



NGO information on the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Finland

The information has been compiled by Vammaisjärjestöjen Naisverkosto i.e. Network of Women with Disabilities. Network consists of almost twenty different organisations working for people with disabilities.

In terms of the Istanbul Convention the situation of women and girls with disabilities is alarming.

The Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) published a study conducted with two NGOs (Network of Women with Disabilities represented by The Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, and Kynnys, The Threshold Association) in 2022 with alarming results about the frequency of (domestic) violence experienced by persons with disabilities and the factors related to it. The research data used in the study included seven population study data sets and a survey and interview data collected in the project (2021). The study showed that (domestic) violence is more commonly experienced by persons with disabilities than by the rest of the population. In general, girls and women with disabilities face more violence than men and boys with disabilities. Already amongst four-year-old children especially the boys with disabilities face more violence at home, at kindergarten and leisure activities than others. Youngsters, especially girls with disabilities face **1,5 time more** violence than others. They face different forms of violence, and experiences of violence also cumulate with the youngsters with disabilities. They face more sexual harassment (60-62%) and violence (22-26%), physical (13-24% of girls and 9-18% of boys) or emotional (48-57% of girls and 27-33% of boys) violence from their parents or caretakers and physical threat and bullying. The boys with disabilities face more physical threat (31 %) and bullying (14%) and the girls with disabilities face all the forms of violence more than others. Adults with disabilities face **two times more** violence. Men with disabilities face more violence or threat and women with disabilities face more sexual harassment and violence. The violence is often close relationship or domestic violence coming from current or former partner, parents or caretakers. There are major challenges associated with acquiring help, and these challenges deserve attention and require taking measures to improve the situation. To improve the situation of persons with disabilities, who have experienced domestic violence in our society, the work begins by identifying the phenomenon, its diversity and persons who experience it. (Source in Finnish <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-016-5>)

The study reaffirmed the report of ministry of interior and THL study on Finnish school survey 2017, which already presented shocking figures. The women with disabilities face **2-3 times more** violence than other women. The risk of sexual violence is especially high on women with mental disabilities, maybe even **ten times higher**. The youngsters with disabilities have more challenging background. They faced **three times** more discriminating bullying and over **two times more** physical threat, boys with disabilities more commonly. They faced **three times more** sexual violence, girls with disabilities more commonly. (Source in Finnish <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-302-838-8>)

Fundamental rights, equality, and non-discrimination (Article 4)

When evaluating intersectional discrimination under Istanbul Convention there should be cross-evaluation also to Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) especially article 6 on women with disabilities and article 7 on children including girls with disabilities. This is often neglected.

Notwithstanding the legislation, intersectional discrimination is often overlooked in case of women and girls with disabilities, as well as men with disabilities, who face domestic violence, even more than others, and should thus be protected by Istanbul convention. Programmes or activities do not recognize clearly or specifically enough the needs of women with disabilities, who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination nor their disadvantages. There are still barriers in terms of availability, accessibility and disablism in seeking quality interventions for any of the forms of violence. Among authorities and service providers, there is still much unawareness about the specific aspects relating to people with disabilities. The cultural specificities, sexual orientation and gender identity of women and girls with disabilities is not recognized. State and authorities overlook the specific needs of women with disabilities, who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantages, for example. It is often thought that standard methods are suitable also for this vulnerable minority and there is not enough particular effort in ensuring that the available support services cater to and address the specific needs of women and girls (and men) with disabilities.

As for the shelters, improvements have been made but accessibility must and needs to be improved continuously. It is important to keep in mind that accessibility can vary whether the person uses wheelchair or walks poorly or has a challenge in hearing or seeing etc. Also, considering the large geographical distances there are still few shelters in Finland. Long travel may cause severe effects, such as deteriorating health or physical pain, which may prevent one from leaving for shelter. There should be more flexible system to provide shelter.

Notwithstanding the thorough legislation, implementation of measures is inadequate to prevent and combat violence against women who are or might be exposed to intersectional discrimination. Also children with disabilities should be protected from domestic violence. Although there is some data about the violence the people with disabilities face, the challenges people have to overcome to receive help remains a continuous problem. According to online questionnaire conducted within the study 2022, over one fourth of those people with disabilities facing the violence do not tell about it to the authorities. Only a half of those who seek help have received it. Only fewer than one fourth of respondents thought it was easy to get help. The legislation should protect the people with disabilities, but the protection is not realized in practice. Although intersectionality is mentioned as a cross-cutting principle in programmes, it is often not visible in concrete activities and actions, as if one mention among principles would be sufficient. Human rights -based interpretation, accessibility and availability of services are often similarly treated, concerns worth a mention, but missing in actions.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies implemented under the responsibility of an adequately mandated and resourced co-ordinating body (Articles 7 and 10)

The action plan should include concrete activities and steps also regarding women who are or might be exposed to intersectional discrimination such as women and girls with disabilities. Also, the evaluation and reporting should include this aspect. Specific attention should be given that women with disabilities are given education and information about their human rights (CRPD), sexual and sexual health care rights and rights to personal security.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society (Article 9)

The co-operation with NGOs should be more transparent, active and equal. When carrying out programmes or projects to improve guidance and handbooks, it would be important to include NGOs to the work and recognize also intersectional groups. Only little co-operation is toward NGOs relating to violence against women and girls with disabilities even though they are at higher risk to face violence.

Data collection and research (Article 11)

Data collection and research overlooks intersectional groups such as women and girls with disabilities. For example, the data collected about shelters and their clients should include information whether of the number of the clients with disabilities and whether the client is directed elsewhere due to inaccessibility.

VII. Immediate response, prevention, and protection (Article 50)

Training of law enforcement officials on the gendered nature of violence against women and its consequences should include also the specific aspects that women with disabilities face. Designed premises should be accessible. Testimony of victims with disabilities must not be overlooked.