



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 December 2023

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-eighth session

11–22 March 2024

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Sightsavers is an international development organisation which works with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in more than thirty low and middle-income countries. Our programmes also include work to ensure quality inclusive education, strengthen health systems and eliminate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Sightsavers is accredited to ECOSOC under our legal name of Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. Through this submission we would like to make the following observations reflective of the priority and review themes for CSW68 and would be grateful if these could be considered as part of the Commission's deliberations.

Disability and Poverty

Globally, an estimated 18 per cent of women have a disability (WHO, 2022). However, women and girls with disabilities are often left out of policies and programmes which aim to eradicate poverty.

There is a close connection between gender, disability, and poverty. Women with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty (UNDESA, 2018) as they face significant barriers to accessing adequate housing, health, education, training, employment, and other societal decision-making structures (World Bank, 2022) This includes multiple attitudinal and environmental barriers, such as stigma and negative attitudes, discriminatory laws and policies, the unavailability of assistive devices and inaccessible buildings and spaces.

Women and girls with disabilities are two times less likely to be employed compared to men without disabilities (UNDESA, 2018), more likely to be out of school (UNICEF, 2021) and have unmet health needs (WHO, 2022). Women with disabilities face double disadvantage in the labour market on account of both their gender and disability and they are more likely to not be in employment, education, or training (ILO, 2022). As a result, poverty is disproportionately higher among women and girls with disabilities, with gender and disability being multidimensional poverty determinants (UN Women, 2017).

The social and economic isolation women and girls with disabilities experience also contributes to the increased likelihood of experiencing violence. Girls and young women with disabilities experience up to 10 times more violence than those without disabilities (World Bank, 2011). In particular, girls with sensory or intellectual disabilities are at increased risk of experiencing violence (Sightsavers et al, 2014). Yet gender-based violence laws, policies and programmes are not always disability inclusive, and it is difficult to find accurate and comprehensive data disaggregated by both gender and disability.

Therefore, it is essential that women and girls with disabilities are meaningfully included in considerations of the Commission on the Status of Women 68 priority theme of 'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) obliges States Parties to pay particular attention to women and girls with disabilities in access and poverty reduction programmes (Article 28, paragraph 2(b)). Laws, policies, and programmes should address the intersectional and structural inequalities that affect women and girls with disabilities, including economic empowerment, universal health coverage and girls' education. Women and girls with disabilities should be supported as agents of change in shaping the decisions that affect them and approaches should be gender transformative and combat negative stereotypes.

In line with the Political Declaration (Paragraph 38) that has been newly adopted at the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, States should ‘commit to targeted and accelerated action to remove all legal, social, and economic barriers to achieving gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls including those with disabilities, their full, equal, and effective participation in all decision-making processes, and the realization and enjoyment of their human rights’.

More granular and disaggregated data should also be collected and used to understand the needs and experiences of women and girls with disabilities. This should be used to ensure that resources are being allocated to maximise outcomes for the poorest. Currently, too many people are missing in data and too little data is routinely disaggregated. While there are many recognised methodologies that should be used to improve data disaggregation, some of the largest barriers are political.

Summit for the Future

The upcoming Summit for the Future offers a vital opportunity to reform multilateralism and UN institutions to address today’s political and economic realities. As gender is a cross-cutting theme of the Secretary General’s Common Agenda, it is essential that this takes an intersectional approach and includes women and girls with disabilities. This is vital to achieve the Leave No One Behind promise of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also essential that, as the United Nations reviews its systems ability to deliver on gender equality across its mandates and programmes, that disability is mainstreamed into these discussions. In order to lead to a strong Pact for the Future, the Agreed Conclusions should build on the following commitments made in the SDG Summit Political Declaration:

‘ensuring that persons with disabilities actively participate in and equally benefit from sustainable development efforts ...’ (Paragraph 14);

‘identifying those who are being left behind and reach those who are the furthest behind first. People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities ...’ (Paragraph 37);

‘addressing barriers to girls’ education, gender and disability gaps and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in and through education and safe, healthy and stimulating learning environments that enable all learners to achieve their full potential and physical, mental and emotional well-being.’ (Paragraph 38, d);

‘taking action to strengthen international, national and local data systems efforts to collect high quality, timely, relevant, disaggregated and reliable data on SDG progress and to intensify efforts to strengthen data and statistical capacities in developing countries... [and] continue to strengthen our efforts to collect, analyse and disseminate relevant, reliable and disaggregated data for better monitoring and policymaking to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda’ (Paragraph 38, r).

United Nations Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy (UNDIS)

UNDIS necessitates active involvement of women and children with disabilities and their representative organisations in shaping normative frameworks and policies. However, there is limited awareness of UNDIS and insufficient human resources for its implementation. As a result, the meaningful engagement of women with disabilities remains under institutionalised within the UN. Therefore, the Agreed Conclusions should highlight the importance of sustainable financing for UNDIS in order to systematically engage women and girls with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Financing

Investment in the gender movement rarely reaches women and girls with disabilities and their requirements are often not considered by development programmes. States should assess the overall portfolio of government financing and ensure a sufficient percentage goes to women and girls with disabilities across sectors. Specific targets should be set for the percentage of programmes marked as disability inclusive against the OECD DAC disability inclusion marker in specific sectors. It is also important to assess the extent to which government financing is both gender equitable and disability inclusive. Additionally, States should make further efforts to strengthen the use of disaggregated data to inform programmatic and funding decisions.

In line with the SDG Summit Political Declaration, there is also a need to reform the global financial architecture, with concrete proposals that include women and girls with disabilities, and their representative organisations, in time for next year's Summit for the Future and the next Financing for Development Conference in 2025.

Funding organisations of women with disabilities

Despite new funding commitments made, women's rights organisations receive only 0.13 per cent of the total ODA and 0.4 per cent of all gender-related aid (AWID, 2021). In particular, organisations of women with disabilities are funded even less, although there is no specific data on this. At the same time, there is a growing number of organisations led by women with disabilities, ready to expand and deepen their work with further investment (Women Enabled International, 2016). Therefore, there is an urgent need to allocate more funding to organisations of women with disabilities in order to enable them to better advocate with national governments and international mechanisms. CSW68 presents a critical opportunity to explore how States Parties can bridge the women's rights and disability rights fields and to strengthen partnerships between women with disabilities and mainstream rights organisations.
