Submission to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for consideration in drafting general comment on Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute in developing the draft general comment on Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The WFD commends the steps taken towards developing the draft general comment and has a few suggestions to the draft text.

In the end of paragraph 6, the WFD would like to add the following words (in bold): “Women with disabilities may experience violence for longer periods of time due to inadequate pathways to safety and to seek help.” because several deaf women have no way to call or receive help. This is because of the lack of sign language skills of police and medical authorities and unavailability of professional sign language interpretation. This paragraph could continue with the following text: “Deaf girls and women are vulnerable to violence and abuse because of communication difficulties: they may have little education on appropriate and inappropriate sexuality and be easily misled; they may lack self-confidence and feel they deserve to be mistreated; they may lack information on where to report an abuse; they may not have the communication skills needed to report an incident; and may rightfully perceive that they would not be believed. Meanwhile, perpetrators act with impunity because they (accurately) perceive little risk of discovery or punishment.”

In the beginning of paragraph 7, the following information should be added: “Women with disabilities are often treated as if they have no control or should have no control over their sexual and reproductive rights. Their choices often remain unheard and their decisions are substituted by legal representatives or family members, thus violating their rights under article 12 CRPD.” The WFD is aware of several cases where family members who are not necessarily legal representatives have taken over controlling deaf adult women.

Regarding paragraph 8, the WFD would like to add linguistic perspective as follows: “However, human beings are not only men, women, intersexual or transgender, they also have ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious backgrounds, they may have an impairment or not and have other layers of identity, such as age and sexual orientation.” and note the importance of accessibility in the following phrase: “The resulting myriad of violations of rights includes the right to non-discrimination and accessibility, freedom from torture and ill-treatment, protection of personal integrity, right to legal capacity, right to family, right to health, to living independently and being included in the community, and access to justice.”

The WFD is concerned that paragraphs 38-40 on accessibility do not take communication and information accessibility into account in sufficient measures. Here are suggestions for your consideration on the beginning of paragraph 39: “Accessible sexual and reproductive health services, facilities and equipment are required such as contraceptive information in different formats including sign language, gynaecologist’s examination beds and mammography equipment. All care services for women (and especially those related to health, motherhood, violence against women and childcare) must be fully accessible to women and girls with disabilities. Availability of communication and information in accessible formats such as sign language is vital because deprivation of this measure could lead to health problems or even become fatal.” In the end of this paragraph, the WFD encourages adding assistive technology that benefits parents who are deaf or hard of hearing: “Particular attention should be paid to those related to the sexual health of women with disabilities and to motherhood (babies’ bottles with handles, prams designed to be clipped on to wheelchairs or pushed with one hand, wheelchair-accessible nappy changers, vibrating baby alarm and so on), and should be included...”
in publicly-available catalogues at affordable cost.” because a vibrating baby alarm is not provided by several governments to deaf or hard of hearing parents.

Regarding paragraph 42 the WFD would like to note that health care and humanitarian assistance is rarely provided in sign language: “Humanitarian aid efforts must prevent such situations and address them if they do occur, including provision of accessible health care and mental health services to overcome psychological trauma according to individual needs.”

The WFD would like to stress that several communication methods are used and thus mentioning oral communication is unnecessary and that interpreter service benefits all parties, not only deaf or deaf-blind people. For this reason the following changes are hoped for paragraph 44: “They must be granted access at all stages of the process to support systems and technologies for the method of oral communication they choose, including professional sign language interpreters and guide-interpreters tactile sign language interpretation for people who are deafblind, in order to ensure proper communication with police and justice personnel.”

Regarding paragraph 48 the WFD would suggest changing word choices as follows: “If such services are provided by means of modern technology a telephone hotline or tele-assistance, they should also be accessible for deaf and deafblind women and girls.”

The WFD would like to add linguistic perspective to the end of paragraph 50: “Education programmes must cater for the training needs of those girls and women with disabilities who are at greatest risk of exclusion (such as those with high support needs, migrants, different linguistic needs, those belonging to indigenous populations, those residing in rural areas and older women and illiterate women), ensure they receive proper attention, and combat school failure and drop-out by these groups.” because the provision of education in e.g. sign language remains a challenge in today’s society.

The WFD has learned cases where reasonable accommodation such as professional sign language interpretation has been provided only for certain work-related situations such as job interview without taking other situations, e.g. staff meetings, trainings and any other event, into account. For this reason the WFD suggests adding the following clarification to the beginning of paragraph 51: “Considering the high unemployment and labour market inactivity rates among women with disabilities, it is necessary to develop both mainstream and positive actions targeting women with disabilities to promote training, job placements, access to employment, job retention, equal pay for equal work, accommodations in the work place under all circumstances and work-life balance.”

The WFD hopes that aforementioned suggestions are useful for drafting the general comment on women with disabilities.

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About the World Federation of the Deaf
The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation representing and promoting approximately 70 million deaf people’s human rights worldwide. The WFD is a federation of 134 nations; its mission is to promote the human rights of deaf people and full, quality and equal access to all spheres of life, including self-determination, sign language, education, employment and community life. WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfdeaf.org