25th November 2023

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

**STATEMENT**

**‘I decide’**

Sixty million women and girls in the European Union live with a disability (25.9% of the female population) and we face multiple and intersectional discrimination in all areas of life.

Respect for inherent dignity and individual autonomy (including the freedom to take decisions), and respect for legal capacity are fundamental principle which are not guaranteed. As a result, we cannot exercise all our human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing with other people.

Despite the fact that all the countries in the European Union have ratified the United Nations treaties safeguarding the rights of women (CEDAW) and the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD), many states have put in place legal measures that deprive us of our capacity to exercise our rights and take decisions concerning our own lives.

In short, the long-standing and systematic refusal to acknowledge our right to take our own decisions is a reflection of discriminatory and harmful stereotypes concerning women with disabilities that highlight the failure of governments, societies, and in many cases even families, to appreciate and respect our dignity as women and girls. These restrictions that breach human rights, disguised as protection mechanisms, are forms of misogynist and ableist violence against us.

As a result of these procedures denying us our dignity, many of us have lost custody of our daughters and sons and have felt intimidated by those abusing us because we face the threat of being legally incapacitated and nullified as citizens.

In practise, this means our opinions as women with disabilities are ignored and our decisions are replaced by decisions taken by third parties, including those acting as legal representatives, service providers, tutors and relatives. It is impossible to imagine a crueller form of violence.

For all of the above reasons, this November 25th we, European women and girls with disabilities, **CALL FOR**:

1 A Europe-wide, large-scale survey focusing specifically on the violence to which we, women and girls with disabilities, are subjected. This survey must take into consideration restrictions on our right to take our own decisions as misogynist and ableist forms of violence.

2 The effective implementation in European Union policies of the regulatory requirements set out in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

3 Action to ensure universal accessibility in all European Union countries, including all types of support necessary for women and girls to take decisions, in all centres and support services for women victims of violence, in courtrooms and in awareness-raising campaigns and information material.

4 Guaranteed access to justice by women and girls with disabilities, including free legal aid, while ensuring the full accessibility of all procedural safeguards, providing age-appropriate procedural accommodations, access to information and communication, human assistance and those support products and devices chosen by women with disabilities in our engagement with the justice system.

5 The urgent implementation of independently-managed monitoring mechanisms to ensure that residential institutions, mental health institutions, special education schools, day-care centres, occupational workshops, special employment centres, and other similar facilities are supervised effectively to prevent cases of neglect, maltreatment, abuse, harassment and violence against women with disabilities, including the loss of their legal capacity.

6 The upcoming Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence to include women with disabilities and to criminalise forced sterilisation and contraception and coercive abortions as forms of violence against women.

7 The European Disability Card to incorporate a gender perspective and to ensure free and safe movement for women and girls with disabilities within the European Union, protecting them from violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

8 The European Union to designate 2025 as “European Year of Women and Girls with Disabilities” as a game changer in strengthening awareness around our particular situation and fundamental rights, and to set in motion acceleration measures that truly change the path of our destiny.

**¡BECAUSE IT’S OUR LIFE, WE DECIDE!**

**NOT ONE LESS!**