

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

General comment number 3 Women and girls with disabilities

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Women and girls with disabilities**

Note: Please note this is not a United Nations
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1. About us

We are the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or the Committee for short. We are part of the United Nations. The United Nations is an organization of 193 countries that works to make the world a better and safer place.

The Committee is a group of experts who check that countries are following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (from now on called the Convention).

The Convention is an agreement that many countries have made about the rights of people with disabilities. It aims to make sure that people with disabilities everywhere are treated fairly, have the same chances in life as people without disabilities and are fully included in society.

Countries that have signed up to the Convention must now follow what it says. In this document, these countries are called States parties.

2. About this paper

This document is about women and girls with disabilities. Life can be very hard for women and girls with disabilities and they are often treated badly.

The Convention contains a section on the rights of women and girls with disabilities called article 6. The Committee made this document to help States parties understand their duties under article 6 and other parts of the Convention.

3. What is the situation for women and girls with disabilities?

Women and girls with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. But they are often denied them.

For example, it can be harder for women and girls with disabilities to get a good education, earn money and have a say in decisions about their communities and countries.

People often deny women and girls with disabilities the right to make important choices, such as where to live and whether to have relationships or children. And women and girls with disabilities often face violence and abuse.

Many laws, rules and plans in the world ignore the needs of women and girls with disabilities. This has made life harder for women and girls with disabilities. But the situation is slowly changing. For example, other United Nations Conventions and plans now talk about women and girls with disabilities and how to improve their lives.

4. What does article 6 of the Convention say?

States parties must follow article 6 of the Convention to make sure that women and girls with disabilities enjoy all their rights.

Article 6 (1)

The first part of article 6 says that States parties must stop discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. Discrimination is when some people are treated in a worse way than other people because of who they are or where they come from.

Women and girls with disabilities can experience discrimination for many reasons. For example, because they are a woman or girl, because they have a disability or because of their age, religion or where they are from. States parties must address all forms of discrimination that women and girls with disabilities face.

The law must protect women and girls with disabilities from all discrimination. For example, the law must require organizations and companies to make reasonable accommodations where they can. Reasonable accommodations are changes that an individual with disabilities needs to do everyday activities, such as work, use services and go to school.

There are many examples of reasonable accommodations. For example, a woman with disabilities at work may need an employer to provide:

- information in a format she finds easy to understand
- a room that is easy for her to feed and change children in
- a ramp to enter the workplace if she uses a wheelchair

Different kinds of discrimination

Women and girls with disabilities face discrimination in their homes, families and communities. And different people may discriminate against them, such as family members, teachers, the police, courts and health staff.

Article 6 describes the different kinds of discrimination that women and girls with disabilities face:

1. People may treat women and girls with disabilities in a worse way than other people in the same situation. For example, the police may dismiss what women with disabilities say when they report violence. This denies women with disabilities their right to get help from the justice system (police, courts and prisons).

2. Laws, rules and services may appear to work for everyone, but may discriminate against women with disabilities. For example, a women's health service may have the wrong equipment for women with disabilities. This stops women with disabilities using the service.

3. Women without disabilities can face discrimination because of someone they are related to with a disability. For example, an employer may refuse to give the mother of a child with a disability a job. The employer may think that the mother will often miss work because of her child's disability.

4. Organizations and companies may refuse to make the reasonable accommodations that women and girls with disabilities need. It is discrimination if the organization or company can easily make the reasonable accommodations but chooses not to.

5. People often have wrong ideas and beliefs about women and girls, or about women and girls with disabilities. This causes people, communities and organizations to treat women and girls with disabilities badly. For example, teachers may believe that girls with disabilities are less intelligent than other children. And some communities believe that men can cure HIV/AIDS by having sex with women with disabilities.

Article 6 (2)

States parties have a duty to stop discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. But the second part of article 6 says that States parties must go even further.

States parties must do everything they can to improve the lives of women and girls with disabilities. This involves giving women and girls with disabilities the power and confidence to:

- enjoy all their rights
- take part in all aspects of society, including work, education, culture, sports and politics
- have a say in what happens in their communities and countries
- make their own choices
- do well in life

States parties must change anything in society that is unfair to women and girls with disabilities or causes them harm. For example, States parties must change unfair laws and rules, including laws that stop women with disabilities choosing where to live or how many children to have. States parties must follow the Convention at all times.

Women and girls with disabilities are often left out of decisions that affect their lives. States parties must make sure that

women and girls with disabilities can speak up and have their say without any problems. States parties must support women and girls with disabilities to form organizations to have their say. And they must help women and girls with disabilities to be leaders in their communities and countries.

Other actions that States parties must take:

States parties must also make sure that:

- everyone treats women and girls with disabilities fairly. This includes family and community members, organizations and companies
- the police and courts take action against people or organizations that deny women and girls with disabilities their rights. Training for police, judges and other court staff can help them know how to support the rights of women and girls with disabilities

States parties must also:

- include the rights of women and girls with disabilities in all plans for the country about women, children and disability. And in other plans about health, violence, education, work and taking part in politics
- take action to meet the particular needs of women and girls with disabilities. For example, women and girls with disabilities may need a particular support service to help them live at home or find a job

5. How article 6 fits with the rest of the Convention

Article 6 is about the rights of women and girls with disabilities. But other parts of the Convention are also relevant to women and girls with disabilities. States parties must think about how article 6 works alongside other parts of the Convention.

Articles in the Convention that are particularly relevant to women and girls with disabilities

The right of people with disabilities to be free from violence, abuse and people forcing them to do things they don't want to do (article 16)

Women and girls with disabilities experience more violence and abuse than women and girls without disabilities and boys with disabilities. This can stop women and girls with disabilities having the same chances in life as other people. For example, young girls with disabilities who are forced to get married often have to leave education.

Many people have wrong ideas and beliefs about women and girls with disabilities. This leads to more violence and abuse against women and girls with disabilities. For example, family members may keep women with disabilities away from the community or be violent to them because they believe that women with disabilities are dangerous or less important than men.

States parties must work to stop all violence and abuse against women and girls with disabilities. This includes rape and female genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation is when a woman or girl's private parts are cut, injured or changed. There is no medical reason for this

Women and girls with disabilities also face other violence and abuse. For example, people sometimes:

- force women and girls with disabilities to work for free or have sex with people for money
- leave women and girls with disabilities without the personal care, medicine or equipment they need, such as wheelchairs and ramps
- force women and girls with disabilities to have medical tests or operations, without asking them first. For example, some women with disabilities are forced to have an abortion. This is a medical procedure to end a woman's pregnancy

The right of people with disabilities to get married and have relationships, sex, a family and children (articles 23 and 25)

People often stop women with disabilities from having children or keeping the children they have.

People may think that:

- it is wrong for women with disabilities to have sex or children
- women with disabilities will give birth to children with disabilities

Women with disabilities also face problems when they use health services related to sex, relationships and children. For example, health workers may refuse to give women with disabilities the information they need about safe sex, children and relationships. This can put women with disabilities at risk of sexual violence because they don't know their rights or how to keep safe.

Discrimination against women with disabilities in other articles of the Convention

Work that States parties must do to change wrong ideas and beliefs about people with disabilities (article 8)

States parties have a duty to change wrong ideas and beliefs about all people with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities. For example, people often believe that women and girls with disabilities:

- are weak and need to be looked after
- are not as important as other people

Wrong ideas and beliefs about women and girls with disabilities are harmful and stop women and girls with disabilities doing well in life.

Work that States parties must do to make buildings, transport, information, communication systems and services easy for people with disabilities to use (article 9)

People often ignore the needs of women and girls with disabilities when they design transport, information and communication systems, buildings and services. This includes services that keep women safe from violence and abuse.

The right of people with disabilities in emergency situations such as wars, floods and famine (hunger) (article 11)

Women with disabilities are more at risk of violence and abuse when war, floods or other emergencies happen. For example, women with disabilities are often left alone in an emergency situation. This can put them in danger of being attacked or raped.

It is also harder for women with disabilities to get help from services or the police in emergencies. For example, health services are not available to refugees, including refugee with

disabilities. Refugees are people who are forced to leave their countries because of problems like war or violence.

In emergency situations, it is often harder for women with disabilities to:

- get information about the emergency, how to keep safe and available support
- get to places that provide food and water
- use showers and wash places in refugee camps
- communicate with support staff
- go to school

The right of people with disabilities to make their own choices (article 12)

People often stop women with disabilities from making choices about important issues, such as:

- where to live and who to live with
- money and property
- family life and relationships

States parties often have laws that allow other people to make decisions for women with disabilities.

The right of people with disabilities to get help from the justice system. The justice system is the police, courts and prisons (article 13)

Women with disabilities face many problems when they are in contact with the police, courts and prisons.

For example, the police may make it hard for women with disabilities to report a crime. And police and judges may not believe what women with disabilities say.

This can stop women with disabilities reporting violence and

crime in the first place.

Work that States parties must to do to stop people with disabilities being treated in a bad or cruel way (articles 14,15 and 17)

Some women with disabilities are obliged to live in institutions. Institutions include hospitals for people with mental health conditions, homes for people with disabilities and prisons.

Life in institutions is often worse for women with disabilities, especially for women with intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions. For example, people in institutions sometimes:

- lock women with disabilities away from other people
- hurt women with disabilities or rape them
- force women with disabilities to take medicine or have medical treatment

Institutions are often far away from the rest of the community. This makes it hard for women with disabilities to get help from the police or support services if someone hurts them.

The right of people with disabilities to live in the community with everyone else (article 19)

Family or community members often decide where women with disabilities will live. This means women with disabilities often have to live with their families or in institutions instead of in the community.

The right of people with disabilities to education (article 24)

It is often hard for girls with disabilities to get an education. For example, people may think it is more important for boys to go to school than girls. And toilets and wash places in schools may be hard for girls with disabilities to use. This causes many girls

with disabilities to do badly at school or leave school altogether.

The right of people with disabilities to health and rehabilitation (article 25 and 26)

Many health services fail to meet the needs of women and girls with disabilities. For example, counselling services for women who experience violence may only be suitable for women without disabilities.

The right of people with disabilities to work (article 27)

People often discriminate against women with disabilities in the workplace.

For example, women with disabilities often:

- experience sexual violence at work
- get paid less than men or women without disabilities
- find it hard to get help from the justice system if someone discriminates against them because of their disability

The right of people with disabilities to have enough money to live on (article 28)

Many women with disabilities are poor. Poverty stops women with disabilities from having the same chances in life as other people.

Older women with disabilities often find it harder than other women with disabilities to get:

- suitable housing
- government money to help them with their living costs

The right of people with disabilities to take part in politics and public life (article 29)

People often ignore what women and girls with disabilities have to say. And women and girls with disabilities rarely get the

chance to join together and set up their own organizations to have a say.

6. What State parties must do

States parties must take the following action in their own countries:

1. Change laws, rules and systems that are unfair to women and girls with disabilities. States parties should work with women and girls with disabilities to change unfair laws, rules systems and plans. They should start work on this straight away.
2. Make sure the rights of women and girls with disabilities are included in all plans, especially plans about women and disability.
3. Make sure women and girls with disabilities have a say in decisions, plans and rules that affect them. And make sure women and girls with disabilities help check how the plans and rules are working.
4. Make sure women with disabilities can make their own choices, with support if they need it.
5. Get important information about what life is like for women and girls with disabilities and what needs to change. Work with organizations of women and girls with disabilities to get this information. The information will help States parties make laws, rules and plans that are right for women and girls with disabilities.
6. Make sure countries include the needs of women and girls with disabilities in work they do together. And make sure that women and girls with disabilities can help with

projects and plans that countries work on together.

7. Make sure all services are easy for women and girls with disabilities to use. This means public and private services. Staff who work in services should get training to support women and girls with disabilities.

7. Word bank

Word	What it means
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	A group of experts from all over the world who make sure those countries follow the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
United Nations	An organization of 193 countries that works to make the world better and safer for everyone.
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	An agreement that lots of countries have made about the rights of people with disabilities. Countries that agree to follow the Convention now have to do what it says.
States parties	Countries that have agreed to follow the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
Abuse	<p>When people treat other people very badly. There are many types of abuse. For example, someone may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hits or hurt someone • say nasty things to them • force them to have sex or take part in sexual activity • steal their money

<p>Discrimination</p>	<p>When some people are treated in a worse way than other people in the same situation because of who they are and where they come from.</p> <p>For example, a women’s health service may use equipment that is unsuitable for women with disabilities. This means only women without disabilities can use the service.</p>
<p>Reasonable accommodations</p>	<p>Changes that organizations and companies must make where they can so that people with disabilities can take part in everyday activities.</p>
<p>The justice system</p>	<p>Police, courts and prisons.</p>
<p>Female Genital Mutilation</p>	<p>When a woman or girl’s private parts are cut, injured or changed. There is no medical reason for this.</p>
<p>Sexual violence</p>	<p>When people force other people to have sex with them, touch their private parts or take part in other sexual activity.</p>
<p>Institutions</p>	<p>Institutions include hospitals for people with mental health conditions, homes for people with disabilities and prisons.</p>