

## Women with Disabilities

About 650 million people in the world—or 10 per cent of the world’s population— live with disabilities, and frequently encounter a myriad of physical and social obstacles. They often lack the opportunities of the mainstream population and are usually among the most marginalized in society. Women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability.<sup>1</sup> Persistence of certain cultural, legal and institutional barriers makes women and girls with disabilities the victims of two-fold discrimination: as women and as persons with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>



"Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society. There is therefore need to take into account and to address their concerns in all policy-making and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development."<sup>3</sup>

Often, women with disabilities are invisible both among those promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, and those promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. This page on Women with Disabilities aims to increase awareness about the rights and the situation of women with disabilities by serving as a portal to resources and the work of the United Nations in this area.

## Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

### Background



The [rights of persons with disabilities](#) are grounded in a broad human rights framework based on the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international covenants on human rights and other human rights instruments. On 13 December 2006, the General Assembly adopted the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention shall be open for signature at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 30 March 2007 onwards.

The [text of the Convention](#) contains an article on women with disabilities, as well as several references to girls, women, and gender issues. The section below links information related to the article on women with disabilities.

## **Women with disabilities in the text of the Convention**

Excerpts from the [Convention](#):

### **Preamble**

(p) *Concerned* about the difficult conditions faced by persons with disabilities who are subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, indigenous or social origin, property, birth, age or other status,

(q) *Recognizing* that women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation,

(s) *Emphasizing* the need to incorporate a gender perspective in all efforts to promote the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities,

### **Article 3 - General Principles**

The principles of the present Convention shall be:

(g) Equality between men and women;



### **Article 6 – Women with disabilities**

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discriminations, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.

Other references to women and gender issues are found in the following articles:

Article 8 – Awareness-raising (paragraph b)

Article 16 – Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (paragraphs 1,2,4,5)

Article 25 – Health (chapeau and paragraph a)

Article 28 - Adequate standard of living and social protection (paragraph 2b)

Article 34 – Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (paragraph 4)

### **Background information on the article on women with disabilities**

Proposed revisions and amendments to the text of the Convention, Eighth session, 14 - 25 August 2006:

- [Governments](#)
- Non-Governmental Organizations  
International Disability Caucus  
[IDC on Women and Gender Issues \(MS Word\)](#)  
[Fact Sheet Treaty Body, 25 July \(MS Word\)](#)

Background Documents: [Third to Seventh Session](#)

Background document: [Towards a Gender Sensitive Disability Rights Convention](#). Side event to the Second session of the Ad Hoc Committee, 20 June 2003.

### **Related links**

[About the Convention](#)

[Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention](#)

[UN system vows to ensure rights of persons with disabilities](#)

## **Fact Sheet**

### **About girls and women with disabilities**

"Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society" ("[Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)", General Assembly Resolution S-23/3 of 10 June 2000, annex, paragraph 63).

### **Education**



"Less than 5 per cent of children and young persons with disabilities have access to education and training; and girls and young women face significant barriers to

participating in social life and development" ([Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report on the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled, A/56/169](#), paragraph 79).

"The global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3 per cent, and 1 per cent for women with disabilities, according to a 1998 UNDP study" ([UN DPI fact sheet](#))

### **Employment and paid work**



"People with disabilities in general face difficulties in entering the open labour market, but, seen from a gender perspective, men with disabilities are almost twice as likely to have jobs than women with disabilities. When women with disabilities work, they often experience unequal hiring and promotion standards, unequal access to training and retraining, unequal access to credit and other productive resources, unequal pay for equal work and occupational segregation, and they rarely participate in economic decision-making" ([Arthur O'Reilly. "Employment Barriers for Women with Disabilities" in "The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities" IFP/Skills Working Paper No. 14. International Labour Organization 2003](#)).

### **Health**



"Every minute, more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during labor... However, those 15 – 50 million women generally go unnoticed"([World Bank, "Health, nutrition and population: Reproductive health and disability"](#)).

"Women with disabilities, of all ages, often have difficulty with physical access to health services. Women with mental disabilities are particularly vulnerable, while there is limited understanding, in general, of the broad range of risks to mental health to which women are disproportionately susceptible as a result of gender discrimination, violence, poverty, armed conflict, dislocation and other forms of social deprivation" ([Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women General Recommendation 24 Women and Health](#), in relation to the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(Article 12\)](#) (Twentieth session, 1999, paragraph 25).

"Depressive disorders account for close to 41.9 per cent of the disability from neuropsychiatric disorders among women compared to 29.3 per cent among men" ([Women's mental health: The Facts, World Health Organization](#))

### **Housing**




"Women with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing adequate housing and services" ([Study by Miloon Kothari, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, "Women and adequate housing"](#), E/CN.4/2005/43, paragraph 64).

"Women with disabilities are ... more likely institutionalized than men with disabilities" ([Study by Miloon Kothari, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, "Women and adequate housing"](#), E/CN.4/2005/43, paragraph 64).

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## Citations

### **The challenges: multiple discriminations and societal barriers**

"... women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factor as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability" ([Beijing Platform for Action](#), Chapter IV, Strategic objectives and actions, paragraph 46).

"People with disabilities often encounter attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent their full, equal and active participation in society. These barriers impinge particularly on the well-being of persons with intellectual, mental or multiple disabilities. They add to the disadvantage customarily experienced by disabled persons belonging to such populations or social groups as women, children, the elderly and refugees" ([Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report on the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled](#), A/49/435, Annex, paragraph 4).

"The consequences of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. There are a great many countries where women are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages which impede their access to, for example, health care, education, vocational training and employment. If, in addition, they are physically or mentally disabled, their chances of overcoming their disablement are diminished, which makes it all the more difficult for them to take part in community life" ([World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons](#), paragraph 45, General Assembly resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982).



### **Women with disabilities may be particularly at risk due to stigmas associated with both disability and gender inequality**

"Thus we would now like to focus our attention on the negative consequences for women of the persistence of certain cultural barriers that make them the victims of a two-fold discrimination: as women and as disabled persons. Much

has been written on discrimination against women, but very little has so far been done to deal adequately with the problem of disabled women. The few attempts made have been based on a mistaken approach, since they treat the acute problem of disability as part of the general topic of discrimination against women. However, sex and disability are two separate factors which, when combined in the same person, usually reinforce each other and compound prejudices" (Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 1988, ["Human Rights and Disabled Persons"](#), Human Rights Studies Series, Number 6. Centre for Human Rights: Geneva, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.XIV.4, paragraph 140).

"Women with disabilities may be particularly at risk due to stigmas associated with both disability and gender, and are more likely to suffer from discrimination than able-bodied women or men with disabilities" ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Paul Hunt, submitted in accordance with Commission resolution 2002/31](#), E/CN.4/2003/58, paragraph 67).

### **A call for action at all levels to ensure non-discrimination, enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and inclusion into the mainstream of development**

"All the arguments adduced in favour of women's full participation in the various spheres of cultural, political, economic life, etc., are doubly applicable to disabled women, not only regarding equal rights, but also with respect to the negative consequences for society in general of neglecting any human resource, for the community's failure to use it turns it into a burden for that community" (Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 1988, ["Human Rights and Disabled Persons"](#), Human Rights Studies Series, Number 6. Centre for Human Rights: Geneva, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.XIV.4, paragraph 140).

"Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society. There is therefore need to take into account and to address their concerns in all policy-making and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development" (["Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action"](#), General Assembly Resolution S-23/3 of 10 June 2000, annex, paragraph 63).

"The girl-child with disabilities faces additional barriers and needs to be ensured non-discrimination and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the [Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities](#)" ([Beijing Platform for Action](#), Chapter IV, Strategic objectives and actions, paragraph 270).

## United Nations *enable*



[United Nations enable](#) is the gateway to the work of the [United Nations on disability](#) and the official site of the Secretariat for the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). It hosts major United Nations documents related to the [rights of persons with disabilities](#) and [related official documents](#).

### **Women with disabilities in United Nations enable**

[Women with Disabilities and Gender Perspectives](#)

- [Women with disabilities and the five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#)
- [International norms and standards relating to disability: Rights of women with disabilities](#)
- [Women with Disabilities: Lessons of reinforcing the gender perspective in international norms and standards](#)
- [Issues in gender-sensitive and disability-responsive policy research, training and action](#)
- [Report on the Seminar of Disabled Women, Vienna, 20-24 August 1990](#)

[Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Disability on the occasion of International Women's Day March 8, 2005](#)

[Women with disabilities in the text of the Convention](#)

## Resources on other UN websites

**Division for the Advancement of Women/Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women [General Recommendation No. 18 Disabled women](#), in relation to the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), (Tenth session, 1991)

### **United Nations Regional Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

- [Task Force on Women with Disabilities](#), 1 December 2004
- [Engendering disability statistics: First Workshop for Improving Disability Statistics and Measurement](#), 24-28 May 2004
- [Workshop on Women and Disability: Promoting Full Participation of Women with Disabilities in the Process of Elaboration on an International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities](#), 18-22 August and 13 October 2003
- [Gender Dimensions of the Implementation of the Agenda for Action Adopted by the Meeting to Review the Progress of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, Bangkok](#), 26 - 30 June 1995.

### **World Bank**

- [Gender and Disability](#)
- [Reproductive health and disability](#)

### **World Health Organization**

- [Gender and women's mental health - Gender disparities and mental health: The Facts](#)

More at [United Nations System and Persons with Disabilities](#) at United Nations enable

## **UN publications and documents**



### **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

- Boylan, Esther. [Women and disability](#), 1991.
- Dalen, Monica. ["Background paper for the Education for All global monitoring report 2003/4: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality"](#) in The Relationship between disability, gender and education in the Norwegian context, 2003 (2004/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/16).

- Lonsdale, Susan. [Women and disability: the experience of physical disability among women](#), 1990.

- Rousso, Harilyn. "[Background paper for the Education for All global monitoring report 2003/4: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality](#)" in Education for All: a gender and disability perspective, 2003 (2004/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/66).

### **United Nations Regional Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

- [Focus on Ability, Celebrate Diversity: Highlights of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993-2002](#), Social Policy Paper No. 13, 2003, ST/ESCAP/2291.

Part two: Women with disabilities, Chapters [VI. Overview of Women with Disabilities](#) and [VII. Skills-based training: empowering women in their families and communities](#)

Part six: Highlights of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, II B. "Women with disabilities" in Chapter [XVII. Socially vulnerable groups: selected issues: empowerment of persons with disabilities](#)

- [Hidden Sisters: Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region](#), 1985 (ST/ESCAP/1548).

### **World Bank**

- [Report: Engendering Development – through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice](#), 2001 (ISBN 0-19-521596-6)

### **World Health Organization**

- Michelle K. Gomel, [Nations for mental health: a focus on women](#), 1997 (WHO/MSA/NAM/97.4)

## **Related UN events:**

[International Day of Disabled Persons](#)

## **UN webcast**



[Closing session of Ad Hoc Committee on](#) a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of [the Rights of Persons](#)

[with Disabilities](#), Aug 25, 57 minutes

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> [Beijing Platform for Action](#), Chapter IV, Strategic objectives and actions, paragraph 46 [[back to text](#)]

<sup>2</sup> Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 1988, "[Human Rights and Disabled Persons](#)", Human Rights Studies Series, Number 6. Centre for Human Rights: Geneva, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.XIV.4, paragraph 140. [[back to text](#)]

<sup>3</sup> "[Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)", General Assembly Resolution S-23/3 of 10 June 2000, annex, paragraph 63. [[back to text](#)]

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