

# International Women's Day

Today is International Women's Day.

Women and girls with disabilities are at a special disadvantage: they face discrimination due to their gender and due to their disability. This "double discrimination" translates to a higher probability of being victim to abuse and sexual violence, less access to health and reproductive services, and higher rate of unemployment, among many others.

This is why today we highlight our work to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities. You will read about:

- Our new position paper on "Sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls with disabilities";
- The EDF Women's Committee;
- The first expert with disabilities in the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

We feature the testimonial of Pirkko Mahlamäki, member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum and of the European Women's Lobby.

We are also announcing our new monthly newsletter: EDF Women's Voice!

As usual in Disability Voice, you will also find our latest news and events.

Enjoy!

- [Announcing our new newsletter: "EDF Women's Voice"](#)
- [It is time to ensure the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women with disabilities!](#)

- [What is the EDF Women's Committee?](#)
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## **Announcing our new newsletter: "EDF Women's Voice"**



We are launching a monthly newsletter with updates on our work on the rights of women with disabilities.

[Sign up here for the EDF Women's Voice newsletter.](#)

First issue will be out next week.

# It is time to ensure the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women with disabilities!

Women and girls with disabilities have always been considered by society either as non-sexual or too sexual. They have been considered unfit to live with a partner and be a mother. Their sexual and reproductive health has been neglected.

This is not only wrong, it also leaves women and girls with disabilities more vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, unwanted pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases.

This is why EDF is launching today the position paper "**Sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls with disabilities**". The paper highlights:

- Women's decisions on their own bodies are personal and private. No one should interfere on the autonomous choices of women with disabilities.
- States need to ensure that women with disabilities are well informed about their rights. All decisions should be taken with their fully informed and prior consent.
- The above applies also to abortion. States should decriminalise abortion in all circumstances and legalise it in a manner that fully respects the autonomy of women with disabilities.
- States need to assure the end all forms of discrimination and abuse. This includes forced sterilisation, forced abortion, forced contraception, female genital mutilation and incest.

- States need to ensure that all women with disabilities have full access to justice.
- States need to assure that all women with disabilities have access to proper sexual and reproductive healthcare and education.

[Position paper in English in PDF](#) | [Position paper in English in Word](#)  
[Position Paper in Spanish in PDF](#) | [Position Paper in Spanish in Word](#)  
[Position paper in French in PDF](#) | [Position paper in French in Word](#)  
[Position paper in Italian in PDF](#) | [Position paper in French in Word](#)

## What is the EDF Women's Committee?

The Women's Committee is a group of 10 experts that assures that the needs, rights and perspectives of women with disabilities are represented in all our work. It also works on including the rights of women with disabilities in the wider women rights' movement.

Some examples of the Committee's work include:

- The position paper announced above.
- The report on [ending forced sterilisation against women and girls with disabilities](#)
- A campaign that led to the election of Pirkko Mahlamäki to the Executive Committee of the European Women's Lobby.
- Active support to the campaign to elect Ana Peláez Narváez as an expert of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The 10 members are:

- Ana Pelaez - Chair
- Jenny Nilson
- Claire Desaint
- Luminita Calderas
- Monique Post
- Luisella Bosisio Fazzi
- Foteini Zafeirpoulou
- Sanja Tarczay
- Guadalupe Morales Cano
- Pirkko Mahlamäki
- Zara Todd

To know more about their work, sign up to the EDF Women's Voice newsletter!

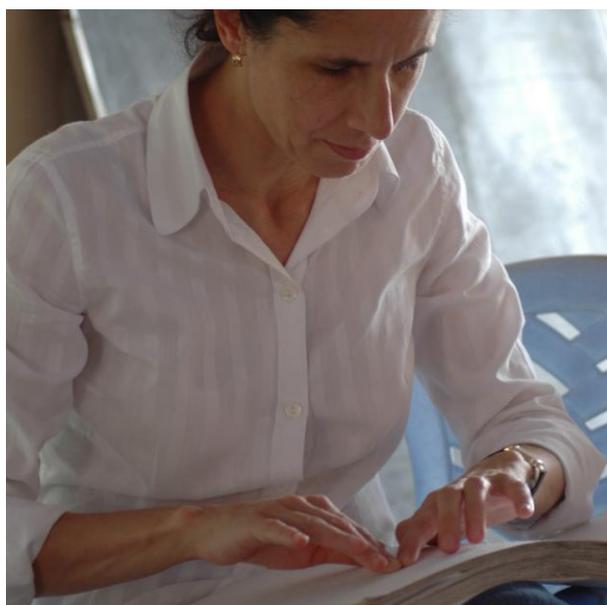


**Ana Peláez Narváez: UN Committee on**

# the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is a group of 23 experts on women's issues from around the world. They are tasked with analysing the progress of countries (State Parties) in [eliminating discrimination against woman](#).

Our Vice-President, Ana Peláez Narváez was elected last May to be an expert in this Committee. She is the first expert with disabilities to be elected to this Committee in its 37 years!



Ana's term started in January 2019 and the first session of the Committee took place last week.

You can read more about Ana's campaign [#DisabilityForCEDAW](#) here

You can learn more about the Committee here

Finally, our human rights officer, Marine Uldry, [live tweeted the review of the United Kingdom](#) by the Committee.

**“We can only make a difference if we are involved”.**

Testimonial of Pirkko Mahlamäki, Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum and of the European Women's Lobby



I have a very concrete example of discrimination of women with disabilities: screening for breast cancer. Women with disabilities have an increased risk of not

surviving breast cancer because they often do not have access to regular screenings – therefore, the cancer is diagnosed at a later stage. Early detection improves chances of surviving cancer. This is the reason why screenings and other preventive measures need to be accessible for all.

I was telling this to my doctor and he warned me that I, too, have not had regular check-ups or screening. I never had realised that! I think, subconsciously, I was put off by it because I thought it would be inaccessible for me. This is an example of how ingrained discrimination is, even in me.

Employment is also another example: I was talking with a friend about her job interview and she told me that she was almost happy when the interviewer asked her if she was planning to have children.

Asking this question during recruitment interview is illegal in Finland – it is a form of pregnancy discrimination – but she was happy because **the question meant that the employer saw her as a woman and not only a person with disabilities**. It felt very conflicting, being happy about being discriminated in a way that is far too familiar to women.

## **Finland**

In Finland, one of the most burning issues for women with disabilities is poverty. After years of austerity, the cost of living is increasing but social benefits such as unemployment support, are being reduced. This affects especially women with disabilities, since they are more likely to be unemployed than men.

Other big issue is care. The care services in Finland are increasingly being privatized, and the cost is the main deciding factor. This results in much less services with worse quality. It is a big problem for women with disabilities – worse services increase the risk of negligence and abuse.



## **Women's movement**

I am in the Executive Committee of the European Women's Lobby (an organisation for women's rights), where I work to promote diversity and inclusion. It's very important that the women's movement include minorities, and we need to assure that the feminist discussion spaces are accessible, and that information is easier to understand. We are working on a position paper about this issue to inform European feminist movements.

I am also assuring that the EDF Women's Committee is heard. Our Women Committee does a very good work and really brings a lot to the European's Women Lobby. A lot of what I say and do at the European Women's Lobby meetings is informed and inspired by our Women's Committee.

We still need to make advances though: we must remind the women's movements that we are active citizens, that we are rights holders. That we are not just "care-receivers", we are even unrecognized care givers especially in older households! That's why I think national movements should follow our example and cooperate more. Both movements need to make the meetings more accessible and easier to understand – **because we can only make a difference if we are involved.**

# Save-the-date

- **10 - 15 March, Tirana (Albania):** European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities [‘Building an Inclusive School for all’ training course](#)
- **18 March, Brussels (Belgium):** Disability Intergroup event [EU Disability Parking Card](#)
- **20 March, Brussels (Belgium):** Joint Intergroup event - Combatting racism/discrimination: Evaluating 2014-2019 and recommendations for 2019-2024
- **21- 22 March, Brussels (Belgium):** European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities [Ageing and Disability Conference](#)
- **23 - 24 March, Bucharest (Romania):** European Disability Forum Board meeting, including Your Rights in the EU workshop for Romanian participants and European Conference on Employment of Youth with Disabilities
- **25 March, Brussels (Belgium):** European Network of Independent Living: ["The Present and the Future of Personal Assistance in Europe"](#)
- **25 - 26 March, Trier (Germany):** Academy of European Law: Seminar for legal practitioners - [Employment and Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- **25 - 30 March, Tallin (Estonia):** [European Guide Dog Federation Conference](#)

## April

- **11-12 April, Brussels (Belgium):** [Connecting with Microsoft EU Accessibility Summit](#)

## May

- **6 - 7 May, Trier (Germany):** Seminar for policy practitioners on EU Disability Law and the UNCRPD
- **13 May, Brussels (Belgium):** Work Forum on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the EU and its Member States
- **14 May, Brussels (Belgium):** European Union High Level Group on Disability
- **16 - 17 May, Bucharest (Romania):** European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities: [‘Investing in Social Services, Investing in People’](#)
- **23 - 25 May, Barcelona (Spain):** [European Association for Mental Health in Intellectual Disability: 12th International Congress](#)

## June

- **1 - 2 June, Brussels (Belgium):** EDF Annual General Assembly
- **5 - 7 June, Vilnius (Lithuania):** Inclusion Europe event on [Europe in Action- making decisions, living independently.](#)
- **5 - 7 June, Trier (Germany):** Academy of European Law [seminar for members of the judiciary - Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- **11 - 13 June, New York (USA):** The 12th Session of the conference of States Parties to the CRPD
- **25 June, Brussels (Belgium):** Workshop by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and Social Platform on the EU’s future research and innovation policy

## September

- **13 - 15 September, Nice (France):** [Autism-Europe’s 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress 2019](#)
- **16 - 17 September, Trier (Germany):** Seminar for members of the judiciary- [Applying EU Anti-Discrimination Law](#)
- **18 - 20 September, Graz (Austria):** Inclusion Europe event on [Hear our Voices](#)

## October

- **1 - 3 October, Brussels (Belgium):** 9th European Network on Independent Living [Freedom Drive](#)
- **3 - 4 October, Helsinki (Finland):** European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities - Conference on [‘Developing a Quality Workforce in Disability Services: emerging needs and opportunities’](#)
- **24 - 25 October, Trier (Germany):** Seminar for legal practitioners - [Applying EU Anti-Discrimination Law](#)

## November

- **8 - 10 November, Helsinki (Finland):** EDF Board meeting
- **13 - 15 November, Sofia (Bulgaria):** Seminar for members of the judiciary - [Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- **28 - 29 November, Brussels (Belgium):** The European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD)

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## News



### [Why 500,000 disabled people won't get to vote in May](#)

Between 23 and 26 May, hundreds of millions of Europeans will [head to the polls](#) to elect the next

members of the European Parliament.

Yet, around 500,000 persons with disabilities will not be able to join them.

Read the [opinion article of the Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency](#).



## [Council of Europe: Romania needs to protect the rights of persons with disabilities](#)

Commissioner Mijatović is particularly concerned about the underfunding of the social care system for adults and children with disabilities.

The Commissioner also calls on the authorities to repeal the current legislation which allows the involuntary placement of persons with disabilities in closed institutions.

Read the [report of the Commissioner's visit to Romania](#).



## [Ms Catherine Trautmann donates European Railway Award to the European Disability Forum](#)

The European Railway Award 2019 was presented to Catherine Trautmann for her life-long dedication and support to advancing rail transport locally and on European scale.

The ex-Minister and ex-MEP donated the prize money of the award to us! We will use it to create a database documenting discrimination in transports.

Read more about [Ms Trautmann and the Award](#).



### [Candidates to the European Parliament Elections: Commit to Disability Rights!](#)

The European Disability Forum launched the pledge "EU for Disability Rights".

This document is aimed at candidates in the European Parliament elections. It asks them to commit to advance the rights of over 80 million EU citizens with disabilities by, among others, joining the Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament.

[Ask your candidate to sign the pledge.](#)



### [Voter of Europe - Thibault Appelmans - Belgium](#)

"I am involved in a political party and am also part of the Executive Committee of Inclusion Belgium – an association for persons with intellectual disabilities – so, of course I wanted to vote in Belgium's local elections. But my letter never arrived."

Read Thibault Appelmans testimonial on [how he didn't get to vote](#).