

**Nearly one-fifth of the world's women at risk:  
Report calls on States to include gender, disability in COVID-19 response**

*For more information or questions about this report and its findings, please contact the author of the report, Amanda McRae, WEI Director of U.N. Advocacy, [a.mcrae@womenenabled.org](mailto:a.mcrae@womenenabled.org), or Stephanie Ortoleva, WEI Founder and Executive Director, [president@womenenabled.org](mailto:president@womenenabled.org).*

(May 20, 2020) As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, women with disabilities are experiencing worsening physical and mental health, face significant barriers to meeting their basic needs, and are at higher risk of violence, said Women Enabled International (WEI) in a [report](#) launched today. Governments must immediately ensure that women, girls, non-binary, trans, and gender non-conforming persons with disabilities are actively included in their COVID-19 response, said WEI.

According to the World Health Organization and World Bank, women with disabilities account for nearly 20% of all women and more than 500 million people worldwide. Despite their significant presence in the world's global population, women, girls, non-binary, trans, and gender non-conforming persons with disabilities rarely have their needs considered in global efforts to ensure rights, equality, and empowerment for women, including in times of crisis.

“Women and girls with disabilities are already on the margins of society in almost every country, which the COVID-19 crisis has only amplified,” said Amanda McRae, WEI Director of U.N. Advocacy and author of the report. “If we are going to prevent a true catastrophe for one-fifth of the world's women, it is imperative that governments specifically target women with disabilities and others living at the intersection of gender and disability in their COVID-19 responses.”

The report, [COVID-19 at the Intersection of Gender and Disability](#), draws from 100 responses to a global human rights survey from women, non-binary, and trans persons with disabilities across the world. Respondents shared:

- Their **healthcare needs were being overlooked**, particularly related to sexual and reproductive health, and they feared that they would be left behind should their States need to “ration” healthcare.
  - *I heard about that [rationing] on Facebook. That makes me really scared to go to the hospital. Petrified.* -Linda, a woman with an intellectual disability in the U.S. state of New York
- They were increasingly having **trouble meeting basic needs**, including obtaining food, personal hygiene items, and assistance with tasks of basic living
  - *Before, I had a person who helped me change and bathe every day. With this situation the service is not available, and I feel powerless to handle my own hygiene.* - Rosario, a woman with muscular dystrophy in Argentina
- Nearly one-quarter felt they were at **increased risk of violence** at home or in their communities.
  - *My family is emotionally abusive, and I am trapped in a house with them.* - Alex, a non-binary person with multiple disabilities in the U.S. state of Texas

“We are disheartened but not surprised that people living at the intersection of gender and disability have been left behind by the COVID-19 response so far,” said Stephanie Ortoleva, WEI Founder and Executive Director. “It's not too late for States to turn the corner and make sure the rights to health, to be free from violence, and to live a life with dignity are assured for all, including women with disabilities.”

For a summary of report findings, key quotes from Survey respondents, and our call to action, see below.

*WEI is an international non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing human rights at the intersection of gender and disability to: respond to the lived experiences of women and girls with disabilities; promote inclusion and participation; and achieve transformative equality.*

## Summary of Report Findings

**“Now more than ever it is clear to us that we have no social value....”**

- Yolanda, a woman with a physical disability, age 55, Canada

The 100 Respondents to WEI’s Survey included women, non-binary, and trans persons with disabilities who ranged in age from 19 to 73, came from every continent except Antarctica, and represented physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, and mental health-related (psychosocial) disabilities.

### *1. Gaps in Ensuring the Right to Health*

The majority of Survey respondents (61) reported that COVID-19 had affected access to their usual health services, medications, and equipment. This included restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health goods and services such as regular sexual and reproductive health check-ups, breast cancer screenings, pregnancy-related services, menopause services, abortion, and hormone treatments.

Meanwhile, 81% of Survey respondents reported that their countries were conducting or considering rationing healthcare, and many were afraid that—due to their gender, gender identity, and/or disability—that they would be left behind.

- Gwen, a non-binary autistic person from France, also noted: “I’m scared and angry that people will be discarded as not a priority because of their disabilities.”

### *2. Barriers to Meeting Basic Needs*

According to Survey respondents, lockdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and social distancing during the COVID-19 crisis have had a significant impact on their income and on their ability to access food, hygiene items, and personal assistance for tasks of daily living. The lack of income and formal supports for these individuals also heightens their risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse.

- A Deaf woman in Nepal noted that her entire family was dependent on her salary. She described that losing her job has meant that she has “to borrow daily food and vegetables from the stores” near her house.

### *3. Heightened Risk of Violence*

Women with disabilities are two-to-three times more likely to experience violence than other women, even during normal times. Nearly one-quarter of Survey respondents (22) said that they felt an increased risk of violence from family, intimate partners, or their community as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, as a result of lockdowns, stigma, and discrimination at the intersection of gender and disability.

- Sabrina, a survey respondent from Colombia, shared that: “I have had to go out a couple of times for groceries and to the bank and in some of the lines it has happened to me that other people yell at me because they think that I should not go out or that I am a carrier of the virus just because I have a disability.”

## Calls to Action

WEI calls on States to:

- Involve women, girls, non-binary, trans, and gender non-conforming persons with disabilities in planning for and implementation of the COVID-19 government and healthcare responses.
- Issue specific guidance to healthcare providers on ensuring rights-based care during the COVID-19 crisis that makes clear that discrimination on the basis of gender and disability, is prohibited.
- Classify disability-related support services, sexual and reproductive health services, and gender-based violence services as essential services and allow providers movement to deliver services.
- Urgently adopt social protection measures to ensure an adequate standard of living. Target these measures at people living at the intersection of gender and disability.