



## With one voice in Europe



**Foundation of the European Network  
of Women with Disabilities  
For the Realisation of the Human Rights  
of Women with Disabilities**



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With one Voice in Europe -  
Foundation of the European Network of Women with Disabilities  
For the Realisation of the Human Rights of Women with Disabilities

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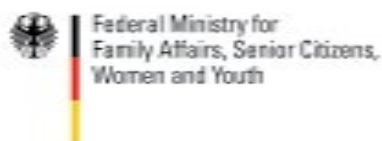
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**One hint to use the booklet:**

**All the texts are in English and German.  
At the end of each text there is an  
easy-to-read-summary**



## Introduction

The European Network of Women with Disabilities was born on 4 May 2007 at about midday.

Over 100 women from 17 countries came to Berlin in Germany in order to set up this network. Women came from Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, the UK, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria, Rumania, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine. They all agreed on the need for a strong Lobby group of women and girls with disabilities in Europe to be able to represent our issues.

Weibernetz, the German network from WomenLesbians and Girls with Disabilities, was the host of this conference in Germany. Prior to the conference, we worked closely with Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) and International Training Advice Research (ITAR).

One of the main topics of the conference was the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention particularly strengthens the rights of women with disabilities worldwide. However, the written text of the convention alone is not sufficient. It must now be implemented into national legislation in those countries which ratified it. Naturally, the convention must also be a measure to all future European policy as a standard. It is therefore all the more important to form a European lobby group of women with disabilities at the time of the convention coming into force.

Like the UN convention, our work is not complete now that we have founded a European Network of Women with Disabilities. We have set ourselves many objectives which we must now work on. When we formed the network, it was clear to us all that it would need an office with paid staff in Brussels, as European campaigning and networking cannot be carried out on a voluntary basis if it is to be effective.

We agreed on some first steps for the network. These included drafting a constitution for setting up a European organisation in order to be able to apply for some EU funding at a later stage. This draft constitution is currently being worked on. The next thing we need to do is to set up this organisation. The founder organisations and founder members need to meet up in order to do this.

### **The work of the network begins now!**

There was a lot of power and energy at the founding event of the Network of Women with Disabilities in Berlin. Everyone was highly motivated and wanted to network and talk to each other. Women wanted to hear about the conditions for women with disabilities in other countries. Of course, we laughed a lot too and partied and danced in the evenings.

We must now carry on with our work! As the host of this conference, it was very important to us that the founder spirit will not be lost. In order to help with this, we have once more captured the conference speeches, as well as our resolution, of course, and the press coverage.

The purpose of this brochure is not purely that of documentation. It also wants to invite all women to take an active part in the network. This is why it also includes the key points that have been developed for a constitution for the organisation. This brochure also demonstrates how all women can get involved in the network.

Because: We together make up the European Network of Women with Disabilities. Let us work together and use our strengths!

Brigitte Faber and Martina Puschke  
December 2008



## Easy to read summary: Introduction

On 4 May 2007 at midday, the European network of women with disabilities was born.

Over 100 women formed this network. They came from 17 different countries in Europe. All the women said: we need the network. We need to better represent our interests in Europe.

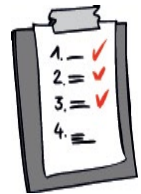


Having founded the network now, the work really begins. Because we want to be a strong network. For this we need an office with paid workers.

We need money for the office. Because of this, we want to set up an organisation.

The organisation needs a constitution. This constitution is just being written.

A lot of other work also needs to be done.



The speeches from the founding meeting are in this booklet again. And we show you what women can do to make the network strong. Because we all together are the network!



## **We are the European Network of Women with Disabilities!**

### **Our vision: An office for the network in Brussels**

#### **What and who is the European network?**

In May 2007, the network was formed by over 100 women from 17 European countries. A list of the participating organisations can be found at the back of this brochure.

The founding of the network was the first step in our networking efforts. Now we need to get to know each other better and talk to each other in order to bring life to the network. The best way to achieve this will be to have an annual meeting. It is crucial that we all contribute to the life of our network. We all make up the network! Let us make it work!

#### **How does the network function?**

When the network was founded, it was decided to set up an organisation to enable us to apply for EU funding for our office. A number of women in different countries are currently working on setting up this organisation. They are working on its constitution in line with European legislation.

When this constitution is completed, all the national organisations of women with disabilities who want to be involved in setting up this organisation will get together. We will then be able to apply for funding for the new organisation in order to establish an office in Brussels. The areas of work undertaken by the network will be agreed at the Annual General Meeting of the organisation and by its committee as appropriate.

Once we have established our office with paid members of staff, many things should become easier. Until then, we will have to develop the network on a voluntary basis.

But it will all be worthwhile. Just imagine what it will be like to have an office for the European Network of women with disabilities in Brussels! We will be able to do our European campaigning work for women with disabilities from this base!

#### **Who can join the network as a member?**

The European Network of Women with Disabilities intends to work on European campaigns for women and girls with disabilities. In order to include as many views and opinions as possible, it is crucial to have a wide variety of organisations of women and girls with disabilities from all over Europe involved.

These include:

- National networks or Organisations of women and girls with disabilities in Europe
- Groups of women and girls with disabilities which are part of a national organisation

Individual women with or without disabilities can also support the work of the network, as well as organisations of women or disabled people.







## How can I as a woman with disability get involved?

There are many ways in which you can contribute to the life of the network:

- If your country has a national network of women with disabilities, please pass its address on to the European network. We can only work together if we know of each other.
- If you are involved with organisations of women with disabilities in your country, please tell them about the European network.
- Would you like your country to host a meeting of the European network?! We would love to come to your country. Let us work out together how your country could contribute to the funding of such a meeting.
- Have you got good links with the European parliament? It would be great if we could benefit from that. We need all the contacts for the campaigning work and for the funding of our office.
- Do you know some women with disabilities who have good knowledge of European policy? Please tell them about the European network and ask them to get involved.
- Do you know of current European documents in which the issues affecting women with disabilities have been ignored? Please share them with us. There could be some potential for campaigning work for us.
- Are you a woman with a disability with good knowledge of English, and do you enjoy composing responses to European documents? Please work with us!
- Can you translate documents for the network into other languages including easy to read language? That would be great! Please get in touch with us! Until we receive some public funding, we have no money for translations.

## We are the European Network of Women with Disabilities!

**Let us all develop a strong, independent European campaigning force! Let us ensure that our issues are being heard, so that no decisions about us in Europe are made without us!**

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**Easy to read summary:**

**We are the European network of women with disabilities!**

### **What is the European network of women with disabilities?**

The network was founded by more than 100 women from 17 countries in Europe.

Together, we all are the network!



We have a dream: we want an office with paid workers! We need money for the office. Because of this, we want to set up an organisation.

All women need to work without pay until we can get some money.

But we will manage this together!

### **Who can work with the network?**

All disabled women in Europe can join in! In particular, networks of disabled women in different countries should join. We want to talk to each other and work together.



### **What can each woman do?**



Many women can do something for the network.

Do you know a network of disabled women in your country? Please tell them about us. Please give us the address of the network. Then we can get to know each other.

Do you know some disabled women who know a lot about European policy? Do you know women who can translate texts? Please talk to them. Then they can work with us.

# Welcoming Speech



**Ulrike Jähric**  
**Board member of Weibernetz**

Dear Mrs Welskop-Deffaa,  
Dear Mrs Evers-Meyer,  
Dear ladies from the various ministries,  
Dear members of the German Parliament,  
Dear speakers and experts,  
Dear participants from all over Europe,

I would like to cordially welcome you all who have come together here this morning to this conference „A Network of Disabled Women in Europe“. I would like to welcome you on behalf of the board of Weibernetz, the main host of this conference, also on behalf of the Weibernetz team, who have bore the majority of the workload for the planning and holding of this conference over the last weeks and months. I would also like to welcome you on behalf of our two international partners, who are „Disabled People’s International“ and „International Training Advice Research“.

It is a great honour and a great pleasure for us to hold this conference in the presence of such a large number of prominent guests and with experts of such high calibre and with so many active participants. Above all, however, we are so pleased to be host to all the guests from all over Europe. 120 spaces were booked, and more than 120 women with and without disabilities from 17 European countries have come here... and even more women were placed on the waiting list! We can therefore assume that the aim of this conference of building the corner stone for a „Network of women with disabilities in Europe“ is being met with great interest.

The fact that this event can even take place is due to the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), which provided the resources for the realisation of this project. I would like to particularly welcome Eva-Maria Welskop-Deffaa, who is Director General for Gender Equality within the BMFSFJ. For many years, Weibernetz has been working together very well with her department. In particular the unit for Women in Certain Circumstances has put forward a number of projects and initiatives for improved living conditions of disabled girls and women over the last few years. The organisation of Weibernetz is being funded by your department. We are therefore very pleased that Dr. Doris Jansen-Tang, head of the unit, and her colleague Ursula Seidel-Banks are also able to be here today and that they can attentively observe the event for the formation of a European network.

Furthermore, I would particularly like to welcome Karin Evers-Meyer, Federal Government Commissioner for Matters relating to Disabled Persons“. Since you have taken office, we have been working together very closely, especially as representatives of the movement on independent living of disabled people. In a few minutes you will also address this conference with some welcoming words.

Furthermore, I would like to welcome Erika Huxhold, head of the department „General Director for Matters relating to Disabled Persons within the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as Eva Ullrich and Petra Spätling-Fichtner, who is also part of the aforementioned Ministry.

Finally we are very pleased about the attendance of a Member of Parliament, or rather colleagues of Members of Parliament. I would also like to welcome Sylvia Schmidt, SPD spokesperson on disability policy, as well as Susanne Baumstark from the parliamentary party of the Left.

Dear guests and experts, please forgive me for not welcoming all of you by name... you are all of you very, very welcome here!



Dear audience,

The significance of European policy is growing on a daily basis for us all. For disabled people, this is particularly shown by the legislation on anti-discrimination, which has been standardised by European directives. In Germany, this has brought us legislation such as the General Equal Treatment Act.

There are 60 million disabled women in Europe. Even though this number is not backed up by statistics, it is, in itself, powerful enough!

- It is a powerful argument for an even closer exchange and cooperation of women with disabilities all over Europe.
- It is a powerful argument for our demands on European policy for consideration of our future issues and interests within new directives and guidelines, even if the UN convention of the rights of disabled people will be implemented.
- Finally, this number is a powerful argument for developing a contact point through a European Network of Women with Disabilities, in which experts are available to advise both politics and society on their own issues.

Women with Disability in Europe currently do not have their own network. At the moment, they are merely organised in sub-groups or under the umbrella of bigger confederations:

- in the European Disability Forum (EDF)
- in the European Women's Lobby (EWL)
- in Disabled Peoples' International (DPI)
- and in other international disability-specific organisations.

We are very pleased that some representatives of the aforementioned organisations are also here today. Some of them will shortly address this conference and attend the formation of this network.

Apart from these organisations, there is no independent lobby group of disabled women in Europe! The formation of such an independent European network is, however, very, very important in our opinion!

We have come here together today to discuss this plan and its goal. We have plenty of time for this, and to get to know each other and to share experiences. We also have plenty of time for personal conversations and to have fun, which is also necessary at such a conference.

We have some excellent speakers to provide the content for this conference.

We would like to use the first day for mutual exchange of experiences on some topics. Tomorrow, we will work together on the possible organisation of the network so that we can, if you agree, „found“ the network on the last day.

Well, I would like to point something out to you at the end which should not be ignored:

For this evening we have organised a party with a dinner under the heading „Women are demanding and partying!“. It is taking place as part of the European Protest Day for Equal Rights German „Gesellschafter-Projekt“ run by the „Aktion Mensch“. There we will address the question „What kind of Europe do disabled women want to live in?“ We are inviting you all to join in with the partying and demanding.

One more thing: We will publish a conference report, so that you can concentrate on listening to the presentations.

I would now like to wish all of us the best of luck and success for our common goal, excellent cooperation and, above all, some fun and joy together!



## Easy to read summary: Welcome by Ulrike Jährig



Ulrike Jährig is on the board of Weibernetz, the national network of women with disabilities in Germany. She warmly welcomes everyone at the founding meeting of the European network of disabled women.

Ulrike Jährig is really pleased to see more than 120 women from 17 European countries. She thanks the Ministry for Women which paid for this conference. The Ministry for Women also has a very good relationship with Weibernetz. Together, they have started many good projects for disabled women.



There are many disabled women in Europe. The European policies are getting more important to the individual countries. This is why it is so important that disabled women get involved in European policy. In order to do this, we need a European network of disabled women.

Ulrike Jährig would like us to work together well and that we have fun with what we are doing.



## Greeting

***Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa***  
***Director General for Gender Equality***  
***Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,***  
***Women and Youth***



Dear Ladies,

I would like to cordially welcome you all here in Berlin. In particular I would like to welcome the participants from countries other than Germany.

I will make every effort to speak slowly enough in order for the sign language interpreters to follow and I will try to use simple language.

Today I am representing Ursula von der Leyen, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. She sends her warm regards and would like to wish you much success for this conference.

Like you, we are hoping that at the end of this conference you can say that we have taken concrete steps towards better networking of disabled women in Europe.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The city of Berlin has had a long tradition on the rights of women.

About a hundred years ago, Berlin was the starting point of a movement that has been continuing worldwide up to now.

Women's battle for the right to vote and for political participation.

Representatives of women's organisations have got together here in Berlin, together with many other courageous and determined women. They have decided to fight for women's rights worldwide.

At that time, the battle for equality of women was unthinkable without the involvement of women's organisations and women's networks. It is still very much the same today. It remains important that women join together to achieve their rights. This is true even though in our policies on equality today, we rely on the inclusion of men as our partners and recipients.

Berlin is one of the „Homes of the women's movement“. For this reason, Berlin is a very appropriate place to initiate a European network of disabled women.

Disabled women in Europe can learn from one another.

We can say that disability legislation in Germany is good in comparison. It explicitly considers the issues concerning disabled women.

In Sweden, however, the conditions relating to assistance are particularly good.

The formation of a network is important in order for women to share information and to represent their interests.

The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs is supporting you in this. One of the ways in which it is supporting you is that it is funding this conference. This conference is the mean contribution of the Federal government in the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All for the better participation of disabled women.

The living conditions of disabled women in Europe are as varied as the living conditions of non-disabled women. There is not one type of disabled woman. However, there are commonalities which are pronounced to different degrees in an individual. Disabled women are often doubly disadvantaged, both as women and as disabled people. This applies to all of Europe.



There are many issues which concern all disabled women throughout Europe:

More than 70% of women with disabilities in Europe have experiences sexualised violence.

Almost everywhere in Europe there is a lack of support structures for these women as many centres such as women's refuges and advice centres are not accessible to them.

The Federal government is aware of this problem. It has decided to introduce a "Second Action Plan of the Federal Government to Combat Violence against Women".

This Second Action Plan will have a clear focus on the fight against violence experienced by disabled women.

In order to implement this project, one of the things we are planning is a project for the introduction of women's representatives in institutions for disabled people.

Furthermore, we will commission an extensive scientific study on the extent of violence against disabled women in Germany.

Disabled women all over Europe are affected by poverty and disadvantages in the area of employment. The rate of employment of disabled women is only about 25%. For this reason, the level of poverty is very high within this group. Disabled women, like non-disabled women, are affected both by unemployment and poverty to a higher degree than disabled men. Together we must try to achieve some improvements in this area.

I would like to address two other issues which I am sure concern all of you. The question of assistance and the problems in the area of healthcare provision for disabled women.

Not everywhere in Europe do disabled women have a legal entitlement to personal assistance. In particular, disabled women in some eastern European countries urgently need such paid assistance.

There is a lack of accessible doctor's surgeries in almost all of the European countries.

We know now that women often react differently to medication than men do. We also know that certain illnesses can affect women and men in different ways. However, many doctors lack the knowledge of the effects of some illnesses on disabled women and how they can best be treated. Much research is still necessary in this area!

In order for the situation of disabled women to change in all European countries and for their living and working conditions to improve, we need effective binding European frameworks. Disabled women need to be involved in the development of these frameworks, according to the motto of the European Year of Disabled People, „nothing about us without us“. For this to happen there needs to be a contact point on the European level!

Dear Ladies,

On 30<sup>th</sup> March of this year, the UN Convention on the rights of disabled people was signed in New York. The Federal government has been working very trustfully and closely with the interest groups of disabled people, particularly with those of disabled women. Together we have achieved the inclusion of an independent powerful article on disabled women in the UN Convention. We have achieved the consideration of the issues concerning disabled men and disabled women in many other articles.

In my view, this joint success is the best proof for the necessity of a European network of disabled women on a European level as well!

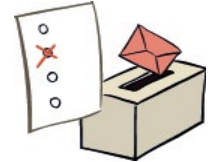


## Easy to read summary: Greetings from Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa



Eva Maria Welskop-Deffaa works for the German Ministry for Women. She passes on warm regards from Ursula von der Leyen, the minister.

Women have had to fight a lot for their rights. A hundred years ago, they fought for the right to vote. Women have achieved a lot because they got together. This was the only way to achieve things. This is still the case today.



Disabled women in Europe can learn a lot from each other. Germany has good laws for disabled people. Sweden has a good law on personal assistance. This is why it is so good to work and share in a network.

Everywhere in Europe, disabled women have to put up with violence. There are not enough women's refuges which can support disabled women. There are some poor disabled women everywhere in Europe. There are not enough jobs for disabled women. Everywhere in Europe, disabled women can't choose their doctor because a lot of doctor's surgeries are not accessible.



This is why we need good European laws. Disabled women need to be involved in making these laws so that there will be good human rights for disabled women.

Disabled women have worked with the governments on the international agreement on the rights of disabled people. This should also be done in Europe. This is why we need the European network of disabled women.



The Ministry for Women supports the founding of the European network of disabled women.



## Greeting

**Dinah Radtke**  
**Vice- Chair of Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) and**  
**Chair of DPI's Women's Committee**



I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to address this conference on behalf of Disabled Peoples' International. I am particularly happy about the fact that the movement of girls and women with disabilities is growing and becoming more significant.

I myself have been working for the disability movement and the independent living movement.

I am particularly keen on raising the profile of disabled women in politics and in society, and on fighting for our rights.

This naturally has a lot to do with my own personal history. My mother was ashamed of having two disabled daughters. Additionally, girls were considered to be inferior beings in my family.

My own pride has always rebelled against such attitudes. I became active in analysing the discrimination faced by disabled people. In the late seventies, I started to run women's discussion groups. In the beginning, we talked about issues relating to aesthetics and our bodies, then other topics such as sexualised violence, personal assistance, bioethics, etc. came up for discussion.

What bothered me about the disability movement was that disabled men were just taken more seriously, and I felt this was unfair. For me, equality is really important. It is crucial that there is equal representation on the committees and organisations and that it's not just the men who are always in the forefront. I want women to have equal opportunities. It is equally important that disabled women take other disabled women by the hand, support, strengthen and empower them, so that they can gain the confidence to take on responsibility.

I have always been actively promoting that we as disabled women are being taken seriously and that our rights, our human rights, are being respected. At the same time, it is crucial that disabled women know their rights and that they can develop strategies to help them exercise their rights.

What is the best way to pass on our knowledge? The best way is networking.

Without tireless campaigning and lobbying by disabled people's networks, especially those of disabled women, we would not have achieved the political changes which have happened over the last few years. We are very proud of the changes we have achieved up to now, even though it has always involved some tenacious struggles. The organisation Disabled Peoples' International which I am representing here is also a network. It is a human rights organisation and it represents the interests of all people with disabilities.

DPI also has a worldwide women's committee. All of our five regions in the world, as well as many of our 140 member countries, have women's committees. The main aim of the women's committee is to provide a forum for disabled women where they can share their views and work proactively. We want to ensure that disabled women have equal participation in society and that they are also treated equally within DPI.

The most significant success of the international disability movement, on our long route towards the realisation of our human rights, has, of course, been the convention on the rights of disabled people. The signing ceremony took place in March of this year. We, as women with disabilities, must now ensure that our respective countries will ratify and implement the convention, and that they also, if not already done so, sign the „optional Protocol“. This is important as the convention must become legally binding.

DPI provides the appropriate campaigning tools on its website. There is a ratification toolkit and an implementation toolkit. I would encourage you to download these practical toolkits from the homepage so that you can work with them. The web address is: [www.dpi.org](http://www.dpi.org)



As Chair of DPI's women's committee, I am very pleased about the forming of a European network of disabled women. It is important to co-operate with all women's networks. We are combining all of our energies and will thereby strengthen our lobby work.

Let us fight together for better living conditions for women and girls with disabilities. We need equal chances, equal opportunities. The human rights are our human rights too. We want to empower and support each other. We want to speak with one voice, for together we are strong!



### **Easy to read summary: Greetings from Dinah Radtke**

Dinah Radtke gives the greetings from the worldwide organisation of disabled people. It is very important to Dinah Radtke that disabled women are being considered everywhere. In politics and also by all members of the public.



Women should have some authority in all areas of life. It should not just be men.  
Women should support each other, and women must know their rights.  
They need to learn to fight for their rights.

This is why it is so important for disabled women to come together in networks.

Over the last few years, the conditions for disabled women have started to change. Many networks of disabled people and disabled women have worked hard to achieve these changes.



Dinah Radtke is really pleased about the European network of disabled women. She said: „Together we are really strong!“

## Greeting



**Brigitte Triems**  
**Executive Member of the European Women's Lobby**

First of all, I would like to thank you on behalf of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) for inviting me to address your conference on a European Network for Women with Disabilities. Special thanks go to the association Weibernetz e.V. who has organized this conference in cooperation with Disabled Peoples' International and International Training Advice Research. I am very pleased that EWL's former President and EWL's representative in the High Level Group on Disability, Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel, is one of the key initiators of this event and this testifies that women's solidarity is strong in supporting each others work.

I am particularly pleased that EWL, especially with Lydia as its representative, lobbied strongly for a stand alone article on women and girls and gender mainstreaming of other articles in the UN Convention for the protection and promotion of the rights of people with disabilities, and that this was successful. A new era has begun and is greatly welcomed by EWL as it is the first time that the needs and rights of disabled women and men across the world are being addressed in a human rights framework. This is a historical breakthrough from the traditional perspective of addressing disability as primarily a health issue. This Convention further strengthens the human rights approach and in so doing is completing the preceding Conventions for women and girls, notably the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW – 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

It is vital to recognise that at the onset women and men are not equal partners. Wide spread gender inequalities is a societal structural problem. It is not a question of non-discrimination but of tackling the deep-seated structural barriers that prevent all women from fully participating in all aspects of life; these barriers are more entrenched for women with disabilities who face multiple forms of exclusion from all areas of life: in employment, in education, in political decision-making, etc. It is vital that a democratic society provides adequate space to mirror diversity, between women and men and especially between and among women.

While it is clear that there have been many positive developments for women generally in recent decades in Europe and globally, not all women have benefited in the same way. Women with disabilities are more exposed to developments that are uneven, erratic and reversible in times of economic and political instability, which we are gradually seeing re-emerging in the shape of growing fundamentalist ideology. While the lives of many women have improved, there are still millions of women and girls whose lives and aspirations are crushed by the weight of poverty, economic deprivation, exclusion from political participation, violations of basic human rights, in particular through violence and sexual exploitation in times of war and peace, and by restrictions to their personal autonomy in access to reproductive rights, as well as in many other ways, of which disability is a compounding factor. It is vital to recognise the diversity of women's lives and experiences; a European network of women with disabilities has without a doubt a role to play in achieving this and will strengthen women's participation in the struggle for the rights and the dignity of women with disabilities. This approach is also in line with the EU's own objectives as equality between women and men to be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay, has been enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union signed in December 2000. In Article 86 of the Charter, the Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community



The EWL supports the development of your network. EWL will join forces with you for the ratification by all EU Member States of the UN Convention, for more concrete provisions under article 6 to ensure full implementation of the human rights of women and girls with disabilities and for joint lobbying actions in the future.

We look forward to working with you and wish you every success in your future achievements.



**Easy to read summary:  
Greetings from Brigitte Triems**



Brigitte Triems gives the greetings from the European Women’s Lobby. This organisation is very pleased that there is now a worldwide agreement on the rights of disabled people. This is the first agreement which includes the rights of disabled women.

Everybody must now learn that there are differences between women and men. And that women are different from one another too.

Some women are much better off now, and some women are very poor.

They have to put up with violence, and they are not allowed to have children.



All these differences have to be considered. The European network of disabled women can help to show these differences. In this network, disabled women can fight for their rights together.

The European Women’s Lobby supports the network of disabled women. Brigitte Triems looks forward to this joint work. And she wishes the network every success with its work.



# Greeting

**Karin Evers-Meyer,  
the Federal Government's commissioner for disabled  
people's issues**



Dear participants

First, I would like to thank you for inviting me to address your conference for the formation of a network of disabled women in Europe. As the Federal government's Commissioner for Matters relating to Disabled Persons, and as a woman, your cause is very close to my heart, and I am very pleased to be able to say a few words to you here today.

I feel that the particular situation of disabled women is still not receiving sufficient attention from the public. The twofold discrimination faced by you as a woman and as a person with disability is often not considered or recognised. This is a problem area which needs to be given a lot more attention. For this reason, and especially during the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, your forming of a network is a clear signal and a call to clearly show the situation of women with disabilities in the public.

Dear Ladies,

it has been proven that women with disabilities are subjected to higher levels of discrimination. In many cases, the living conditions of disabled women vary greatly from those of non disabled women, as well as disabled men. Neither are their needs as women often catered for in all areas of life, nor are their disability-related needs often met. In employment, disabled women face even more problems than do disabled men. They frequently face unemployment, and it is almost impossible, especially for disabled mothers, to return to work.

The additional support which a disabled mother needs in order to care for her children is often not provided.

Many disabled women, who are often considered to be helpless and defenceless victims, still become victims of violence, particularly through sexual assaults. In many cases, access to women's refuges and advice centres is poor, and this means that disabled women often cannot access sources of help and support.

I could go on with this inexhaustible list and I am sure that every one of you could give me further examples. It is therefore all the more important that we raise public awareness about the disadvantages faced by women with disabilities in order to build an environment where there is more respect, acceptance and equality.

Over the last few decades, we have achieved a great deal in the area of disability policy in Germany. In several places within policy and legislation, some specific support opportunities for disabled women have been set out. I will just highlight a few important points here:

The SGB IX (Social Code Book Nine) which came into force in 2001 explicitly mentions the specific needs of disabled women in several places. It commits the authorities to take these needs into account. I do have a sense of reality, and I am well aware of the fact the SGB IX law is an excellent law in theory, but is still very much lacking where the implementation is concerned. It requires all our involvement to bring about this implementation and to put into action the good intentions within this law.



As another important milestone in German disability policy I like to name the General Equal Treatment Act which was finally put into force last year. In this law, discrimination on the grounds of gender or disability in some significant areas of life is prohibited. This also still needs practical implementation, and I would like to encourage you all to exercise your rights.

The paradigm shift towards wide participation and self-determination is continuing to develop in Germany and is finding its way into society. I feel this is a significant development and I am pleased that politics of the last few years are bearing fruit.

However, we need to face the risk of this shift in perspective and the new opportunities passing some specific groups of disabled people by. All these opportunities must also cater for the needs of disabled women in particular. We want women with disabilities to be able to live self-determined lives, just like disabled men and non disabled people. They must have the opportunity to choose who provides their care and assistance, where and how they wish to live and which career path they wish to take. Society must accept disabled women's decisions in favour of motherhood. These demands are not unrealistic or quixotic. They merely constitute the plain and justified right to equal participation in society.

At the time, the crucial momentum for the paradigm shift in Germany was generated by disabled people themselves. It is only right and very important that, by having this conference and the network, you bring to people's attention the fact that, in spite of all the progress and developments in disability policy, the needs of disabled women are still not being considered sufficiently in reality. Do push for change! Make sure that the facilities meet your needs by forcefully raising the issues!

From 1. January 2008, people with disabilities in Germany are entitled to apply for a personal budget. This personal budget allows you to purchase services yourselves and to organise the care and assistance you need, and this will enable you to live as independently and flexibly as possible. I very much hope that many women in Germany will discover this new opportunity for themselves and that they will have the courage to face this challenge. Some other countries have already shown us that personal budgets are the way for the future, and I would like to encourage you to share your experiences with personal budgets and to support and inspire each other in putting together your own personal packages.

Dear Ladies,

we have come here today to form a European network of disabled women. Therefore, naturally, we do not want to focus on Germany alone. At European Union level, there has been a lot of progress in the area of disability policy. The year 2003 was declared the European Year of Disabled People, and this year is the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. These campaigns help to raise awareness of people with disabilities in society, as even in Europe, equal opportunities for disabled people, especially women with disability, are not always common practice.

It is therefore very encouraging that so many countries have already signed the UN convention on the rights of disabled people and that they have thus agreed to promote and advance independence and social participation in their disability policies. The deliberations on the convention were conducted in an exemplary manner, and we can really be proud of the result. The convention document contains a lot of issues which disabled people worldwide have been fighting for a long time. I am particularly pleased about the achievement of an independent article in the convention on women with disabilities, as well as disabled women's needs being mentioned explicitly in several other articles. I will be active in working towards Germany's early ratification of the convention, so that it can come into force very soon.

On a national and international level, the foundations for the consideration of the specific situation of disabled women have been laid. With regard to further progress on the framework, however, it is necessary to put these demands into practice. This obviously requires sensible and informed discussions on the subject. The concept of normalisation, integration, participation and self-



determination, which has developed over the last few years, now also needs to be further developed and implemented for women with disabilities in a consistent and professional manner.

I therefore very much appreciate your forming of this network, and I would like to encourage you to continue to make your views heard in those places where the specific needs are not being considered.

All of you are very strong women who want to live independently. A community, such as the network which you are forming today, can support and strengthen you in your quest for better quality of life. You will have the opportunity to share experiences and ideas from the different European countries, to support each other and to raise your voice against disadvantage and discrimination together. You have great strength through your self-confidence in your abilities and your determination not to put up with discrimination without a fight. You are entitled to have your needs considered, and to receive the support you need in order to live independently, to take an active part in employment, to participate in social activities, to be wives, lovers or mothers, in short, to live the way which people in today's Europe take for granted.

An American author once said „Progress comes together through the intelligent use of experiences“. You have had plenty of experiences as disabled women in Germany and other European countries. Unfortunately, in many cases, these have been negative. Hopefully, some of your experiences have been positive. Share your experiences in your network and bring those experiences, and your network, to public attention. This way, we can all achieve progress and advance from a theory of self-determined lives for women with disabilities to practical implementation.

I hope you will have a productive and inspiring conference, a fruitful exchange of experiences and all the necessary energy to achieve your common goals!





## Easy to read summary: Greetings from Karin Evers-Meyer

Karin Evers-Meyer is a politician. She is responsible for the issues affecting disabled people.

Karin Evers-Meyer knows that disabled women face disadvantages. They face disadvantages as women and as disabled people.

This must be given much more attention.



Over the last few years, many new laws for disabled people have been written. These laws mention disabled women in particular. The laws are there to help stop discrimination against disabled women.

Disabled women should be able to live independently.

They should decide who they want as a carer.

Or who provides their personal assistance.

They should decide where they want to live.

Or where they want to work.

Or whether they want to have children.



Karin Evers-Meyer is very pleased with the international agreement about the human rights of disabled people. In this agreement, many demands of disabled people have been written down.

With this agreement, disabled people get more rights. There are also special rights for disabled women in the agreement.

In the European network, some strong women have come together. These women are self-confident and they know what they want.

In this network, they can share their experiences and help each other.

They can also tell everyone what needs to change in Europe.



Karin Evers-Meyer hopes that the network will be strong. And that it will have all the energy it needs to achieve its goals.



# Opening Speech

**Kicki Nordström**  
**Chair of the World Blind Union**  
**Working Group on United Nations Issues**



## ***Women with disabilities and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***

It took 4 years, one Working Group meeting and eight sessions for the United Nations General Assembly's Ad Hoc committee (AHC), to convene, discuss and finally adopt the document which becomes the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CRPD.

This convention will ensure full human rights and fundamental freedom and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities of all ages, nationalities, social status, ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation.

We have now a document which will be legally binding for States which ratify it. It takes 20 ratifying countries until the convention can come into force and a monitoring committee can be established.

The committee will monitor the convention and receive complaints from individuals and organisations from countries, which have also ratified the Optional Protocol to the convention.

This convention is not a social declaration or convention, nor is it a convention on development; it is a pure Human Rights based Convention, nothing more, nothing less!

We fought our battles in many fields in the beginning, against UN officials, UN bureaucracy, against country delegations, within NGO structures outside the disability movement and sometimes within our own international movements itself.

It was however a learning process for everyone in the plenary session NGO's or government representatives alike! For each session we attended we got more and more organized and structured.

We realized that we had to demonstrate consensus and have to support each other in order to gain our cause.

I believe it is that way we, women with disabilities shall take in order to form a sustainable network of WWD In Europe!

There is no way out of our dilemma of isolation and neglect by the society at large, but for us to keep together and form a common front

There is one mistake committed by mainstream actors; they have forgotten women and girls with disabilities in their work, that is obvious!

Women and girls with disabilities are often marginalised and made invisible in international surveys, national data collections and in social and legislative programs and actions.

Women and girls with disabilities are made invisible and unknown by not being noticed of their existence in any kind of publicly addressed investigations, gender policies, women's programs or laws of protection.

Statistics from Canada, Finland and Sweden reveal that up to 50% of women in general may have been physically abused in their lifetime, and this is probably just the tip of the iceberg.

Among women with disabilities the numbers have proven to be higher there such investigations have been undertaken. The perpetrators are often the support givers, family members or professionals.



This is one of the reasons why we from the International Disability Caucus (IDC) so strongly fought for a stand alone article on women with disabilities in the convention.

We had mainly EU opposing us and said there is already a convention which prohibits discrimination against women, namely the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW!

Our reply was that we, women with disabilities have never been recognised, reported on or mentioned in connection to CEDAW. The worse countries in opposition were the UK and Sweden!

Women with disabilities are recognized in the CRPD within a number of essential areas, even if not directly spelled out in the text.

Women constitute more than half of the population, so by stating persons with disabilities, means also women with disabilities, of course!

Such areas are the right to education, legal capacity on equal grounds as all others, freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information, freedom from violence and abuse, right to life, access to justice, participation in the political and public life, cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports etc.

There is one particular article which states the Human Rights and fundamental freedom for women, and this is article 6 consisting of 2 rather short paragraphs.

Further, it is stated in the **preamble**:

*(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,**

*This is one of the fundamental articles in **the convention and it states***

*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 discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all 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.*


### **Article 12**

#### **Equal recognition before the law**

*1. States Parties reaffirm that persons with disabilities have the right to recognition everywhere as persons before the law.*

*2. States Parties shall recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life.*

*3. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to provide access by persons with disabilities to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity.*



4. States Parties shall ensure that all measures that relate to the exercise of legal capacity provide for appropriate and effective safeguards to prevent abuse in accordance with international human rights law. Such safeguards shall ensure that measures relating to the exercise of legal capacity respect the rights, will and preferences of the person, are free of conflict of interest and undue influence, are proportional and tailored to the person's circumstances, apply for the shortest time possible and are subject to regular review by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body. The safeguards shall be proportional to the degree to which such measures affect the person's rights and interests.

#### **Article 16**

##### **Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse**

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects.

2. States Parties shall also take all appropriate measures to prevent all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse by ensuring, inter alia, appropriate forms of gender- and age-sensitive assistance and support for persons with disabilities and their families and caregivers, including through the provision of information and education on how to avoid, recognize and report instances of exploitation, violence and abuse. States Parties shall ensure that protection services are age-, gender- and disability-sensitive.

4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons with disabilities who become victims of any form of exploitation, violence or abuse, including through the provision of protection services. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment that fosters the health, welfare, self-respect, dignity and autonomy of the person and takes into account gender- and age-specific needs.

5. States Parties shall put in place effective legislation and policies, including women- and child-focused legislation and policies, to ensure that instances of exploitation, violence and abuse against persons with disabilities are identified, investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted.

#### **Article 25**

##### **Health**

States Parties recognize that persons with disabilities have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure access for persons with disabilities to health services that are gender-sensitive, including health-related rehabilitation.

#### **Article 28**

##### **Adequate standard of living and social protection**

(b) To ensure access by persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection programmes and poverty reduction programmes;

#### **Article 34**

##### **Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

4. The members of the Committee shall be elected by States Parties, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution, representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems, balanced gender representation and participation of experts with disabilities.

If women with disabilities should not continue to be invisible in the future, we should not let authorities and the public make us the target in the debate on other women's unpaid work and care, rob us from our self-determination, take away our legal capacity and rarely be asked before any decision are made on our behalf!



All those rights are now guaranteed us in the convention! and we have the needed articles that will protect us

But this is not enough; we ourselves must be proactive and let us make use of our new tools!

We must take initiatives of international advocacy campaigns, cooperation between international women's organisations and DPO's, and the UN body and its agencies can be effective means at the international level.

At the national level, awareness raising, networking, counselling, financial support and education of the civil society would help to assist battered and abused women with disabilities visible.

Sheltered homes are important but won't prevent the criminal action of violence against women. We have to address the root of it which lies in traditional discrimination, poor education, injustice and patriarchal systems.

All legal measures must be followed up by monitoring and implementation policies at the international and national levels. No excuse for inactivity or lack of resources should be tolerated.

A change in attitude and behaviour would not cost much money, but may take a bit of personal and political will from some!

Mainstreaming policies and particular mentioning of women's equal rights have not brought about any changes.

Maybe it was a mistake by the women activists during the last decades, to demand mainstreaming instead of anti-discrimination laws and particular rights for women.

Or should we have demanded both – a twin track approach to gender equality?

Forward looking economists and politicians realise that investment in women is an investment of the resources of the country! This must be told to everyone over and over again, we can not give up this truth!

The main step forward towards this realisation is to put an end to all forms of violence and discrimination of women and in particular of WWD!

The international disability movement had a dream that started more than 35 years back when the first proposal for an international convention for the human rights of persons with disabilities was tabled in the UN.

The proposal was turned down twice but as all good things are three, the third time the process started.

The power of the dream is near. 650 million persons with disabilities, of which more than a half are women, can look forward to a better world and a better life in the future due to this convention.

But, we hold our countries accountable for ratifying and implementing the convention very soon!

Let us, women with disabilities take the lead! We have the knowledge, we have the skills and we take the power!

Let us do it through our European network of WWD, let the network grow and let it become a world wide movement!

Let us tell everyone:  
„Nothing about WWD, without Us!

Thank you



## Easy to read summary:

### Women and the worldwide agreement for persons with disabilities

The development of a worldwide agreement on the rights of disabled people took four years. This agreement is now completed. Disabled women and men all over the world have now achieved some new human rights through this agreement.



When this agreement was first written, there were no guidelines for disabled women and girls. They had just been forgotten!

After that, disabled women from different countries got together. Together, they fought for some guidelines for women.

Now, there are several guidelines for women in the agreement.

Some of the important rights are:

- Governments must make sure that disabled women have the same rights as disabled men.
- Governments must protect disabled women and men from violence.
- Governments must make sure that doctors are aware of disabled women. This also applies to other professions, such as nurses or health advice centres.



There are many more guidelines in the agreement.

But it is not enough to have these guidelines written down in the agreement.

We must know our rights as well. Disabled women must work together. Together, we must fight all over the world so that we really get our rights.



Disabled women can do a lot. We know a lot. Now it is time for us to call the shots!

Nobody else should run our lives!

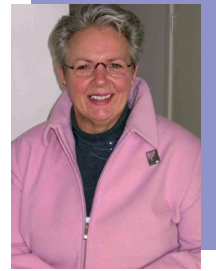
This is why the European network of disabled women is so important.

Kicki Nordström wrote the harder-to-read-article. She is from Sweden. She is on the committee of a worldwide organisation of blind people.



# Opening Speech

Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel



## **Nothing about Women with Disabilities, Nothing without Women with Disabilities! Women and girls with disabilities (WWD) in the European Union (EU) and the UN Convention on 'disability'**

### Introduction

On March 30th, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was open for signing and 20 EU member states (+ Norway and Iceland) and 3 in accession signed the CRPD (unfortunately only 13 of them signed the optional protocol; its consequences will be discussed later). This Convention is of major importance to WWD Europe wide. The European Union counts 37 million disabled citizens. More than half are women and girls with disabilities (approx. 53 to 58% in 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Although the EU did its utmost best, still after 27 years<sup>2</sup> of EU disability policy and anti-discrimination legislation, the majority of EU disabled citizens, i.e. WWD, are still struggling to be heard or taken into consideration by the decision-makers in EU member states and the disability and women's movement alike. As there is a general lack of data broken down to gender and disability, and research concerning the issues „women and disability“ is just in the early stages, WWD's situation cannot be substantiated by substantial and reliable data.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was launched 40 years ago (adopted by the GA on November, 7 1967) had so far only a marginal impact on the advancement and discrimination of WWD, as they were not mentioned specifically in the text and regarded more as belonging to the world of 'the disabled', than to the world of women, as will be highlighted later.

Thus women and girls with disabilities often remain „invisible citizens“ in mainstream policy, within research and not specifically targeted within disability, women and/or gender policies.

Yet, society questions whether the situation of disabled women varies so much from the situation of disabled men. The notion of multiple discrimination, on grounds of gender and disability is very complex.

To understand WWD's situation we have to unfold the complexity of the fact that we are *women*, *disabled* and the combination of both (apart from other intersectional – discriminatory - elements such as ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, class, poverty, etc.)

### Complexity of disability and gender

Women (and men) with disabilities are often seen as sex-neutral beings, and without a sexual identity. They are most likely referred to as **The Disabled** with no reference to being people, let alone to being a woman or a man. This reference, often a result of the medical model, has separated the needs of a woman in the first place from the needs related to the impairment or the disabling factors in society.

WWD are born first as women and the disability is a secondary dimension, which is exacerbated by environmental and social factors. It cannot be seen as unimportant but certainly not the only distinguishing feature in an individual. Moreover some disabilities come later in life wherein a woman

<sup>1</sup> Eurostat Observations until 2002

<sup>2</sup> **Resolution of the Council of 31 May 1990**, Resolution of the Council and the Ministers for Education meeting within the Council concerning integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education

**COM (96)406 final of 30 July 1996**. Communication of the Commission on equality of opportunity for people with disabilities



or girl already grew into a non-disabled adulthood and is then confronted with this complexity of being silenced to a different world she has no experience or knowledge of the world of 'disabled citizens'.

We see a similar picture of our elderly citizens, we all know that one day we will *all* be old (which is different to becoming disabled) but yet people are hardly prepared or realistic about becoming of age and have difficulty dealing with their ageing bodies. In general society has difficulties in dealing with differences and with loss of possibilities, as a result society disrespects disabled or elderly people as they regard them as failures as inadequate, and stigmatises them even more by making them sex-less: 'the disabled', 'the elderly' not distinguishing women from men.

Society believes that disabled women and disabled men (like elderly women and men) have the same needs, based primarily on the disability (age) and not based on human potential and values.

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 more 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<sup>3</sup>

Women live in cultures based on a long tradition of paternalistic, cultural and religious dominance of men over women, wherein women are struggling for their rights. These rights entail for instance equal pay, pension and benefit rights, reconciliation of work and family life and reproductive rights. Each woman in the EU faces a daily risk to become a victim of gender-based violence and abuse. Perpetrators of such violence can be men with and without disabilities.

Through the adoption of CRPD, the EU now officially acknowledges

„...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“ (CRPD, Preamble q)

The position of WWD is on gender grounds no different from non-disabled women. On the basis of their impairments they face however disabling factors that restrict them in a larger context than non-disabled women.

The EU's long tradition of identifying and acknowledging gender based discrimination and disadvantages and creating legislation and policies to advance the position of women in our societies, has hardly effected WWD. For too long WWD are referred back to disability policies only therewith denying their gender aspects and silencing the intrinsically linked discrimination or advantages.

*„A pregnant mother, who was a wheelchair user, could not use the services of the community maternity centre, for it had many steps“<sup>4</sup>*

This is contrary to the latest EU 2004 Council Directive implementing equal treatment between women and men in the access to and supply of goods and services, which does however not stipulate the difference in access between women with and without disabilities<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur O'Reilly. „Employment Barriers for Women with Disabilities“ in „The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities“

<sup>4</sup> Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities Women's Committee

<sup>5</sup> On 13.12.2004, of EU Council of Ministers unanimously adopted the Directive aimed at extending the principle of equal treatment beyond the area of employment regulation in the field of goods and services



## Disadvantages in comparison with non-disabled women

WWD women are valued even less than non-disabled women in relation to beauty, motherhood or parenthood, sexual attractiveness as a woman.

The chance of being a wife/partner or for instance a disabled lesbian can become denied identities.

If you are a woman with a learning disability, or a woman with high dependency needs the discrimination is likely to increase, based on the fact that society in general, including non-disabled woman who are also often the care-takers, are convinced that they are the sole judges of your ability to be a woman.

WWD throughout the EU form the highest rate of unemployment, are more often deprived of education and further education and furthermore not stimulated in their development towards all facets of womanhood.

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If you are a woman with a learning disability, or a woman with high dependency needs the discrimination is likely to increase, based on the fact that society in general, including non-disabled woman who are also often the care-takers, are convinced that they are the sole judges of your ability to be a woman.

WWD throughout the EU form the highest rate of unemployment, are more often deprived of education and further education and furthermore not stimulated in their development towards all facets of womanhood.

In Hungary 9% of all disabled persons are employed, that means 90% are unemployed. Taking into consideration that women with disabilities represent > 53% it stipulates their inactive life and their benefit or family dependency and as a consequence life-long poverty<sup>6</sup>. Despite initiatives following the Millennium goals, the Lisbon Targets and the directives on equality between women and men regarding employment, WWD have not benefited from either.

When institutionalised or being a woman with high dependency, or other special needs you do not receive the special attention or dignity needed as a woman: no gender specific choice of your carer or support person; hardly time for female related support (e.g. make-up if you wish so, fashionable clothing instead of only practical ones); courtesy around intimate care; gender based adolescent support. Things that women without disabilities can freely choose for in their daily lives but that become a luxury in a disabled woman's life.

*„When I am having my period I do not want to be dressed by the male assistants, but often I have not choice. And apart of that they never put the things on I have chosen myself, leaving me sometimes with two different socks, or clothes that don't match together. It really drives me nuts and frustrates, because I want to look nice when I go to school“ a 17 year-old French Girl*

In CEDAW women have become visible. But women with disabilities stayed invisible, as written down in the **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 18** of 1991

*„... Having considered more than 60 periodic reports of States parties, and having recognized that they provide **scarce information on disabled women ...**“*

Women with disabilities are facing the problem of a „double invisibility“. They remain invisible as women, and they remain invisible as disabled persons.

<sup>6</sup> Erzébe Szöllösi, Board member of MEOSZ, EDF Executive member in Situation of WWD in the Central and Eastern European Countries, Berlin May 2007.





## **Disadvantage in comparison with men with disabilities**

In general being a woman is a risk factor for becoming disabled because of e.g. poverty, gender based violence, Female Genital Mutilation, armed conflict and disasters, malnutrition, insufficient medical care, HIV infection, to suffer from depression, panic or eating disorders.

On top of that girls and women with disabilities face unique barriers in comparison to men with disabilities (and non-disabled women!), such as

### **Economic barriers**

- EU data shows that percentage of employment rates for non-disabled men is 76% versus 36% for MWD. For women, the percentages vary from 55% for non-disabled to 25% for WWD.
- WWD are subjected to low income, cultural and social status
- Benefit systems and pension schemes are hardly designed for WWD
- WWD face life-long poverty

The CRPD acknowledges the life-long poverty situation of WWD and the EU is obliged to tackle this.

*„To ensure access by persons with disabilities, **in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities**, to social protection programmes and poverty reduction programmes“ (CRPD, Art. 28.b)*

### **Educational barriers**

- WWD in particular are at higher risk for illiteracy and low education-levels, despite the fact that overall educational levels of non-disabled women and girls in the EU are rising
- WWD are deprived of disability and gender designed vocational training

EU member states have acknowledged the right to education through various international and European legal binding commitments (Universal Declaration of HR, art. 26; CEDAW, art. 10; CRC<sup>7</sup>, art. 23 & 28).

Education levels and literacy rates of women with disabilities tend to be lower than those of men with disabilities. The estimated literacy rate for people with disabilities worldwide is 3%, with the rates for disabled women and girls being about only 1%<sup>8</sup>.

Existing statistics on vocational training indicate that the percentage of women trainees is low. Studies carried out in Switzerland<sup>9</sup> have shown, for example, that more effort is invested in vocational rehabilitation for men than for women.

*„All my deaf brothers went to secondary education, but I was supposed to stay at home and help my deaf mother in the house-hold. One day I would probably marry a deaf man and any further education was not needed my parents and the deaf institute claimed“ (Deaf women’s situation in 1998)<sup>10</sup> Similar situations still occur in many countries of the EU both for deaf as well as for learning disabled women.*

Although girls and women with disabilities are not specifically mentioned in relation to education within the CRPD, there is enough legal binding ground both within this convention as within other international and European legislation to demand for proper and further education for women and girls with disabilities as well as a right to life-long learning. The educational levels of WWD in rural areas and in Eastern member states tend to be much lower than in other areas and countries and in general lower than that of MWD and should therefore get even more structural EU attention and funds.

<sup>7</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>8</sup> Groce 1997a cited in Rousso 2000

<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe: „Discrimination against women with disabilities“, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg 2003

<sup>10</sup> From Rucksack to Attache Case, Situation of disabled people’s employment in the Netherlands, 2001, L. la Rivière-Zijdel, ITAR Publ.



## **Health and reproductive health/rights barriers**

- Various barriers make access to birth control and family planning very difficult, such as physical, communication and attitudinal barriers. Overall we see insufficient gender and disability specific (reproductive) health care and rehabilitation services
- There presupposed role that women should play, and that assigned to disabled women contradicts: women in general are pressured by society to motherhood, while WWD are discouraged to have children, and this leads in many EU member states to
  - selective or forced sterilisation<sup>11</sup>
  - abortion,
  - the denial of adoption on the basis of the „care-taking incapacity of the mother“
  - false information is given about their physical capabilities to bear children
- Learning disabled women are at higher risk to forced sterilisation or abortions without consent (some EU member states still have this as a general law of application)
- Health care institutions discourage conception of WWD with an inheritable impairment/ disease by stipulating WWD's 'criminal behaviour' in case of pregnancy. It can result in refusing adequate medical or maternity care.

*„I really wanted to have child. My husband supported me in this. We both know that we have a 50% chance of getting a baby with the same disability as I have (I have a congenital heart-disease). But I feel I am the best mother to support her or him as I know how it is with such a disability. The doctors at the hospital were so cruel to me they said they would not treat me if I got pregnant and got heart problems as a result of it. And they said I am a criminal putting a child on the world that would 'suffer' in the same way as I, and the money it costs the government to have another child with disability like mine. So we took instead a dog, but I still regret it till today!“ (Dutch woman, now 42 years old!)*

Women and girls with disabilities face many barriers to basic health care. Medical research is often based on studies of men and disabled women are not included in the mainstream health care programs, particularly maternal and gynaecological issues. They are often sent to poorly equipped rehabilitation-focused facilities.

*„A pregnant mother, who was a wheelchair user, could not use the services of the community maternity center, for it had many steps“ (Finland, 2005)*

- WWD and women with mental health problems in particular are frequently victims of pharmaceutical and medical experiments. Drugs, undefined medical treatments, operations and therapies are tested on.

A recent research in the UK (2002) on treatments with Electro Convulsive Therapy showed that 68% of people treated with ECT were women and only 32% men. 44% were women over 65! Estimates show that only about 25% of ECT's have been properly reported.

- In hospitals WWD are used without their consent as models for trainee doctors. Videos and slides of WWD are used as teaching aids without control over its use.

*„I had to walk up and down the room fully naked, while 8 male doctors were staring at me and analysing my body in an unpleasant way. Nobody asked me anything, they treated me as a thing and not as a woman. I still have to cry at night if I remember the words they used to describe my body“, 28 year old woman from Greece.*

<sup>11</sup> although disabled men are at risk too, the number of sterilised disabled men is a fraction in comparison with women



We have to realise that women with disabilities frequently lose their rights as a woman, to motherhood and a family life through denying their sex and gender, through forced abortions and sterilizations. On top of that the stigmatisation of denied ability to motherhood, or resulting from institutionalisation deprives WWD of their fundamental rights and freedoms.

CEDAW, art. 16 and the Cairo Declaration speak out on the protection against eugenic health programs and practices, which includes forced abortion and sterilisation. The Universal Declaration of HR, art. 25, CEDAW, art. 12 & 16, CRC, art. 23 & 24 as well as the CRPD, art. 6 and 24 state clearly that WWD have the right to access all health and reproductive health services and family life

„Provide ... the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other persons, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health and population-based public health programmes“ (CRPD, art 25, a)

We all know however that legal obligations cannot diminish attitudinal barriers that are still prevalent in our societies regarding WWD and their alleged female identities. Especially in the case of learning disabled women or women with inheritable diseases, the ethical debates of non-disabled so-called experts are overshadowing WWD's rights and demands. Within the Netherlands a large debate has started (again) on sterilisation of women with learning disabilities as (disputed) research proves that more problems occur in families with learning disabled parents. A strong European Network of Women with Disabilities can play a major role in combating such stigmatisation and support their learning disabled sisters in obtaining their rights on the same basis as others.

### **Women with disabilities and violence**

Studies carried out in EU member states reveal that an overall estimate of 89% of all women and girls with disabilities experience at least once in their life severe forms of disability-gender-based violence. Approximately 76% were a victim of sexual abuse at least once in their life.

Other studies suggest that 39 to 68% of girls and 16 to 30 % of boys with developmental disabilities will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday<sup>12</sup>. Women with psychiatric disabilities or women in institutions are at even a higher risk for violence. Even if a disabled woman does escape from the violence, very few shelters or services are accessible. Information material on violence are not available in easy to read format, in Braille or available for deaf women and girls.

As violence is often euphemized regarding WWD (what we call rape is seen as sexual service in the case of some WWD; or physical violence as treatment or part of care taking) or even denied, it is difficult for WWD to fight for their rights.



<sup>12</sup> Sobsey, 1994, as reported in Reynolds, 1997 cited in Rousso 2000



Several factors are debit of the forms of violence that WWD encounter:

- WWD see themselves as subjects of maltreatment and abuse, while society ignores the problem.
- WWD do not always regard themselves as victims of violence, because they consider these situations habitual in their lives and associated with disability.
- Disability is an extra risk factor for suffering abuse and maltreatment on top of the gender disadvantage.
- Women with sensorial, learning, and communication problems, are more likely to suffer abuse and violence.
- The denial of traditional female roles contributes WWD lower self-esteem and increases vulnerability, elements that favour becoming subjected to violence.
- Studies on specific groups of women (autistic, for example) show that they remain for longer periods in institutions than men do.
- Violence against disabled women has common characteristics with the female collective, but has specific characteristics too.
- Most professionals in charge of counselling and interventions in maltreatment to women ignore that WWD are in the same situation, because information does not reach them, or because they do not typify it as violent or associate it with disability.
- Depending in daily life on others increases the risk of being objects of becoming a victim of violence. This risk is believed lower when personal assistance is given by persons who were professionally trained or with psychological aptitude.
- Professionals in the juridical system should be educated and trained to deal with WWD and the cases of violence they report. Most cases that are brought for the courts now within the EU seldom result in convictions of the perpetrators of violence towards WWD. It is either denied as violence, or the WWD is not believed or not taken serious (in the case of different communication levels).

It is extremely difficult for any abused woman to leave a situation of abuse.


A woman is hit by a husband or a partner an average of 35 times before she calls the police. Battering undermines self-esteem and makes women feel responsible for her own abuse.

For WWD this situation is even more difficult.

She may be dependent on her abuser for affection, communication and financial, physical and medical support. WWD reporting the abuse may risk poverty and loss of housing and support. She may fear not being heard or believed if she speaks out.

She may face further violence, institutionalisation, or loss of her children if she seeks help. She may not have access to information about existing support services for victims of violence. Even if she has this information, many sources of support may not be accessible.

She may not be able to contact the police or women's shelters because they are not physical accessible do not have communication devices as telecommunication devices for deaf women. She may not be able to physically leave her situation because of a lack of accessible transportation. Her lack of options leaves her feeling so powerless and despairing that suicide seems the only viable choice. When seeking help to overcome suicidal thoughts or attempts, she is unlikely to find counselling that takes account of her own reality, leaving her isolated and possibly suicidal.



*'I thought he really was in love with me, and that one day we would marry and I would leave the institute. But than I discovered he was already married and had never the intention to marry me in the first place. As the group-leader on my unit he regarded it as sexual services by saying to me: „Otherwise you would never had this experience maybe in your life“. It was the first time in my life that I thought about killing myself. I felt so humiliated, so lost, and nowhere to go to, who would believe me, as he was still a superior in the institute' (19 year old girl in German institute)<sup>13</sup>*

The high risk of disabled women and girls of being subject to all forms of violence has been acknowledged by several **UN documents that** included recommendations for actions to be taken:

- The recommendations of the 1990 UN Seminar on Disabled Women marked violence against disabled girls and women as a major problem and ask for special programs to prevent such violence.<sup>14</sup>
- The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action acknowledged women in institutions and women with disabilities to be particularly vulnerable to violence and recommended that governments ensure that women with disabilities have access to information and services in the field of violence against women and that special measures to eliminate violence against women, particularly women with disabilities are taken.<sup>15</sup>
- The outcome document from the Twenty-third Special Session of the UN General Assembly (2000)<sup>16</sup>, adopted by General Assembly resolution S-23/2<sup>17</sup>, recommends governments to adopt and promote a holistic approach to respond to all forms of violence and abuse against girls and women of all ages, including girls and women with disabilities.

*States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects (CRPD, art 16.1)*

The CRPD gives –again- enough legal ground to combat violence against WWD, but a strong movement has to combat biased behaviour towards this phenomenon and linking with the mainstream women's movement who has gained so much experience in this field over the years is essential. Especially the new EU Network of WWD should seek membership of the European Women's Lobby Observatory on violence to ameliorate the conceptual thinking on violence against women and girls with disabilities.

### **Women with disabilities and their organisations**

Participation of WWD within disability and women's organisations is a prerequisite for their emancipation and integration. Not only taking part is here at stake, also decision-making. With the creation of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 1993 (i.e. Article 18) the right to establish disability organisations was created. It was then that worldwide many disability organisations emerged, as governments were obliged to make this (financially) possible. Up till then most organisations concerned with disability issues were organisations **for** disabled person, mostly run by non-disabled 'experts'. Within the EU, in 1996 after the Helios Forum (that focused specifically on disability issues) the European Disability Forum was founded that unites most European national disability platforms.

WWD became, through their respective organisations members of EDF, but even up to now their position in elected structures and EDF policies is minimal.

<sup>13</sup> Her story is exemplary for the many stories I have heard over the past 15 years throughout the EU whilst giving empowerment and self defence courses

<sup>14</sup> UN, Report: Seminar on Disabled Women, Vienna, 20-24 August 199, I.c., para I. J.

<sup>15</sup> Beijing Platform for Action, I.c., para 116, 124, 175

<sup>16</sup> A/RES/S-23/3

<sup>17</sup> A/RES/S-23/2



To highlight the position of WWD, EDF established a Women's Committee that consists of 7 WWD who are supposed to represent the 53% of WWD within the EU! The committee's resources (annually allocated by EDF) only allow the committee to meet once a year. The committee has only an advisory role.

In 1990, resulting from the Beijing Platform for Action, the 1<sup>st</sup> European wide mainstream women's federation was created, i.e. the European Women's Lobby, consisting of 4.500 women's organisations.

In 2000 the EDF's Women's Committee joined EWL and holds a board position ever since. For the first time in the European history disabled women became an integral part of the conceptual thinking on gender and the advancement of women. From 2002-2005 EDF's board member, a wheelchair-using woman, became the president of EWL, which had a major impact not only on the policies within EWL, but also on the structures and policies of its member organisations to include WWD's issues. It proved that WWD issues are closer linked to the women's movement than to the disability movement, or because they were found a better audience for their demands than within the disability movement. But even within EWL the pressure has to continue, and constant education is needed to make members aware of the double or multiple discrimination of WWD.

More than 15 years WWD have tried to bring their issues on the table of mainstream disability organisations, but so far with little and mostly splattered results.

If we than realise that WWD form the majority of EU disabled citizens (and their percentage is increasing) it becomes even more clear that it is time that WWD start to organise themselves on European level. Not only to demand their rights on EU level, but also to play a role and be a respective partner in the growing international WWD movement. In this time an era we cannot reveal to our sisters in Arabia, Africa and South America who have already large WWD networks, that the EU or Europe as a whole does not have such a movement or organisational structures, and mainly because of lacking resources and overall ignorance of the gender dimension within disability theory and policy.

More than 10 years after Beijing, where the WWD movement strongly emerged it is time to speak out for ourselves within the European Union and beyond and to create our own strong organisation to voice our demands regarding EU directives and international legal binding tools such as the CRPD. The legal obligations are there, it is now our task to make use of EU public funding to create this long overdue WWD network.

### **Women with disabilities and Human Rights**

The concept of disability as well as the concept of gender are internationally accepted human rights aspects and political and civil rights are recognized to women (and men) with disabilities as to all other women and men and as is the necessity to adopt the necessary measures to live their life fully. Therefore WWD's right to economical and social security, to employment, to live with their own family, to participate in social and cultural life, to be protected against any form of exploitation, abuse or degrading conditions should be recognized and advanced.

As women with disabilities we live in a dominated non-disabled society, wherein the norm is healthy, able and fit to work or actively contribute to society. WWD are still unable to fully participate into society on the basis of the issues mentioned above. As most countries of the EU chose after World War II to create an open and social welfare society it inextricably linked itself to care and welfare for the 'needed' by setting up care structures for persons with disabilities and elderly persons and therewith devaluating 'dependent citizens' to second class citizens.

The CRPD is the first of its kind that recognises specifically women and girls with disabilities and promotes their advancement through legal binding convention text specifically targeted at them<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Article 6.1 and 6.2



as well as gender references in various articles<sup>19</sup>. The Convention starts with a clear binding commitment to equality between women and men<sup>20</sup> with disabilities.

*States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (CRPD, art. 6.1)*

The European Union, like the United Nations have acknowledged *gender mainstreaming* as a political strategy. Though it can't be yet considered to be part of international or European customary law and it is still not legally binding for national governments, although there is a strong mandate for all entities of the European Union and the United Nations. All resolutions, actions plans, directives and other efforts and activities of the EU and the UN and national governments cannot be ignored. Gender mainstreaming became an indispensable guiding idea and strategy to achieve the equal rights of women and men to the enjoyment of all human rights. This means that the principle of gender mainstreaming should become an integral part when we talk about persons with disabilities, stipulating every time again that situations can be different for women with disabilities in comparison with men with disabilities or women without disabilities.

### **Conclusions**

For too long women and girls with disabilities have been denied their EU citizens rights. They are underrepresented within disability organisations on national, European and international level. Resources are hardly allocated to disabled women's networks and the overall agenda of disability organisations have a so-called impairment and male specific focus, i.e. focusing mainly on employment from a breadwinner's perspective. Although their number is growing within mainstream women's organisations and their position was elevated on European level<sup>21</sup> women's organisations are still not fully open or equipped to WWD's participation in their structures. Moreover their agenda's focus on so many elements regarding gender-based aspects that the specific WWD's aspects are hardly part of the agenda due to lack of understanding, small number of WWD participating in the debates, knowledge of only a few groups of WWD or pure ignorance. Mainstream women's organisations should adopt statutory provisions to include WWD's issues and (members of) their respective networks and learn directly from WWD about their lives.

Issues such as disability and gender-based violence should become an integral part within EU violence prevention programs and reliable data should be gathered about the daily lives of WWD to charter the magnitude of violence and discrimination in their lives. This means that programs like Daphne should target specifically at WWD and (gender-based) violence and allocate finances for projects in this field, carried out by WWD. This means that the Daphne Institute should gain knowledge to understand the remit of such projects better.

It further stipulates that WWD and their organisations should be directly involved in the design of researches concerning their lives and (violence) circumstances.

The European Union and its member states by rapidly ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and adapting it to their national and European legislation will truly advance the position of WWD throughout the EU. At this moment however, although a majority of the EU member states have signed the CRPD, a large minority have not signed the optional protocol, which means signing but not legally binding oneself to the CRPD. This leaves the majority of EU disabled citizens, i.e. WWD, still out in the cold.

Especially WWD from the new member states and those in accession are awaiting these human rights targeted at them already for so long. Many of the older member states are diminishing the human rights of WWD and MWD by withdrawing goods and services, focusing on one sided cost-benefit analysis and the Lisbon targets (= focusing on fulltime employment and not on poverty reduction).

<sup>19</sup> Articles 8, 16, 25, 28, 34

<sup>20</sup> Article 3

<sup>21</sup> Due to a disabled woman being the president of the European Women's Lobby from 2002-2005



*„Even in our country that was always regarded as having the best provisions for WWD within the EU, we see that support systems are going down and down. Lesser things are possible and we are afraid that when we are old we will end in an institute again as we cannot afford to stay on our own with 24 hours assistance“, says a 36-year old Swedish woman.*

No one is ever analysing the enormous employment, pharmaceutical and medical market revenues resulting from the existence of persons with disabilities, governments only look at what a WWD or MWD costs instead of the benefits derived from them.

Moreover, we deny therewith the potential of WWD as members of civil society, as contributors to the EU knowledge through their respective NGOs. Without the enormous input and knowledge of WWD and MWD in the process of the CRPD the UN member states would never have been able to create this convention in such short time and with this rich content.

The EU too bases its knowledge on the input of civil society organisations and its members, as most WWD and MWD are still hardly present within the labour force that is working on WWD and MWD issues and policies (nor in the EU commission, the EU parliament or member states government departments dealing with disability).

The fact that WWD and their issues are so predominantly present within the text of the CRPD is an achievement of historical importance. WWD have fought their way into the debates, first through the male-dominated international disability organisations (i.e. IDC) and the gender and disability biased UN member states delegations. And they succeeded in a way that even goes beyond what CEDAW experts held for possible.

WWD should therefore be directly involved in the monitoring process of the CRPD. Consequently the creation of an European Network of Women with Disabilities is essential to play a partner role on international level. This means that resources should be allocated to women with disabilities' specific organisations on national as well as on European level. Such an European Network should not only be able to play a role within the implementation of the CRPD, but should be a catalyst for WWD issues within mainstream national, European and international women's political agenda through expert meetings of CEDAW, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) annual conferences, EWL meetings, as within mainstream disability organisations on national, European and international level (National Disability Councils, European Disability Forum, International Disability Association).

A paradigm shift is needed not only from a medical model to a social human rights model, but on top of that also from a sex-neutral to a sex and gender-specific approach on the human rights model on disability.

Only then we can really speak of

## **Nothing about US Women and Girls with Disabilities, Without us Women and Girls with Disabilities!**





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## Easy to read summary: No decisions about us without us!

Disabled people are often not seen as women or men. People often just talk about the disabled. But this is not right. The lives of women and men are not the same.

It is harder for disabled women to find a job.  
Disabled women often also earn less money than men.  
Disabled women are often victims of violence and abuse.  
The offenders may be men with or without disabilities.



For disabled women, it is hard to become a mother.  
People often think they can't be a mother.  
They are also more likely to be unmarried than non disabled women.



Women's policy often ignores disabled women.  
Politicians just say that they are part of disability policy.  
But disability policy also ignores disabled women.

But now we have the worldwide agreement on the human rights of disabled people. This agreement contains guidelines for all important areas of life. In the guidelines, disabled women are also given attention.



Now we have to make sure that these guidelines are put into practice.



It is important that disabled women work in their organisations. In organisations for disabled people and in Organisations for women. Disabled women must have some power in these organisations.

But we also really need our own network of disabled women in Europe.

Then we can get involved in European policy.



The harder to read article was written by Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel. She is from Holland. She works for better living-conditions of disabled women in Europe.

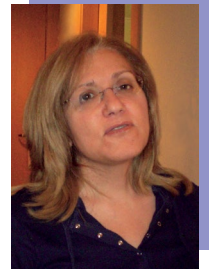


# Opening Speech

**Rita Barbuto**

**Regional Development Officer- DPI Europe**

***Daphne Programs against sexual violence  
and their implications for women with disabilities***



## **The Daphne Program**

The European Commission's policy is based on the Daphne Program, one of the milestones, to fight sexual violence and its implications for women with disabilities within the range of the priority actions in order to establish a space of liberty, safety and justice.

The goal of the Daphne Program is to support the activities of the organisations and public authorities aiming to the protection of women and children and to the prevention of violence against them. The Daphne Program gives an extra European value to these activities and encourages the exchange of ideas and good practices by means of networks and partnerships.

The Daphne Program intends to increase the citizens' and political representatives' awareness of the problem of violence. It is the outcome of the World Conference in Stockholm in 1996 against commercialised sexual abuse of children and the terrible events that happened in Belgium in the summer of the same year, that drew the attention on a particular form of violence: the sexual violence against children and teenagers in the form of kidnapping, sexual abuse, exploitation and sex trade. These forms of violence are too often inflicted on women and have been condemned in the declaration and by the action platform adopted in Peking during the fourth World Conference on Women. In its statement on the trade of female sex slaves (1996) the Commission underlined the important roles of the NGOs in the fight against this trade and in the assistance offered to its victims. However, the phenomenon of sexual violence has many forms: for example, violence within the domestic walls often forces children and teenagers to enter the sex trade and to commit the same abuses.

Sexual violence is certainly not the only kind of violence faced by the Daphne Program; it covers all types of violence: domestic violence, violence among people of the same age, institutional violence in institutions and schools, violence against minority groups as homosexuals, disabled people, ethnic minorities, etc. For that reason we can say that the culture of violence is diffused in every field of society.

Sexual, psychological and physical violence is a deadly cocktail that can harm health in all senses, damaging the body, mind and social welfare of those that undergo violence, undermining the functioning of society and its present and future development possibilities.

The aim of the Daphne Program is to support the activities of the organisations (among which the NGOs) and public local authorities for the protection of women and children and for the prevention of violence against them. The Daphne Program gives an extra European value to these activities and encourages the exchange of ideas and good practices by means of networking, partnerships and the realisation of pilot projects, giving thus the opportunity to learn, exchange information and competences concerning these problems and handling them globally in order to intervene in the best possible way to offer assistance to the victims.

Moreover, Daphne finances actions that make both the general public and the potential victims more aware of the problem of violence; as well as actions carried out by means of the creation of new European networks, in the spirit of European cooperation and with an exchange of good practices.



The Daphne Program includes protection measures addressed to three categories of beneficiaries (Children, teenagers, and women) and prevention measures against violence inflicted on them. These measures provide for:

- The creation of networks on a European level among the NGOs, to promote the cooperation among these NGOs and the competent authorities;
- Measures to protect the beneficiary groups and to prevent violence against them;
- Studies and researches to investigate the causes of violence, intervention methods in order to prevent, assist and reintegrate;
- Exchange of information and good practices;
- Diffusion of information through conferences and meetings, written and audiovisual material;
- Organisation of awareness raising campaigns for the general public, the potential victims and those that work with them.

The Daphne Program has contributed to the improvement of the elaboration both of the policies and of the practical solutions to the problem of violence and their application throughout Europe. Thanks to the reinforcement of the cooperation and the numerous information and awareness raising campaigns for the general public, the projects of the Daphne initiative/ Program have exercised a significant influence not only on the citizens' perception of violence – which will need a long time to change – but also on the development of the EU policies. The public institutions experimented and planned new models and methods that contribute to the creation of a common frame and to the convergence of the related policies in the Member States. Daphne faces a wide range of deeply human difficulties and problems linked to violence, in all its forms, and it is able to propose solutions and give results.

### **The Daphne program against sexual violence and its implication for women with disability**

Thus, one of the action fields of the Daphne program is sexual violence, not only inflicted on women but also on children. For as far I have studied and I know the Daphne program, also in occasion of the preparation of this report, there has been no project carried out within the Daphne program that has made the slightest reference to sexual violence inflicted on women with disability.


Also in this case the women with disability have received nearly no attention, apart from the projects carried out by DPI Italy and DPI Europe within the Daphne Program. These projects allowed focusing on the contexts in which these situations of violence and violations of the human rights happen, involving limitation of freedom, multiple discrimination and denial of equal opportunities of women with disability. Thanks to researches we have analysed and studied the conditions of violence that women with disability may suffer within their family context and in their relationship with their personal assistant.

These projects have offered, undoubtedly, a great opportunity because they have gathered women with disability, not only those that belong to DPI but all those that are interested in the confrontation and the launching of a cultural and political common process to prevent and fight any kind of violence, to propose and start strategies that aim to give strength and visibility to this hidden phenomenon and to claim their Human and Civil Rights.

Before dealing with the possible implications, or better, the support drawn from the use of the Daphne program, we should define our knowledge concerning sexual violence inflicted on women with disability, starting, obviously, from their experience of multiple discrimination, of violence and of lack of equal opportunities.

In this field a lot has been done for women in general but the same cannot be said of women with disability and, besides, it needs to be said that the strategies identified to prevent sexual violence and to support the women that have experience it very often are not applicable on women with disability, who most of the time depend on their abuser to get out of bed, to dress themselves and to eat.

Sexual abuse is a problem of epidemic proportions, which is only now attracting public interest. For every type of disability different dynamics of sexual abuse are involved. Women with mental and intellectual disabilities aren't able to understand what is happening to them or aren't able to communicate it to a trustworthy person. Women with a severe physical disability are able to



understand the violence they are undergoing but may not know it is illegal and that they can say no. The conditions of extreme poverty and economic dependence, physical dependence conditioned by disability, poor education and lack of employment, social isolation, segregation in institutions and lack of self-esteem make that disabled women are an „easy target“ of sexual violence.

The most shocking thing is the lack of research on this problem. The research on the significant effect of sexual violence on disabled women is extremely limited and fragmentary. The scarce information seems to focus on sexual abuse inflicted on women with mental and/or intellectual disabilities. The scarcity of the research and investigation determines both the lack of a specific legislation that gives attention to disabled women, victims of sexual abuse and violence; and the lack of services that take care of the specific needs of disabled women. Little is known about violence and sexual abuse inflicted on disabled women, but they unquestionably experience violence in similar situations as other women: they are raped and abused by someone they know, a relative or a friend, in their homes, at work and in institutions, which are often run by men. But little or nothing is known about this. When these situations come to the surface the only possible solution is sterilisation, a convenient solution for society, that doesn't want to face the disagreeable consequence of a shameful pregnancy that may reveal a violent and degrading system, but not for the women with disability that continue to undergo violence in the silence of their homes and institutions.

It is a fact that disabled women are more exposed sexual abuse and violence; they are silent victims and therefore an ideal target. And yet in the collective image they are regarded as devoid of sexual interest. How can this be? The answer is simple and at the same time cruel: sexual violence and abuse regard more the exercise of oppressive power than libido or pleasure. The oppressive power is exercised most of all on vulnerable individuals and the vulnerability increases when these people live in conditions of outsider, exclusion, segregation or dependence. Women with disability, the most vulnerable amongst the vulnerable, are an easy prey for rapists and jailers. They live in such unworthy and degrading circumstances that they are sometimes in no condition to understand the abuse or the violence they are victim of, whereas in case they are aware of it they are afraid to denounce the fact because they are afraid of retaliation: if they live in institutions they can't leave, whereas if they live at home they have no place to go without money and a job, without personal assistant or a house?

Besides, women with disability are not considered as credible witnesses. Often, when they decide to report and tell their story of violence and abuse nobody believes them because of the myths and prejudices about their sexuality.

## **Conclusion**

The question of sexual abuse and violence on disabled women must be handled from two points of view, i.e. we should work on two levels: a social, political and cultural one and on the other hand the personal growth of disabled women, identifying instruments, strategies and methods to activate empowerment processes.

The Daphne program is certainly the right instrument to act on these two levels. With its projects DPI Italia involved a lot of disabled women and several organisations that are part of DPI Europe and made considerable steps forward in both directions.

The public and institutional level has been involved and made aware of the gender and disability questions thanks to a number of documents, manifestos and open letters written by different women with disabilities all over Europe, in which they urge the European and national Bodies to set in motion policies and actions in favour of women with disability. On a cultural level several initiatives have been organised to discuss the condition of multiple discrimination of disabled women and at the same time good practices, developed in some European countries, have been diffused to support the disabled women in their political action to claim their rights and to denounce the lack of attention given to gender in the world of disability and the invisibility that wraps disabled women in every corner of the planet. As far as the level of personal growth is concerned, researches allowed identifying some instruments to empower women with disability and make them attain or re-attain their self-esteem and self-respect. Thanks to one of the projects it was possible to write and publish in two languages (Italian and English) a handbook on Peer Counselling. It was written by different authors, under the title „*From victims of history to protagonists of life*“. This book demonstrates the desire and the determination of disabled women to get rid of their



age-old reclusion in order to activate a self-awareness process of what they really are and not of an identity of acquired inabilities. The key elements of Peer Counselling – putting interpersonal relationships central, sharing experiences, listening, personal care, attention given to the dimensions of the body and the imagination – mostly belong to women. There is, therefore, a deep relationship between the female world and Peer Counselling. This methodology could be the solution to help disabled women to recognise the sexual abuse and violence they undergo, by developing inside them the awareness of being an individual. It can also be used to support those women with disability that decide to report and tell their experience of violence.

Art. 16 „The right of not being subjected to exploitation, violence and ill-treatment“ of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability forces the Member States to take all the right legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect people with disabilities, within and outside their domestic context, against any kind of exploitation and abuse, including aspects based on gender. Moreover, it forces the Member States to take all the right measures to facilitate the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and the social reintegration of people with disabilities that are victims of any kind of exploitation, violence or ill treatment, by means of offering protection services. Finally, it establishes that the Member States should program efficient laws and policies, including specific laws and policies for women and children, to assure that the cases of exploitation, of violence and abuse against people with disabilities can be identified, investigated and where necessary prosecuted.

Taking advantage of this article and since there has never been any research on sexual abuse and violence on disabled women, at least I don't know any, it would be a good thing to present a project on these problems, in occasion of the next Daphne program. A project that might propose instruments, strategies, policies and actions to define and resolve this problem.

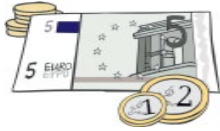
The project should involve as many countries as possible in order to have precise and detailed statistics on the phenomenon in Europe and thus being able to raise and diffuse the awareness of the European institutions on all levels.





## Easy to read summary: European programmes against violence

Many women in Europe have to put up with violence. Because of this, there has been a European programme against violence since 1996. This programme has a special name. It is called Daphne.



European organisations can get money from this programme. The organisations think about ways in which women and children can be better protected against violence.

In many cases, different European organisations work together.

They tell each other about the things which are done against violence in their countries.

So this is how good ideas become known by others.

Other countries in Europe can then copy those ideas.

The worldwide organisation of disabled people has also received some money from the Daphne programme. They used it to pay for projects for disabled women.

Women from all over Europe have been working together.

They have talked to each other about violence against disabled women in their families. Or about violence by carers.



Violence is a very important subject for disabled women.

Disabled women often aren't used to saying no. But they have to learn this.

And organisations must learn that violence is a very important subject for disabled women.

They have to make sure that disabled women can come to their advice centres.

They must think of disabled women when they tackle the subject of violence.



Rita Barbuto wrote the harder-to-read-article. She is from Italy. She works for a worldwide confederation of disabled people.



# Basics

# Resolution

**for the formation of a European network,  
to function as an organisation of women with disabilities,  
Berlin 2nd - 4th May 2007**



We, 105 women present from 17 countries have come together to form a European network of disabled girls and women.

We hereby declare that

the growing strength of the women's and girls with disabilities movement in Europe gives us courage;

we have joined together as a European networking organisation in order to be better able to fight for our rights

We see ourselves as an independent pan disability women's and human rights organisation.

We cordially invite all women and girls with disabilities and/or chronically illnesses to join us in order to:

- be able to share experiences and information to network and to support each other;
- to uncover the specific issues concerning disabled women and girls and achieve their consideration;
- jointly carry out campaigning work;
- have our human rights protected and respected;
- be considered in the implementation of already existing European and UN conventions (e.g. CEDAW);
- get the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified and implemented; women with disabilities have to receive an important role herein;
- have our own as well as important voice within the women's and the disability movements;
- be represented in the significant bodies and committees at local, national and international levels.

The living conditions of women with disabilities in Europe vary greatly. However, due to similar structures which cause discrimination, women with disabilities all over Europe are still subjected to some considerable violations of their human rights. These are irrespective of age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, legal status, social status and religious or political beliefs. Women and girls with disabilities are still invisible with regard to politics and society. We are fighting against the multiple discriminations on the grounds of our gender and our disability.

By signing and then ratifying the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, European countries will agree to a legal obligation.





**We are demanding the right to independent living and are therefore asking for the following:**

**In relation to politics**

- ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as soon as possible. Additionally, the special protocol must be signed and ratified as soon as possible (women with disabilities must play an important part in this process);
- funding for peer counselling advice (Empowerment) for women and girls with disabilities delivered by women and girls with disabilities;
- funding for the European organisation of women with disabilities for the improvement of their living conditions and the enforcement of their human rights in Europe;
- promotion of the establishment of organisations of women with disabilities at national and European levels;
- representation of women with disabilities on all bodies and committees at all levels (local, regional, national, international).

**In relation to education**

- full access to as well as accessible supply of all education and training facilities;
- personal assistance in the area of education (school/university and training);
- free choice of education and training establishments;
- the right to inclusive education at all stages of life.

**In relation to employment**

- accessible workplaces
- equal pay for equal work
- rehabilitation services near to home
- promotion of employment of women with disabilities (including free choice of profession)
- flexible models of work (e.g. full time/part time job share, etc)

**In relation to sexuality**

- the right to self-determined sexuality and relationships as well as to same sex way of living. This includes appropriately designed education about the own sexuality.

**In relation to violence**

- the right to a life without any form of violence (e.g. in institutions);
- protection of women and girls with disabilities against sexual exploitation, prostitution and forced marriage;
- prevention of sexualised violence through classes in self-defence and assertiveness for women girls and with disabilities;
- advice and support for women with disabilities affected by violence in accessible women's advice centres and women's refuges. Staff in these centres have to be trained by female disabled experts. These jobs must be government funded;
- the right to refuse certain examinations, treatments and therapies.

**In relation to bioethics**

- a right to life for all;
- forced sterilisations and terminations must be prohibited.





### **In relation to assistance**

- a legally binding entitlement to personal assistance/care for women and girls with disabilities throughout Europe. This must be non-means tested and tailored to individual need in order to ensure an independent lifestyle (this also includes a legal entitlement to sign language interpreting as well as assistance with self-advocacy of women with learning difficulties, etc);
- a right to choose the carer/assistant by gender;
- personal assistance with hospital stays, convalescences and rehabilitation courses;
- personal work-assistance:
- personal assistance for disabled mothers as well as for family duties (disabled parents must not be reliant on the assistance of their children).

### **In relation to family**

- the right of all women with disabilities to have a family and be mothers, irrespective of the type of their disability. They must be enabled to carry out their duties with regard to bringing up children and looking after the family in a self-determined way (e.g. through non-means tested funding of appropriate equipment);
- equal opportunities in comparison to non disabled women for women with disabilities if they wish to become mothers by way of adoption.

### **In relation to health provision**

- full access to all forms of health provision;
- consideration of the issues that are specific to women in the areas of research, training and health provision (including psychiatry and treatment programmes for chronically illnesses);
- the consideration of aspects that are disability-specific (e.g. in the area of gynaecology);
- informed consent prior to any healthcare procedure;
- to be treated with respect.

### **In relation to poverty**

- prevention of poverty of women and girls with disabilities.

**We are demanding the realisation of our civil and human rights,  
as well as equal participation at all levels.  
We are determined to achieve this.**





## Easy to read summary: Resolution for the founding of the European network of women with disabilities

We are 105 women from 17 countries in Europe.  
We have come together to set up a European network  
of women with disabilities.



We welcome women with different disabilities.  
We invite all disabled women and girls to join us.  
We want to fight for our rights better.

We want to live independently.  
Because of this, we make these demands:

- Funding for advice centres for disabled women run by disabled women!
- Disabled women need to be involved in all decisions!
- Disabled children must be able to choose their schools!
- Disabled women need accessible work places which are right for them!
- Disabled women have a right to sexuality and sex education!
- Disabled women must be protected from violence!
- Everyone has a right to life!
- Disabled women must be able to choose their personal assistance!
- Every disabled woman can be a mother!
- Disabled women must be able to choose their doctors!



**We are demanding the realisation of our rights  
We want to take part  
We will try hard to get this.**

## Main Points of the Statutes of the European Network of Women with Disabilities



The European Network of Women with Disabilities is an independent cross-disability women's and human rights organisation.

### Purpose

To improve the living conditions of women and girls with disabilities, to fight discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender or disability and to promote the integration of the concerns of women and girls with disabilities in all areas of policy within the institutions and all walks of life of the European Union.

### Activities

The aim of the Association, through its member organisations is:

- to take into account the needs and perspectives of different groups of women and girls with disabilities, not only with regard to their differing disabilities but also of their ethnicity, sexual orientation etc, and the multiple identities of women at all stages of their life cycle
- to promote processes of empowerment
- to combat every form of discrimination with regards to women and girls with disabilities
- to support networking among woman and girls with disabilities and their organisations and networks
- to do public relations
- to provide input on all areas of EU policy development and implementation that have an impact on the lives of women and girls with disabilities
- to act as political representation in dialogue with national, European and international institutions and governments
- to monitor the development and implementation of the principals of the UN-convention on the rights of persons with disabilities as well as in the implementation of other already existing legal documents as conventions, e.g. CEDAW in order to ensure full integration of the human rights of women and girls with disabilities, their needs and aspirations in all areas of EU policy

### Bodies

- the General Assembly;
- the Board
- optionally an Executive Committee

The final version of the constitution including the definition of the membership etc. will be determined at the founding meeting of the organisation.





## Easy to read summary: Main points of the statutes

In order to set up an organisation, we need a constitution.  
The constitution says how the organisation will work.



Here are some important points which will be in the constitution.

The network works for Women with different disabilities.  
It fights against the disadvantages faced by women with disabilities.



The network wants women to become stronger.  
It wants to get women and girls to work together better.  
There will be work with the media.  
And the network wants to get involved in European policy.  
The network will get involved in anything to do with disabled women and girls.

The members meeting will decide about the detailed work of the network.

The board will, of course, make decisions as well.  
The board is elected by the membership at its meeting.





## List for Networking

Participants of these Organisations were founding members of the European Network of Women with Disabilities in May 2007 in Berlin

### International Organisations

#### **Disabled Peoples' International – DPI**

Office in Germany:

Phone.: +49 (0)9131 205022 (Dinah Radtke)

e-mail: [dinah.radtke@zsl-erlangen.de](mailto:dinah.radtke@zsl-erlangen.de)

Headquarter in Canada:

Phone: +1 709 747-7600

e-mail: [info@dpi.org](mailto:info@dpi.org)

[www.dpi.org](http://www.dpi.org)

#### **International Training Advice Research - ITAR**

Phone: +31 (0)20 61 01 014 (Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel)

e-mail: [lydialarivierezijdel@tiscali.nl](mailto:lydialarivierezijdel@tiscali.nl)

#### **World Blind Union**

Office in Sweden:

Phone: +46 (0)8 399 255/73 (Kicki Nordström)

e-mail: [kicki.nordstro@iris.se](mailto:kicki.nordstro@iris.se)

Headquarter in Canada:

Phone: +1 416 486-9698

e-mail: [info@wbuoffice.org](mailto:info@wbuoffice.org)

[www.worldblindunion.org](http://www.worldblindunion.org)

### European Organisations

#### **European Disability Forum**

Headquarter in Belgium:

Phone: +32 (0)2 282 4600

e-mail: [secretariat@edf-feeph.org](mailto:secretariat@edf-feeph.org)

[www.edf-feeph.org](http://www.edf-feeph.org)

#### **European Women's Lobby**

Headquarter in Belgium:

Phone: +32 (0)2 217 90 20 (Brigitte Triems)

e-mail: [ewl@womenlobby.org](mailto:ewl@womenlobby.org)

[www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)



## **National Networks/Organisations of Women with Disabilities**

### **Associació DONES NO ESTÀNDARDS, Spain**

Phone: +34 (0)93 4583982-4597 (Carme Riu)

e-mail: [mcarmeriu@hotmail.com](mailto:mcarmeriu@hotmail.com)

[www.adne.no.sapo.pt](http://www.adne.no.sapo.pt)

### **avanti donne, Switzerland**

Phone: +41 (0)848 444 888 (Jaelle Eidam, Rita Vökt-Iseli)

e-mail: [info@avantidonne.ch](mailto:info@avantidonne.ch)

[www.avantidonne.ch](http://www.avantidonne.ch)

### **FORUM - WOMEN AND DISABILITY IN SWEDEN, Sweden**

Phone: +46 (0)8 673-1531 (Camilla Ericsson, Ebon Kram)

e-mail: [kvinnor.handikapp@swipnet.se](mailto:kvinnor.handikapp@swipnet.se)

[www.kvinnor-funktionshinder.se](http://www.kvinnor-funktionshinder.se)

### **Reponses Initiatives Femmes Handicapes, France**

Phone: + 33 (0)14788 4367 (Regina Ubanatu u.a.)

e-mail: [regina.ubanatu@rifh.org](mailto:regina.ubanatu@rifh.org)

[www.rifh.org](http://www.rifh.org)

### **Weibernetz – Nationwide Network from Women Lesbians and Girls with Disabilities, Germany**

Phone: +49 (0)561 72 885-84 (Brigitte Faber, Martina Puschke u.a.)

e-mail: [info@weibernetz.de](mailto:info@weibernetz.de)

[www.weibernetz.de](http://www.weibernetz.de)

## **Additional National Organisations for Women or disabled People**

### **Association for the Neuromotor Handicapped of Romania, Romania**

e-mail: [jagercaty@yahoo.com](mailto:jagercaty@yahoo.com) (Ecaterina-Ani Jager)

[www.fimitic.org](http://www.fimitic.org)

### **(Association for Women Sports and martial arts)**

#### **Frauensport und Kampfkunst (FSK e.V.), Germany**

Phone: +49 (0)30 49862713 (Anne Bloom)

e-mail: [fsk@shuri-ryu.de](mailto:fsk@shuri-ryu.de)

[www.shuri-ryu.de](http://www.shuri-ryu.de)

### **(Competence Center for Disability and Sexuality)**

#### **fabs, Fachstelle Behinderung und Sexualität, Switzerland**

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## About the Editor

### Weibernetz – German Network of Women Lesbians and Girls with Disabilities

Weibernetz is a national confederation of women with different impairments as well as regional networks and centres of disabled women. We formed this network in 1998 in order to improve the living conditions of women and girls with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.



We stand up for women's rights.

We work

- on a cross disability level
- independently
- as experts on our own issues according to the independent living movement

### Lobbying

Weibernetz lobbies the interests of disabled women and girls on a number of national bodies. We are one of the founding members of the German Disability Council, as well as being a member of the National Council of German Women's Organizations. We write statements and comments on relevant plans, projects and draft legislation relating to national policy on women and persons with disabilities.

### Contact and information point

Our database contains a wide range of useful information and contact details including details on accessible women's refuges, women's advice centres and clinics.

Please contact us:

- ... for a speaker or panel member on a variety of topics
- ... if you require an article or statement to be written
- ... for a facilitator of a conference

### Publicity work

We publish a magazine called WeiberZEIT. This publication provides information on current political developments and introduces its readers to some famous disabled women.

In addition, we produce some brochures on a variety of topics.

At our conferences and training events for women with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, participants have the opportunity to learn, network, share and support each other.

Our lobbying work is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth since 2003. This Ministry also funded the Conference to found the European Network as well as this booklet.

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## Easy to read summary: About those who made this booklet

Weibernetz is an organisation for women and girls with disabilities all over Germany. There are women with different disabilities in Weibernetz. There are also groups of women in Weibernetz.



Women with disabilities know what is important to them. They are experts on their own issues.

Weibernetz works with many groups. For example: the German Disability Council. This is a group for all people with disabilities in Germany. And the National Council of German Women's Organizations. This is a group for all women-groups in Germany. Weibernetz tells these groups: This is what women and girls with disabilities need. Women and girls with disabilities must have the same rights.



There are laws for people with disabilities. But sometimes, women with disabilities need different things from men with disabilities. And there are laws for women. But sometimes, women with disabilities need different things from women without disabilities. Weibernetz makes sure that disabled women are not left out.



We from Weibernetz also talk a lot to politicians. And we speak at conferences. And give presentations and write documents on topics to do with women with disabilities.

We produce a magazine. It is called WeiberZEIT. In WeiberZEIT, you will find a lot of important information for women with disabilities.



We organise conferences for women with disabilities. Women with disabilities can meet at these events. They get information. They can work together with other women. They can learn from each other. Together they can get stronger.

Weibernetz gets some money from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

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