

**The Inclusive Generation
Equality Collective**

**FEMINIST
ACCESSIBILITY
PROTOCOL**

DECEMBER 2022

FEMINIST ACCESSIBILITY PROTOCOL | INDEX

Introduction and Background	2
Purpose of the Feminist Accessibility Protocol	3
OUR COLLECTIVE PLEDGE	4
Annex: Good Practices, Focus Group Findings, and Human Rights Standards on Accessibility, Including in Feminist Spaces	6
1 Good Practices on Ensuring Accessibility in Meetings and Events	7
2 Barriers to Accessibility in Feminist Spaces: Outcomes of Focus Groups and Surveys on Accessibility and Inclusivity to Women, Girls, Trans, Intersex and Nonbinary Persons with Disabilities	12
3 International Human Rights Standards and Guiding Documents on Accessibility	17

Acknowledgements

The Inclusive Generation Equality Collective (IGEC) is composed of women with disabilities in all of their diversity and allies from all the major regions of the world. For this work, the IGEC would like to acknowledge the special contributions of some of its members and their organizations, who dedicated their time to developing this Protocol, namely: Alana Carvalho, Alimata Abdul Karimu, Amanda McRae, Amanda Spriggs, Cristina Dueñas, Emma Collins, Estefanía Cubillos Nova, Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, Itzel Moreno Vite, Pamela Molina, Patricia Pam, Rosina Pobee, Shiela May Aggarao, Disability Rights Fund (DRF), Equal Basis Development Initiative (EBDI), International Disability Alliance (IDA), Sightsavers, and Women Enabled International (WEI).

This Feminist Accessibility Protocol would not have been possible without the virtual participation of 109 women, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities, as well as 24 States, agencies of the United Nations, and international feminist organizations, that took the time to respond to the survey and participate in the focus groups or interviews.

Introduction and Background

Women with disabilities are [1 in 5 women around the world](#). As such, their voices and perspectives are invaluable to all conversations related to gender equality and women's rights.¹ Too often, however, feminists with disabilities² have been excluded from the spaces, conversations, and movements that have shaped progress towards gender equality at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

For instance, feminists with disabilities who participated in the 2021 Generation Equality Forums—an international, multistakeholder process that seeks to accelerate progress towards gender equality through 2026—experienced significant accessibility barriers³ to joining, participating in, and leading within those Forums.⁴ As a result, rather than being able to focus on the substantive issues discussed within those Forums, feminists with disabilities had to sit on the sidelines and fight to enter those spaces on an equal basis with others.

These experiences paralleled the ones that they and other feminists with disabilities have had over many years in interacting within the feminist movement and in meetings, events, and other advocacy spaces where gender equality was on the table. Barriers to participation vary from person to person, but they stem from many issues in organizing and executing such meetings and events, such as lack of knowledge about accessibility requirements, lack of funding to invest in accessibility measures, and lack of relationships between the organizers and feminists with disabilities and their representative organizations.⁵

A movement towards gender equality that excludes women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities will never achieve its goals. Actors within the feminist movement and the broader movement towards gender equality must recognize that accessibility is a human right, not an optional add-on. For persons with disabilities, the right to access the physical environment, transportation, information, and communications systems and technologies, and other services and spaces open to the public is a prerequisite to fulfilling many other rights, including the right to participation in public life. Reflecting the importance of accessibility, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) includes accessibility both as one of its guiding principles (Article 3) and as a standalone right (Article 9).⁶

To inform the Generation Equality process and other efforts towards ensuring gender equality, feminists with disabilities and those advocating at the intersection of gender and disability came together in 2021 to form the Inclusive Generation Equality Collective (IGEC). The IGEC raises the voices of feminists with disabilities and those advocating for gender and disability-related rights and justice from around the world. As a response to accessibility barriers during the Generation Equality Forums and aiming at ensuring accessibility in global and national spaces where important discussions are held, and decisions are made on gender equality moving forward, the IGEC developed this Protocol. To this end, the IGEC conducted focus groups, surveys, and interviews with 109 women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with many types of disabilities from at least 37 countries,⁷ who shared their experiences joining feminist spaces and meetings and events on gender equality. The commitments outlined in this Protocol are a result of this work.

Purpose of the Feminist Accessibility Protocol

Women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities have an equal—and perhaps greater—stake in the outcome of discussions and decisions on gender equality. Recognizing this, the Feminist Accessibility Protocol (the Protocol) seeks to ensure that the spaces, both in-person and virtual, where these important discussions and decisions take place are fully accessible to and inclusive of feminists with disabilities. By outlining how actors can anticipate, address, and remove accessibility barriers, this Protocol looks ahead to a world where:

1. women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities in all their identity intersections can participate and lead in the feminist movement on an equal basis with others, and that the accessibility and accommodations measures required for this leadership and participation are fully met; and
2. discussions and decisions made in these spaces reflect the priorities and lived realities of those who experience structural exclusion at the intersection of gender and disability.

The Protocol is intended to guide the work of all actors who seek to advance gender equality at the local, national, regional, and/or global levels. While this Protocol specifically focuses on meetings and events related to gender equality, the principles outlined herein have broader application to the operations of the wider feminist space. By signing onto this document, States, feminist civil society, United Nations entities, and others will be taking an important step towards the fulfillment of their human rights obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (see Annex below) and commitments as made as part of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Generation Equality Forum, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, among other pledges.

Our Collective Pledge

We, the undersigned States, organizations, and other entities hereby pledge to undertake the following in our meetings and events, including in virtual spaces, to advance gender equality:

- 1 We commit to recognizing that women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities have a stake in the discussions and outcomes of all meetings and events on gender equality—not just those specifically focused on disability—and to involving feminists with disabilities and their representative organizations in the design and planning of these meetings and events, including as related to safety and security.
- 2 We commit to proactively ensuring the meaningful inclusion of feminists with disabilities in all of their diversity and intersections, with a particular emphasis on those who experience structural exclusion and/or are underrepresented, as participants and leaders in meetings and events on gender equality. We commit to reducing inequality by ensuring this participation and leadership, including by providing support, accessibility, and accommodation requirements.
- 3 We pledge to develop disability-inclusive budgeting for events and meetings related to gender equality. This includes budgeting for baseline accessibility measures as outlined herein, for costs for participants as well as their support persons or personal assistants to participate in meetings and events, for honorariums to speakers and other active participants in recognition of their expertise, expenses, and time, and for further reasonable accommodations⁸ as needed by individual advocates.
- 4 We commit to providing guidance to speakers, staff, and contracting parties involved in events and meetings on gender equality about what they can do to create an environment that is fully accessible to and promotes the participation and leadership of feminists with disabilities throughout the process (see Annex below).
- 5 We pledge to ensure that our registration process is fully accessible and inclusive and that feminists with disabilities are consulted about their accessibility and support requirements when registering for a meeting or event. We further commit to ensuring the confidentiality of information shared in the registration process, including related to disability, health status, reasonable accommodation requests, and gender or gender identity.
- 6 We pledge to ensure physical accessibility in events and meetings on gender equality, including selecting a venue that has the capacity to accommodate support persons or personal assistants and that offers elevators, ramps, accessible doors, and accessible and gender-inclusive bathrooms for attendees with all types of disabilities.

- 7 We pledge to ensure communications accessibility in events and meetings on gender equality, including by providing as a standard practice closed captioning and accredited sign language interpretation in open meetings and events and asking participants about their accessibility requirements in this regard in closed meetings and events (see Annex below). We further commit to providing spoken language interpretation and translating materials and documents used as appropriate for the audience and event.
- 8 We pledge to ensure information accessibility related to meetings and events on gender equality. This includes distributing information in accessible formats—including by using plain language, Easy-Read, Braille, large print, and screen reader-accessible formats—before, during, and after meetings, including through accessible social media and accessible websites, tested by persons with many types of disabilities (see Annex). We further commit to widely disseminating information about measures taken to ensure the accessibility of the event so that all attendees are aware of and can benefit from these measures.
- 9 We pledge to ensure accessibility for persons with psychosocial disabilities and neurodiverse identities in events and meetings on gender equality, including by providing a structured agenda, sensory breaks at regular intervals, and quiet space for participants to relax away from crowds while still following proceedings.
- 10 We commit to disseminating any conclusions and outcomes of meetings or events on gender equality in accessible formats and ensuring that feminists with disabilities play an important role in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating any outcomes.
- 11 We recognize that accessibility standards may change and evolve and commit to continual learning in this regard. We commit to applying a human rights-based approach to monitoring and evaluating the accessibility of meetings and events we organize on gender equality in consultation with feminists with disabilities and to meaningfully integrating feedback on accessibility into our future work.
- 12 We commit to putting this pledge into practice by using accessibility and reasonable accommodations policies and guidelines for our meetings and events on gender equality, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in consultation with feminists with disabilities.
- 13 We commit to taking steps to dismantle the systems of oppression that prevent feminists with disabilities, including those with additional intersectional identities (for instance, based on ethnicity, race, national origin, sexual orientation, or cultural and linguistic minorities), from fully participating in the movement towards gender equality. We further pledge to advance rights at the intersection of gender and disability in our countries, regions, and globally.

ANNEX

**Good Practices,
Focus Group Findings,
and Human Rights Standards
on Accessibility, Including in
Feminist Spaces**

1 Good Practices on Ensuring Accessibility in Meetings and Events

1.1 Good Practices for Both In-Person and Online Events and Meetings

Good Practice

Ensure the participation and leadership of feminists with disabilities in all of their diversity, in particular ensuring the inclusion of those with intellectual, developmental, and psychosocial disabilities, deafblind persons, girls and adolescents with disabilities, deaf and hard-of-hearing persons⁹, and women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities who may face discrimination based on race, gender, and structurally excluded groups, such as those based in the Global South, indigenous, and Black persons.

Good Practice

Have a disability focal point on behalf of the entity to work closely with feminists with disabilities and their representative organizations in the design, decision-making process, and execution of events and meetings on gender equality.

Good Practice

If the responsibility for planning events or meetings is outsourced or subcontracted to an entity, ensure that accessibility and provision of reasonable accommodation are part of the requirements for services. Outline accessibility requirements in procurement processes and select vendors accordingly.

Good Practice

Ensure that accessibility provisions, including reasonable accommodations, are planned and provided responding to individual access and safety requirements and are gender-affirmative (i.e. accessibility provisions ensure one's safety and do not put a person at risk given shrinking civil society space and growing anti-gender movements).

Good Practice

Invite organizations of persons with disabilities that are specialized in accessibility to provide training on accessibility for staff and/or to conduct accessibility audit services.

Good Practice

When organizing an in-person event, ensure there is accessible transportation to/from the event and accessible lodging accommodation options nearby.

Good Practice

Ask participants, speakers, moderators, and others involved in events or meetings about their accessibility and accommodation requirements ahead of those events and meetings and address those needs.

Good Practice

When invited to speak at an event, make acceptance of the invitation conditional on the event's adherence to standards of accessibility and accommodations for participants.

Good Practice

On social media, visually describe images and videos, incorporate subtitles in recordings, and use plain language. Use URL shorteners when sharing links, and ensure the appropriate use of hashtags, emojis, and related add-ons for social media. Strictly follow the guidelines of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Good Practice

On the website of the event, ensure that the registration process and information available are accessible to feminists with disabilities, including by ensuring color contrast and not using CAPTCHA systems based on images.

Good Practice

Send presentations, agendas, and any material used during the event or meeting beforehand, to both participants and accessibility service providers, in formats that are accessible to persons who use screen readers and those using other input devices like keystrokes and joystick, including Microsoft Word, as well as in Braille and large print. Include a visual description of images, slides, and speakers. Ensure Word documents are accessible, including by the addition of navigation pane to ease interaction.

Good Practice

Offer materials about the event or meeting, as well as information about registration, in Easy Read format or plain language.

Good Practice

Hold briefings with potential participants before the event to provide information about the event's purpose, the registration process, and how to actively participate in the event.

Good Practice

Hold online events and meetings in low bandwidth platforms. Where possible, offer participants stipends to cover internet expenses.

Good Practice

When planning an event or meeting, ask speakers or participants if they may require extra time for interventions and plan accordingly.

Good Practice

At the beginning of the event or meeting, explain its objective, agenda, and structure in plain language.

Good Practice

At the beginning of the meeting, let participants know about accessibility provisions. For meetings or events longer than two hours, plan regular sensory breaks; let the participants know about the timing of the breaks in advance and follow the schedule as planned.

Good Practice

Provide a glossary of frequently used terms related to gender before an event or meeting, with their definition in plain language and the meaning of acronyms that could be used during the meeting or event. Bear in mind that acronyms should be avoided as much as possible.

Good Practice

Book accredited sign language interpreters, preferably those with experience on topics related to gender, and give the participants the opportunity to meet with them beforehand to become familiar with the signs utilized. For events of more than two hours, book more than one interpreter. Ensure sign language interpreters are highlighted.

Good Practice

Ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' information when sharing the event notes and recordings, including by offering a secure mechanism through which the participants can request measures such as removing their names from documentation and/or requesting for anonymity.

Good Practice

While collecting data disaggregated by sex, gender, disability, age, and other intersections that may apply for monitoring and evaluation purposes, ensure the confidentiality of information shared in the registration process, including related to disability, health status, reasonable accommodation requests, and gender.

Good Practice

Ask for the participants' feedback regarding accessibility once the event is over to identify gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility measures.

Good Practice

Ensure that the administrative and programmatic guidelines on gender equality, including strategies, policies, practices, and procedures, of those planning the event or meeting explicitly include women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities in all their identity intersections. The guidelines shall include appropriate content, language, and concepts ensuring consideration of the eight general principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Good Practice

In consultation with feminists with disabilities, monitor and evaluate the guidelines ensuring they attain good ratings using the disability markers.

1.2 Additional Good Practices for In-Person Events and Meetings

Good Practice

Conduct accessibility audits of physical venues with feminists with disabilities and their representative organizations and select venues and service providers for events and meetings on gender equality that meet the greatest possible accessibility standard.

Good Practice

Indicate the venue, restroom, and other important locations with pictograms, and also provide audio guides for navigating spaces.

Good Practice

Offer a quiet room or corner inside the venue to allow participants to relax for a few minutes while still following the event.

Good Practice

Reserve seats for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons close to the sign language interpreter so that the interpretation is visible to them at all times.

Good Practice

Ensure support persons or personal assistants can attend without any registration costs, to guarantee the participation of those who require such support on an equal basis as others.

Good Practice

If the event or meeting includes a meal, offer an alternative to a buffet to ensure physical accessibility during mealtime; ensure the restaurant tables are accessible to wheelchair users.

1.3 Additional Good Practices for Virtual Events and Meetings

Good Practice

Conduct accessibility audits of virtual spaces with feminists with disabilities and their representative organizations. Select virtual platforms and service providers for events and meetings on gender equality that meet the greatest possible accessibility standards.

Good Practice

In recognition of the digital divide that particularly impacts women, girls, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities, offer internet connectivity and technology stipends for feminists with disabilities who attend virtual meetings and events on gender equality.

Good Practice

In virtual platforms, allow participants to participate both through the chat function or through speaking or signing their inputs, so feminists with disabilities can choose the alternative that is most accessible to them.

Good Practice

If using new or uncommon platforms for events, offer participants, speakers, and moderators the chance to navigate the website and event platform a few days in advance, to become familiar with the format and features.

Good Practice

Offer a communication channel between the staff involved in the event or meeting and the participants prior to and during the event to solve any issues with registration, access to the platform, etc.

Good Practice

Record meetings while spotlighting the persons signing, such as sign language interpreters and sign language users, and show subtitles so that the recording is accessible to deaf and hard of hearing persons.

For more good practice examples related to accessibility, please see:¹⁰

- CBM Global Disability Inclusion, Accessible meetings, and events: a toolkit (2020)
<https://cbm-global.org/resource/accessible-meetings-and-events-a-toolkit>
- Council of Ontario Universities, A Planning Guide for Accessible Conferences (2016)
<http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A-Planning-Guide-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf>
- Disability Rights Fund, Putting the Spotlight on Sign Language in Virtual Spaces (2022)
<https://disabilityrightsfund.org/putting-the-spotlight-on-sign-language-and-virtual-spaces/>
- Esi Hardy, Accessible Online Events – 6 quick and easy tips (2020)
<https://celebratingdisability.co.uk/accessible-online-events/>
- Meeting and Events Australia, Accessible Events—A Guide for Meeting and Event Organisers (2019)
https://www.meetingsevents.com.au/sites/default/files/uploaded-content/website-content/accessible_events_guide.pdf
- RespectAbility, Ensuring Virtual Events Are Accessible for All (2020)
<https://www.respectability.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Ensuring-Virtual-Events-Are-Accessible-for-All-RespectAbility-Toolkit.pdf>
- Rooted in Rights, How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community (2020)
<https://rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/>
- Victoria Copans, 6 tips to build accessibility into your virtual events (2021)
<https://www.xliveglobal.com/planners/6-tips-build-accessibility-your-virtual-events>
- Women Enabled International (WEI), Access: Good Practices – International Meeting Checklist
<https://womenenabled.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WEI-access-good-practices-international-meetings.pdf>
- WEI, Access: Good Practices – Social Media
<https://womenenabled.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WEI-access-good-practices-social-media.pdf>
- Zero Project, Conference Accessibility Guidelines (2019)
<https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Zero-Project-Conference-Accessibility-Guidelines-2019.pdf>

2 Barriers to Accessibility in Feminist Spaces: Outcomes of Focus Groups and Surveys on Accessibility and Inclusivity to Women, Girls, Trans, Intersex and Nonbinary Persons with Disabilities

2.1 Overall barriers to participation in events and meetings on gender equality

To inform the Protocol and this Annex, the IGEC conducted focus groups, surveys, and interviews with 109 women, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with many types of disabilities from at least 37 countries, who shared their experiences joining feminist spaces and meetings and events on gender equality. The commitments outlined in this Protocol are a result of this work.

Many of the barriers feminists with disabilities face in events and meetings on gender equality are imposed in both in-person and online spaces. For instance, many feminists with disabilities need to receive information, presentations, and all the materials shared during the event in advance in order to prepare for the event at their own pace.¹¹ Likewise, information in Easy Read or plain language is helpful to many feminists with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities and those whose first language is not English or the main language of the event.¹²

On many occasions, deaf or hard-of-hearing feminists cannot join events on gender equality because there are no closed captions or sign language interpreters.¹³ Regarding sign language interpretation, feminists with disabilities are frequently asked to pay for their own interpreters, or the interpreters offered by the event utilize inaccurate signs or are unfamiliar with the signs the deaf participants use.¹⁴ Some feminists with hearing disabilities shared that they only feel comfortable in feminist spaces held by the deaf community, as they are certain that a sign language interpreter will be provided¹⁵ and that their linguistic rights will be fulfilled.¹⁶ Even when sign language interpreters are available, the language barrier may still be an issue, as international events usually prioritize International Sign. However, many deaf women, especially those in the Global South, are not familiar with International Sign.¹⁷ Another crucial aspect related to sign language interpretation is the moderation of the event. As there is a delay between the signing and the spoken intervention, deaf participants may miss important information if the moderator does not pause, and, as a result, deaf participants may be prevented from engaging in any dialogue or asking any questions.¹⁸ Lastly, the behavior of the interpreters is also a concern. As one focus group participant, a trans woman, shared, she has felt judged and looked down upon by sign language interpreters and wishes there were more female and trans interpreters.¹⁹

Feminists with visual disabilities report facing frequent barriers to accessing materials in events, including because images and PowerPoint presentations are not visually described²⁰ or have small font size,²¹ and written information is not available in Braille.²²

For feminists with psychosocial disabilities, sensory overstimulation associated with loud noises and big crowds can hinder their participation in events,²³ as can the absence of breaks for long periods of time during the event, which can lead to stress.²⁴ As one focus group participant with a psychosocial disability reported, her concentration length is about two hours. After that, she feels overwhelmed and is not able to fully concentrate.²⁵ For another participant, it is hard to follow speakers who keep the same voice tone throughout their presentation.²⁶ However, it is important to bear in mind that concentration length can vary from person to person, as can accessibility requirements in general. Therefore, to effectively include and ensure the accessibility requirements of feminists with psychosocial disabilities, they must be involved in designing and planning these events. In this regard, some participants reported feeling disappointed with the lack of understanding of the accommodation requirements of persons with psychosocial disabilities during events and meetings.²⁷

2.2 Barriers to Participation in in-person events and meetings on gender equality

In-person events and meetings also pose a number of barriers to participation for feminists with disabilities. For those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, support to find the room where the event is being held is often needed, as many buildings do not include information in pictograms or arrows to indicate the way.²⁸ In these cases, they need to rely on the information provided by others attending the event or the staff working at the building, who may give instructions using complex language. In addition, it is not unusual for feminists with intellectual or developmental disabilities to require a support person to accompany them during the event. In spite of that, the organizers of such events often charge those professionals for their attendance as if they were a participant.²⁹ In cases when feminists with intellectual disabilities are invited to speak at events on gender equality, the organizers frequently do not cover the expenses related to the work of the support person and ask them to bring a family member to support them, even though the person receiving the support has the right to choose who will provide it, including if it is a professional support person. As a woman with an intellectual disability in Spain stated, “a family member cannot be as good as a professional support person. Because they may not know about the topic of the event or how to behave as my support in events. It is not the same.”³⁰ As this participant has experience being invited to events on gender equality as a speaker, she also mentioned that organizers prioritize inviting women with intellectual disabilities with low support requirements as speakers, leaving those with complex support requirements behind.³¹

For feminists with physical disabilities, many venues are not designed bearing physical accessibility in mind, and lack ramps,³² have narrow corridors and doors,³³ require walking long distances, have limited parking spaces close to the venue, or have no parking at all.³⁴ Some focus

group participants reported that they sometimes need to be carried into the venue due to the absence of elevators in the building or due to other accessibility barriers.³⁵ Once inside the venue, they often have no space for wheelchair users, and the corridors are too narrow. It is also frequent that standing microphones are not offered,³⁶ preventing those who are invited as speakers and cannot hold a microphone from using them without external support.

Another frequent barrier is the insufficient space in a bathroom for a wheelchair to enter and maneuver or the absence of toilets and sinks specifically designed for persons with physical disabilities.³⁷ And for events that include lunch or cocktails, restaurants and catering services are often not tailored to address physical disability-specific requirements, only offering a buffet format and tables that do not match the requirements that allow a wheelchair user to choose and collect their own meal.³⁸ As a focus group participant shared, “This format leads to others choosing for me what I am going to eat instead of me being able to decide what I want or not.”³⁹ Another survey respondent shared, “As I have one arm, it is almost impossible for me to hold a drink and a plate of food in a buffet. I often end up asking people to hold things for me or having not to eat or not drink—one or the other—to be able to manage it all.”⁴⁰

Feminists with visual disabilities also face barriers in in-person events. For instance, focus group participants described that sometimes directions within the event and meeting paces are only indicated with signs that they cannot see and not through sounds or visual description,⁴¹ and elevators in event spaces may have no number options in Braille.⁴²

Some focus group participants shared their frustration about not being invited to join or speak in feminist spaces due to space or cost limitations for the event.⁴³ As one focus group participant reported: “As I run the organization, they tell me that they are inviting a woman [with a disability] who does not need transportation or an interpreter, nor is accompanied by an assistant, as they only have room for one person.”⁴⁴ Actions like this perpetuate the exclusion of feminists with disabilities from feminist spaces, especially certain types of disabilities that require professional support or interpretation to actively participate in the discussions.

2.3 Barriers to participation in virtual events and meetings on gender equality

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many feminist meetings and events have become virtual, utilizing online platforms rather than in-person meeting spaces. Such spaces have often not been designed with disability in mind, which— together with the increased use of technology— has led to a deepened digital divide between persons with and without disabilities, and feminist online spaces reflect that disparity.

As a focus group participant reported, having access to the internet is a privilege,⁴⁵ and many feminists with disabilities do not have this access. As another participant said, in Africa, many women with disabilities have no access to smartphones and those who do often face internet connection issues.⁴⁶ Although hosting online events and meetings in low-bandwidth platforms helps reduce connectivity issues, event planners often do not consider this option. As an interviewee with autism shared, when she joined an event on gender and new technologies, she raised a question about the difficulty persons with some types of disabilities face in understanding and having access to these technologies and felt judged for bringing up disability in that discussion.⁴⁷

For some feminists with psychosocial disabilities, it can be overwhelming to use online platforms with which they are not familiar, as it is hard for them to know how to activate certain functions or when it is appropriate to speak.⁴⁸

Regarding deaf and hard-of-hearing feminists, closed captioning is a key function in online events, but some online platforms do not allow subtitles. When the participants are divided into breakout rooms in some platforms like Zoom, they can no longer access the captions and may not be assigned to the same rooms as sign language interpreters.⁴⁹ Sometimes, only automatic computer-generated captions are available (rather than a live captioner), and these computer-generated captions are often inaccurate.⁵⁰

Even when closed captioning is offered, this is still not enough for many deaf feminists to actively participate in the event or meeting, as they still require sign language interpreters who can voice for deaf feminists so that they can ask questions and interact throughout the event.⁵¹ Frequently, the chat function is provided as an alternative, but this prevents the participation of deaf feminists on an equal basis, as the chat function may be hard to use or they may not be fluent in written languages.⁵² Regarding sign language interpretation, some focus group participants mentioned that they prefer in-person interpretation, even for online events.⁵³ With this format, both the interpreter and the participant can be in the same room while following the event. In countries where internet connection is unstable, this is especially important to avoid missing the discussions during the event.⁵⁴ Likewise, as it is hard to follow the chat and the sign language interpreter at the same time, the content of the chat should be included in the closed captioning and signing.⁵⁵

For feminists with visual disabilities, virtual registration platforms and digital documents are often not accessible to screen readers⁵⁶ or require using visual verification tests, such as captcha;⁵⁷ images and PowerPoint presentations are not visually described,⁵⁸ and there is no or little visual contrast in the materials sent to participants, making it difficult to find text boxes or fields to respond.⁵⁹

Furthermore, feminists with physical disabilities with limited mobility in the upper limbs may have difficulties following and participating in the chat on online platforms, as well as unmuting themselves or asking for the floor.⁶⁰

Due to the barriers described above, online events remain unwelcoming spaces for feminists with disabilities, who are often not included in the design and planning of such events and, therefore, face more barriers to participating in them than other feminists.

2.4 Financial barriers to participation in events and meetings on gender equality

Persons with disabilities, including women, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities, are overrepresented among those living in poverty.⁶¹ They also have fewer opportunities than the rest of the population to access education and conclude their studies, which, in many cases, prevents them from studying gender equality or learning other languages. This imposes disproportionate barriers on them, including restricting their ability to join feminist spaces and events frequently held in English. The financial barriers that were more frequently mentioned during our consultations are:

Both in-person and online events

- the lack of language interpretation for those who do not speak English;
- the lack of honorariums for those invited as speakers to compensate them for their time and expertise.

In-person events

- the high cost of accessible transportation and lack of accessible public transportation;
- the high cost of a professional support person during the event or meeting;
- the high cost of accessible travel, especially for those living in rural or remote areas.

Online events

- the lack of stipend to cover internet connection;
- the lack of access to a computer or smartphone to join the event;
- the lack of access to tools to allow the use of technology, such as screen readers.

3 International Human Rights Standards and Guiding Documents on Accessibility

For too long, feminists with disabilities were denied a seat at the decision-making table. Disability was not highlighted in discussions on gender equality and was only seen as a medical condition to be cured and as a synonym for impairment.⁶² Laws and policies also reflected that paradigm, utilizing disability as a valid argument to restrict rights.⁶³ This ableist perspective was imposed by the medical model of disability, which considered persons with disabilities as objects of charity and care instead of subjects of rights.⁶⁴ This reality began to change when the human rights model of disability arose.

Indeed, the text of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)—the seminal human rights treaty ensuring the respect, protection, and fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities—reflects the human rights approach to disability. Instead of classifying persons with disabilities solely by their impairments, the CRPD asserts that persons with disabilities “include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”⁶⁵ The CRPD asserts that persons with disabilities are rights holders, not just service users, and that it is primarily the barriers to inclusion—and not persons with disabilities themselves—that must be addressed.

Overcoming these “various barriers” is a key part of States’ obligations under the CRPD, and accessibility is a significant component of that obligation. Accessibility includes, but is not limited to, “equal access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.”⁶⁶ Accessibility should apply to all aspects of daily life, such as education,⁶⁷ health,⁶⁸ housing,⁶⁹ employment,⁷⁰ and participation in political and public life.⁷¹ Accessibility is also a precondition to achieving many sustainable development goals (SDGs), including SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, as inaccessibility imposes barriers that deepen the inequalities between persons with and without disabilities.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) has found that gender must be considered when ensuring the right to accessibility within the disability context.⁷² This is because women and girls with disabilities face unique and disproportionate barriers to their full realization of rights that must be accounted for when providing accessibility measures and support services.⁷³ Article 9 of the CRPD establishes a duty to ensure accessibility in all its aspects,

including the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, and services for both State Parties and private entities that provide services or goods to the public.⁷⁴

The human right to accessibility is not a new concept with the ratification of CRPD but stems from a line of other human rights treaties. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects the rights of all persons without distinction to access public services.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) highlights the right of access to any place or service intended for public use.⁷⁶ While barring access to public places and services based on racial discrimination is distinct from that of disability discrimination, there are parallels between the artificial barriers to access created by both racism and ableism.⁷⁷ Disability activists have also often linked the access to the physical environment and public transportation as necessary to utilize their human right to freedom of movement, as protected in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 12 of the ICCPR.⁷⁸ Likewise, accessibility for information and communications is required for persons with disabilities to utilize their human right to freedom of opinion and expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the UDHR and Article 19, paragraph 2 of ICCPR.⁷⁹

Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) considers the ways in which accessibility intersects with gender,⁸⁰ including access to equal educational opportunities⁸¹ and economic opportunities through employment and professional development.⁸² Like the UDHR, CEDAW iterates that transportation must be accessible for all women.⁸³ Article 8 of CEDAW particularly highlights the right of women, without discrimination, to represent their governments at the international level and participate in international organizations.⁸⁴

The CRPD and CRPD Committee have made clear that ensuring accessibility is not optional and that States and other entities have a duty to ensure accessibility measures proactively before they are requested.⁸⁵ In this regard, States Parties must ensure that any new structures, systems, technologies, and other public accommodations—including those developed by private entities—be fully accessible to persons with disabilities.⁸⁶ States Parties must also ensure that any existing structures, systems, technologies, or other public accommodations be gradually and continuously modified to ensure full accessibility.⁸⁷ States Parties to the CRPD are explicitly prohibited from using austerity measures to justify insufficient accessibility provision.⁸⁸ Any public or private entity with an obligation to provide accessibility for public goods or services cannot justify the lack of accessibility by claiming the measures were too burdensome.⁸⁹

In particular, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy states that the UN will “implement and apply the principles of universal design in all of its policies and programmes. Barriers to accessibility should be properly identified, addressed, and removed.”⁹⁰ Indicator 6.1, on the accessibility

of conferences and events, requires the completion of a baseline assessment of accessibility and reasonable accommodation for conferences and events, and that policies and guidelines on accessibility of conference services and facilities are in place and accessibility targets are established and met.⁹¹

For specific cases in which accessibility is not enough to ensure effective participation, reasonable accommodation—“used as a means of ensuring accessibility for an individual with a disability in a particular situation”—must be provided, so long as this reasonable accommodation can be provided without posing an undue burden.⁹² For this reason, the CRPD Committee recommends that accessibility be the standard used in all spaces, while reasonable accommodations are implemented for individuals whose requirements may fall out of the scope of standard accessibility measures.⁹³

Women, girls, and trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities have historically been excluded from political and social movements, such as the feminist movement, due to the lack of accessibility. This exclusion must end in order for intersectional feminism to achieve the goal of liberation for all. The participation and leadership of feminists with disabilities in the broader feminist movement and the important work at all levels towards gender equality is dependent on ensuring accessibility. For States Parties to the CRPD, accessibility is a human rights obligation, and for other actors, it is an important commitment. If feminists speak of upholding human rights, this must extend to the human right to accessibility for all.

Endnotes

- 1 Even though there is no global data about the prevalence of disability among trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities, they also have a key role in gender discussions and are included under the term “feminists with disabilities.”
- 2 In this Protocol, the term feminists with disabilities refers to all women, girls, and trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities, including those with other intersectional identities (ethnicity, race, national origin, cultural and linguistic minorities) who advocate for gender equality.
- 3 In this Feminist Accessibility Protocol, accessibility is understood in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). According to Article 9 of the CRPD, accessibility refers to the access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas. Lastly, these measures shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility.
- 4 See Inclusive Generation Equality Collective, *Letter to UN Women ahead of the Generation Equality Paris Forum* (May 2021), https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1WONpRHHytBsGaUHTLTrxZ8mg_OcengeOx7nFGW36AsE/edit; European Disability Forum, *Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir*, Inclusive Generation Equality Collective, International Disability Alliance, Sightsavers, & Women Enabled International, *Letter to UN Women and the Government of France about Accessibility Barriers at the Generation Equality Paris Forum* (Aug. 2021), https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15HRqGnggeFqsAt-l695GqaJfIMszmlUFfkTZLXQATVc/viewform?edit_requested=true.
- 5 Result of the survey conducted with 24 States, UN agencies, and international feminist organizations about accessibility in events on gender equality organized by them.
- 6 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, G.A. Res. 61/106, Art.3, and 9, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/106 (Dec. 13, 2006) (hereinafter CRPD).
- 7 The women, trans, intersex, and nonbinary persons with disabilities who participated in the focus groups, surveys, or interviews are based in Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Latvia, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Sudan, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uganda, and Zambia.
- 8 According to art. 2 of the CRPD, *supra* note 6, reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- 9 The Inclusive Generation Equality Collective acknowledges the different and valuable perspectives around the use of the words Deaf or deaf in the disability community and among its members. In this Protocol, the word deaf is not capitalized, in line with the guidelines of the World Federation of the Deaf and the United Nations.
- 10 These resources were developed by external parties not linked to the Feminist Accessibility Protocol and do not necessarily reflect the view of the individuals and organizations that worked on this Protocol.
- 11 Response given by a 29-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Australia.
- 12 Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile.
- 13 Response given by a 47-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Peru.
- 14 Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile.
- 15 Response given by a 47-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Peru.
- 16 Response given by an 18-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Mexico.
- 17 Response given by a 28-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile.
- 18 Response given by a 29-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Canada.
- 19 Response given by a 37-year-old trans woman with a hearing disability in the Philippines.
- 20 Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a visual disability in Panama.

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 21 | Response given by a 59-year-old woman with a visual disability in Costa Rica. | 39 | Response given by a 31-year-old woman with a physical disability in Panama. |
| 22 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a visual disability in Panama. | 40 | Response given by a 38-year-old woman with a physical disability in the United Kingdom. |
| 23 | Response given by a 29-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Australia. | 41 | Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a visual disability in Peru. |
| 24 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Indonesia. | 42 | Response given by a 35-year-old woman with a visual disability in the Dominican Republic. |
| 25 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Indonesia. | 43 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Indonesia. |
| 26 | Response given by a 40-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in the Philippines. | 44 | Response given by a 36-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Colombia. |
| 27 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Indonesia. | 45 | Response given by a 28-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile. |
| 28 | Response given by a 27-year-old woman with an intellectual disability in Spain. | 46 | Response given by a 34-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Nigeria. |
| 29 | Response given by a 27-year-old woman with an intellectual disability in Spain. | 47 | Response given by a 30-year-old woman with autism in Spain. |
| 30 | Response given by a 27-year-old woman with an intellectual disability in Spain. | 48 | Response given by a 29-year-old woman with a psychosocial disability in Australia. |
| 31 | Response given by a 27-year-old woman with an intellectual disability in Spain. | 49 | Response given by a 36-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Colombia. |
| 32 | Response given by many participants in the focus groups and survey. | 50 | Response given by a 47-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Peru. |
| 33 | Response given by many participants in the focus groups and survey. | 51 | Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile. |
| 34 | Response given by a 49-year-old woman with a physical disability in the United States (U.S.). | 52 | Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile. |
| 35 | Response given by a 23-year-old woman with cerebral palsy in Nigeria. | 53 | Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Chile. |
| 36 | Response given by a 55-year-old woman with tetraplegia in the Philippines. | 54 | Response given by a 34-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Nigeria. |
| 37 | Response given by a 31-year-old woman with a physical disability in Panama. | 55 | Response given by a 29-year-old woman with a hearing disability in Canada. |
| 38 | Response given by a 31-year-old woman with a physical disability in Panama. | 56 | Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a visual disability in Panama. |

- 57 Response given by a 53-year old woman with a visual disability from Guatemala.
- 58 Response given by a 57-year-old woman with a visual disability in Peru.
- 59 Response given by a 50-year-old woman with a visual disability in Panama.
- 60 Response given by a 55-year-old woman with tetraplegia in the Philippines.
- 61 Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee), *General Comment No. 3: Article 6 (Women and Girls with Disabilities)*, ¶ 59, U.N. Doc. CRPD/C/GC/3 (2016).
- 62 United Nations General Assembly, *The impact of ableism in medical and scientific practice - report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities*, ¶ 39, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/43/41 (2019).
- 63 CRPD Committee, *General Comment No. 6 on equality and non-discrimination*, ¶ 8, U.N. Doc. CRPD/C/GC/6 (2018).
- 64 United Nations General Assembly, *The impact of ableism in medical and scientific practice - report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities*, ¶ 39, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/43/41 (2019).
- 65 CRPD, *supra* note 6, art. 1 (emphasis added).
- 66 *Id.*, art. 9(1)
- 67 *Id.*, art. 24
- 68 *Id.*, art. 25
- 69 *Id.*, art. 9(1)(a)
- 70 *Id.*, art. 27
- 71 *Id.*, art. 29
- 72 *Id.*, arts. 9(1), 9(2)(b). 3
- 73 U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities*, ¶ 43, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/34/58 (Dec 20, 2016).
- 74 CRPD *supra* note 6, art. 9(1), 9(2)(b).
- 75 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted Dec. 16, 1966, art. 35(c), G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force Mar. 23, 1976).
- 76 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted Dec. 21, 1965, art. 5(f), G.A. Res. 2106 (XX), Annex, 20 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 14) at 47, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966), 660 U.N.T.S. 195 (entered into force Jan. 4, 1969).
- 77 CRPD Committee, *General Comment No. 2: Article 9: Accessibility*, ¶ 13, U.N. Doc. CRPD/C/GC/2 (2014) [hereinafter CRPD Committee, *Gen. Comment 2*]
- 78 *Id.*, at ¶ 1.
- 79 *Id.*
- 80 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted Dec. 18, 1979, G.A. Res. 34/180, U.N. GAOR, 34th Sess., Supp. No. 46, at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, U.N.T.S. 13 (entered into force Sept. 3, 1981) [hereinafter CEDAW].
- 81 *Id.*, art. 10(a)
- 82 *Id.*, art. 11(1)(c).
- 83 *Id.*, art. 14(h); see also CRPD Committee, *Gen. Comment 2*, *supra* note 77, ¶ 1.
- 84 CEDAW, *supra* note 80, art. 8.
- 85 CRPD Committee, *Gen. Comment 2*, *supra* note 77, ¶ 25.
- 86 *Id.*, ¶ 24.
- 87 *Id.*
- 88 *Id.*
- 89 *Id.*
- 90 United Nations, *United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy 8* (2019), https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf
- 91 *Id.*, at 15.
- 92 *Id.*
- 93 *Id.*