**Joint statement by** [**UN-Women**](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/10/statement-joint-un-women-cedaw-and-crpd)**, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**ENDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES**

Women and girls with disabilities rightly demand enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We recognise and acknowledge that work remains to be done to ensure that the links between gender and disability feature more routinely in all our work. Common approaches to disability rights, women’s rights and gender equality have yet to place centrally the lives of women and girls with disabilities. Their call - “Nothing about us without us” - must be heeded if our work is to make a relevant contribution to undoing structural discrimination and realising rights. *Equality for all depends on it.*

**International Standards**

Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women there is recognition that discrimination against women, including gender-based violence, is shaped by intersecting dimensions of inequality, including disability.[[1]](#footnote-2) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises multiple forms of discrimination faced by women with disabilities, which they do not experience as “a homogenous group but, rather, as individuals with multidimensional layers of identities”. [[2]](#footnote-3) The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development also launches a call to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres”. Effective change depends upon meaningful consultation and involvement of women with disabilities in public decision-making processes including through working with organisations of women with disabilities.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**Statement of Intent**

The undersigned commit to improving our collective efforts towards ending sexual harassment to which women and girls are subjected and deepening the reality of ‘leaving no one behind’, as is obliged in Agenda 2030. We will continue working together to strengthen connections across our areas of expertise in order that women and girls with disabilities are at the center of the work for the rights of persons with disabilities and to end discrimination against women. This will include deepening intersectional approaches to end sexual harassment and our understanding of the lived experiences of victim-survivors.

We recognize that disability and gender intersect to shape sexual harassment, which might not fit common understandings of this form of gender-based violence. We also recognize that disability and gender intersect to exacerbate experiences of, create or complicate barriers to ending and achieving justice for, sexual harassment. We acknowledge the foundational importance of taking an intersectional approach in building effective work towards elimination of sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities. Creating respectful spaces that center the voices of victim-survivors, in particular those who require more intensive support, means recognizing them as experts, including on their experiences and expectations.

We therefore commit to ensuring our work serves as a platform to amplify the voices of women and girls with disabilities by:

1. Recognizing sexual harassment as a human rights violation of gender equality principles that intersects with other dimensions of inequality, such as disability. It involves unwelcome sexual conduct, from looks to words, to touching, to interfering with assistive devices, to physical contact, to sexual assault and rape.
2. Treating the experiential knowledge of women and girls with disabilities as core to shaping initiatives intended to prevent, combat, sanction and eliminate sexual harassment, and to create the cultural change necessary to end it. This will include accessible communications, messaging and training that seek elimination and are respectful of the CEDAW and CRPD Conventions and designed around the principles elaborated in this statement.
3. Ensuring the centrality of both gender and disability inequalities in our efforts to end gender-based violence against women, including sexual harassment, in line with CEDAW General Recommendation No.35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No.19.
4. Contesting the range of factors that inhibit the realization of the rights of women and girls with disabilities to be free from sexual harassment and other forms of violence, and that deny the justice and rights protection to which they are entitled. This work will include ending stereotypes that undermine credibility on matters of sexual harassment and violence, addressing structural and intersectional discrimination and ensuring autonomous and supported decision-making.
5. Working to amend all laws that prevent women and girls with disabilities from reporting gender-based violence or discourage them from doing so, such as guardianship laws which deprive women of their legal capacity or limit their ability to testify in court and in official procedures involving them, and the practice of so-called preventive custody which discourages women from reporting violence, promoting suitable and accessible protection mechanisms to avoid re-victimization, including eliminating communication barriers and other obstacles that prevent victim survivors from initiating legal proceedings.
6. Working in partnership with civil society organizations and, in particular, with organizations of women with disabilities,[[4]](#footnote-5) to prevent all instances of sexual violence, including sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities who still reside or spend a great part of the day in institutions, such as residential facilities, , special schools, mental health centres, day care centres and occupational employment centres. In order to prevent the occurrence of all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse,[[5]](#footnote-6) including sexual harassment States parties shall ensure that all facilities and programmes designed to serve persons with disabilities are effectively monitored by independent authorities and that women and girls with disabilities still in institutions are protected against sexual violence and have access to justice, redress and reparations.
7. Working to promote the adoption of measures by national authorities to fulfill the rights of women and girls with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community and to end institutionalization. Ensuring the active involvement of women and girls with disabilities in all initiatives to transform support, rehabilitation and recovery services in their communities within the design and implementation of deinstitutionalization strategies. Jointly promoting the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of women and girls with disabilities who are victims of sexual violence, including sexual harassment or any other forms of exploitation, violence or abuse, such as through the provision of protection services, in inclusive settings that take their requirements into consideration.
8. Working together to promote the adoption of effective legislation and policies to ensure that instances of sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities are identified, investigated and prosecuted.

*Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,*

*Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,*

*UN-Women*

1. See for example CEDAW, General Recommendation (GR) No. 18 (1991), GR No. 28 (2010), GR No. 33, (2015), and GR No. 35 (2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 3 (2016), 25 November 2016, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/3, para 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 7 (2018), 9 November 2018, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/7, paras 11 and 12(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See for example CRPD/C/GC/7, para. 12 (e); CRPD/C/GC/3, para. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. CRPD art. 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)