

Are women with disabilities second class citizens?

Written by Gunta Anca on 23 August 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

Women and girls with disabilities are still living on the margins of society, argues Gunta Anca



Photo credit: Andrew Matthews/PA

There are an estimated 40 million EU citizens facing numerous barriers in the enjoyment of their rights, suffer social exclusion, discrimination and violence.

Despite representing 16 per cent of the EU's female population, women and girls with disabilities are still living on the margins of society. Such actions must stop and the European Institutions must speak out collectively to prevent this ongoing abuse.

Women with disabilities need special support, yet there is no proper focus on them at EU level, neither in the strategy on women nor in the strategy on persons with disabilities. It's as if they have disappeared, like they are of lesser value than the rest of the population.

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It has been heart-warming therefore to see the European Parliament's FEMM Committee has focussed on this subject and asked the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the body representing European organised civil society to do the same.

The EESC adopted its opinion on the matter in July, calling on EU Institutions and Member States to step up their efforts to protect women and girls with disabilities, who continue to face multiple and intersectional discrimination on the grounds of both their gender and disability, often resulting in their social exclusion.

The situation of women and girls with disabilities is not only worse than that of females without disabilities, but it is also worse than that of their male peers.

They are up to five times more likely to be victims of violence, domestic as well as institutional. Gender and disability stereotypes can also be found in media and in educational systems across the EU, thus constituting to an obstacle to an inclusive education.

Only 18.8 per cent of women with disabilities are employed, against 28.1 per cent of men. Those employed, often face underpayment while those that are unemployed are exposed to poverty and social exclusion.

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Disability should be mainstreamed in EU gender policy and gender in the EU disability strategy, as well as in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. For this, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and its Article 6 which concerns women with disabilities must be implemented fully.

EU funds should be used to support Member States to introduce measures that guarantee the full participation of women with disabilities in public and political life, employment and education and empower them to have full control of their sexual and reproductive rights.

Access to healthcare must be improved for these females: both disability-specific as well as mainstream healthcare services. Healthcare facilities and equipment – such as mammogram machines and gynaecological examination beds – are often physically inaccessible to them, meaning that they find themselves excluded from preventive health measures, like breast screenings.

The EESC called for an end to forced sterilisation and for all women to be granted the right to make their own decisions about retaining their fertility or starting a family and stressed the importance for the EU and Member States to implement the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating gender based violence.

The EU and its Member States should launch an awareness-raising campaign about disability-related legislation, which should make women and girls with disabilities more visible and help combat prejudice against them.

It is hoped that women with disabilities will put themselves forward in the upcoming European elections in May 2019.

About the author

Gunta Anca is European Economic and Social Committee, Rapporteur Women with Disabilities

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