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Taking into account the needs of women with disabilities

SEMINAR “ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY: THE ROLE AND SITUATION
FOR GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISMS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19”

Session 2: Ensuring that recovery measures reinforce
gender equality - related bodies and services

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Background information

“An estimated one in five women live with disabilities and the prevalence of disability is actually higher among women than men (19.2 versus 12 per cent). Contributing factors include the lower economic and social status of women and girls, gender-based violence and harmful or gender-discriminatory practices.”

UN WOMEN



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The impact of the pandemic in women in general

Guidance Note on CEDAW and COVID-19

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) expresses deep concern about exacerbated inequalities and heightened risks of gender-based violence and discrimination faced by women due to the current COVID-19 crisis and calls on States to uphold the rights of women and girls.

While many States consider restrictions on freedom of movement and physical distancing necessary to prevent contagion, such measures may disproportionately limit women's access to health care, safe shelters, education, employment and economic life. The effects are aggravated for disadvantaged groups of women and women in conflict or other humanitarian situations.

States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention) have an obligation to ensure that measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic do not directly or indirectly discriminate against women and girls. States parties also have an obligation to protect women from, and ensure accountability for, gender-based violence, enable women's socio-economic empowerment and guarantee their participation in policy and decision making in all crisis responses and recovery efforts.

Link: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/STA/9156&Lang=en

The impact of the pandemic in women with disabilities

Guidance Note on CEDAW and COVID-19

- **Adopt targeted measures for disadvantaged groups of women.** States parties should uphold the SDG principle of ‘Leave no one behind’ promoting inclusive approaches in their legislative, policy and other measures. (...). In particular, States parties should:
- Ensure that basic services including health care, shelters for victims of violence, and inclusive education remain accessible for **women and girls with disabilities** during times of confinement and reduced service delivery, including in rural areas and for those in institutions.

Link:https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/STA/9156&Lang=en

Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

a) Obstacles in access to information and communication.

A good deal of the information about the pandemic has been spread through the society of information (social networks, internet, mobile phones). However, women with disabilities are not digitally literate and therefore, they have no access to communication nor information.

All information and communication must be accessible. Not only the general information or the information about persons with disabilities have to be accessible. The specific information offered to women, and especially to those victims of violence, (available services for victims, sexual and reproductive rights) has to be equally accessible.

The accessibility of information and communication requires thinking in blind women, deaf women, deafblind women, women with intellectual disability, women with psychosocial disability, etc.

Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

b) Prevalence of institutionalization.

A lot of women and girls with disabilities are still living institutionalized in segregated centers, which leads to a great isolation. These institutions need to be supervised by independent mechanisms in order to ensure that abuses or violence are not perpetrated.

A lot of these institutions are still confined although the rest of the population can already move and this is a great discrimination.

Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

c) Worsening of violence against women with disabilities.

Women and girls with disabilities are always exposed to suffer multiple forms of violence, not just from their partners, but also from their immediate environment.

A lot of this violence comes from their own family (fathers, brothers, personal assistants). During the pandemic, it has worsened and, as a consequence of the lockdown, a lot of women and girls with disabilities are living in their homes with their own aggressor.

However, this situation gets worse for women that are maybe sterilized or that do not have legal capacity, which leaves no trace of aggression or abuse that can be committed against them.

Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

d) Legal capacity

Legal incapacity, legal guardianship and interdictions are still possible practices in many countries of Europe that occurs to many women with disabilities, even though it is a practice contrary to the CRPD. This causes that a lot of women with disabilities are defenseless and without access to report or to justice.



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Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

e) Sexual and reproductive rights.

As any other women, women with disabilities have continued to have the need to access to sexual and reproductive health services. Before the pandemic, a good deal of these services were completely inaccessible. During the pandemic, many of these women have been confined and no one has thought about their needs in the field of gynecology or obstetrics.



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Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

f) Access to education

Before the pandemic there were few girls with disabilities to have access to an inclusive education; as a consequence of the pandemic, a lot of them have had to leave education because the modality of virtual education is a real obstacle for many of them.



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Lessons learnt about women with disabilities during the pandemic

g) Access to employment

The same has happened with access to employment of women with disabilities. The possibility of teleworking is not a possible solution for many of these women with disabilities either.



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General recommendations

- To implement positive actions measures for the recovery from the effects of the pandemic on women with disabilities, in consultation with their representative organizations.
- To ensure that all pandemic recovery policies for persons with disabilities integrate a gender and women's right approach.
- To ensure that all pandemic recovery policies focused on gender equality and women take disability into account .
- To ensure that all studies about the pandemic always integrate the variable of sex and disability, this one disaggregated by type of disability.
- To develop specific studies about the impact of the pandemic in institutionalized persons with a gender and disability approach, that allows to implement specific measures for their recovery.

Leave no-one behind.
Nothing for women and girls with disabilities,
without women and girls with disabilities



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