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„Access to specialized victim support services for women with disabilities who have experienced violence“

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**Good Practice Examples and Recommendations
Comparative Report**

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Abbreviations

CRDP	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled people's organizations
ULO	User led organizations: An organization run by disabled people, for disabled people
SVSS	Specialized victim support service

1. Introduction

This report is a part of a two year Daphne III project titled *Access to Specialized Victim Support Services for Women with Disabilities who Have Experienced Violence* (2013-2015). The project was financed by the Daphne Programme of the European Commission and implemented in several stages. Partners in the project are from four European countries: Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Queraum, Cultural- & Social Research and Ninlil, Association for empowerment and counselling for women with disabilities in Austria; University of Leeds and University of Glasgow in the UK; Justus-Liebig-University Giessen in Germany and Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Iceland. In the first stage, a desk study was carried out in each country to identify the policy and legal frameworks governing violence against women with disabilities and the accessibility of support services. In the second phase, which was the empirical phase, an online survey was sent to specialized victim support services (SVSS), and individual in-depth interviews were conducted with employees of support facilities, collecting information regarding the accessibility of their services and their work with women with disabilities. Subsequently focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews were carried out with women with disabilities in order to gain insight and understanding about the violence experienced by them and the main barriers to support services. Findings of the empirical research are published in a report from each country and in a comparative report. These reports are available on the project's home page at <http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/?q=publications>.

At the core of the project is an emphasis on practical findings that may benefit future activities and implementations that will promote accessible support to women with disabilities who have experienced violence. One of the objectives of the project was to develop recommendations for barrier free support and list examples of practices that have proven to be successful. In order to identify the fundamental elements of successful support and good practice examples, the research teams, in collaboration with stakeholders and advisory group participants in each country, developed guidelines for identifying good practices titled Good Practice Principles and Guidelines (See Appendix I below). On the basis of these guidelines each national team identified good practice examples and recommendations which surfaced during the empirical research and in meetings with stakeholders and advisory groups.

This comparative report is based on findings from the four national research teams regarding successful or good practice examples which were identified in each country based on the previously developed guiding principles and criteria for good practice (available in Appendix I). In addition, this report contains recommendations suggested by the research teams and which are based on the findings of this project. Chapter 2 describes some of the good practice examples identified in each of the partner countries. These examples fall into three categories: (1) user-led organizations and programs, (2) specialized victim support services and (3) specialized projects or programs. Chapter 3 presents the main recommendations identified by the research teams and which are grounded in the findings of the project. These recommendations are directed at various stakeholders such as policy makers, disability service providers, specialized victim support services and disabled people's organizations. Chapter 4 has some concluding re-

marks. In Appendix I we provide the Good Practice Principles and Guidelines which were at the basis of identifying the 'good practice' examples described in this report.

We start, however, with a word of caution. The term 'best practices' is often used when describing interventions or programs that are considered 'good' or 'best' according to some indicators or criteria. We believe it is important to exercise caution when making any claims about the success of practices. There are no uncontested principles for 'good' or 'best' practices and in this report we make no such claim. We use the terms 'good' practices when describing supports that have proven successful in particular situations, contexts or locations. It is, however, important to emphasize that when considering transferability of 'good practices' most activities need to be changed and adapted when transferred from one context to another. Although practices have been successful in a particular context, there is no guarantee that these will be applicable in different locations or for different individuals, especially when considering a highly heterogeneous group like women with disabilities.

2. Examples of 'good practice'

During the empirical stage of the project, the national research teams encountered many support options and services available to women with disabilities who had experienced violence. These organizations and projects were diverse and used various approaches. Some offered services to the whole range of people (male and female, disabled and non-disabled) who had experienced violence while others had been established especially to address the support needs of women with disabilities. Each national research team chose up to five 'good practice' examples. Below we have chosen a few of those examples, mostly with the aim of reflecting the different types of support organizations and programs available.

It is important to emphasize that the organizations and projects listed here were not formally evaluated, nor was the success of their activities. Information was gathered from various sources: through interviews with staff members, from accounts of women with disabilities who used the services, from the internet and from reports published by the services. None of the organizations described below met all the guiding principles or criteria of good practice. All of them, however, met some of the criteria in significant areas of their work. We furthermore want to emphasize that there were many other organizations and programs in these four countries not mentioned here but which were doing important work in supporting women with disabilities and in improving access to their services.

2.1 User-led support as 'good practice' examples

A few of the organizations selected as 'good practices' were disabled people's organizations (DPOs) or user-led organizations (ULOs) founded and run by people/women with disabilities and which focused on issues of violence and/or offered support to women with disabilities who had experienced violence. These organizations oftentimes met the

guiding principles and criteria of good practice to a large extent. Their work was commonly grounded in the principle 'nothing about us without us' and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). They were furthermore based on a social understanding of disability that identifies exclusion and societal barriers as disabling aspects of people's lives. They viewed violence against women with disabilities as an expression of a disabling society. Their self-help groups and peer counselling was grounded in a shared reality and reflected the lived experiences of women with disabilities, promoting self-empowerment and a safe space for women.

Stay Safe East - England

Stay Safe East is a ULO that addresses violence and abuse against D/deaf and disabled people in the Waltham Forest, Newham and Redbridge areas of London. The organization was founded by the Disability Action Waltham Forest in early 2010 and was initially funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The organization focuses on various manifestations of violence such as domestic violence, hate crimes, bullying and anti-social behaviour, financial abuse and human rights abuses by carers in institutions and at home. Assistance provided by Stay Safe East includes advocacy, legal support and specialized support to meet the needs of women and men with disabilities who have experienced violence. Stay Safe East is a small organization with one paid member of staff and a team of mainly volunteers. Since 2010 the organization has assisted over 200 women and men with disabilities.

Stay Safe East is a leading organization in the field of violence against women with disabilities, working within the framework of the CRPD and the social model of disability. The primary focus of the organization is offering support for service users to access generic services. They offer assistance and advice to women with disabilities to help them access the criminal justice system by giving advice about their legal rights, assisting them to report crimes and to instigate criminal justice procedures. They furthermore help women locate a suitable refuge when needed. Stay Safe East offers a safe space on the women's own terms, in which women with disabilities feel safe to express themselves. Counselling is offered with regard to domestic violence and hate violence. A peer support group of women with disabilities also meets regularly and organizes occasional social outings that aim to rebuild the confidence of women with disabilities who have been isolated. All activities emphasize users' needs and experiences. The service has dealt with particularly complicated situations and promotes solutions on the basis of needs of the women with disabilities that they support, as defined by the women themselves. The service places emphasis on women's abilities to define their needs in terms of safety and assistance, adopting a case support approach for individual women.

Stay Safe East aims to provide a model of good practice for other services by working across some traditional boundaries and has been acclaimed as a particularly focussed and effective service working within a human rights framework and source of expertise. The organization works in partnership with other organizations concerned with violence against people with disabilities and also actively works to improve the understanding and attitudes of other groups through consultancy and training in disability equality. Particular work is done with the police, local authorities, housing providers, social care organizations and the voluntary

sector to try to ensure that people with disabilities receive responsive services, are listened to and get services equal to others.

The service is located in physically accessible facilities that are easily reached by public transport. Stay Safe East offers an emergency service and there is a range of ways that women may get in touch, including by telephone, short message service (SMS) and email. An outreach service is offered, subject to the availability of finance and transport is arranged if women need to come to the office. Information on the web site addresses directly different groups of people with disabilities (e.g. people from black and minority ethnic communities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and parents with disabilities) and is also provided in easy read language.

As a ULO, the organization places a high value on the leadership, management and participation of people with disabilities which are centrally involved and in control of the direction of the organization. The diversity of women with impairments is recognised and specific steps are taken to ensure recognition of culture where appropriate and encourage women to participate.

Some of the ULOs identified in this project had been founded originally as such while others had initially been founded by specialized victim support services (SVSSs) or organizations consisting of both people with disabilities and non-disabled people, and later evolved into a fully user-led support programs.

Many ULOs and user-led programs considered violence against women with disabilities as a reflection of the oppression and social situation of women with disabilities. They, therefore, used a broader approach in their counselling and support, emphasising more general topics such as 'daily life of women with disabilities', empowerment and self-determination. Since violence against women with disabilities is grounded in their social situation and interwoven with the experiences of being a woman with disabilities, counselling on the broader issues and general empowerment was identified as an important and preventative support measure.

Zeitlupe - Austria

Zeitlupe is a peer counselling program for women with disabilities, run by women with disabilities. The counselling provided is free of charge and is intended for women with different impairments. Zeitlupe started its work in 2012, and is the first peer counselling organization in Vienna exclusively for women with disabilities.

Self-determination and self-empowerment are key concepts of Zeitlupe's work. Counsellors and clients are equal partners. One of Zeitlupe's aims is to support women in realising their aims in a self-determined life. The counselling emphasizes issues relating to being a woman with disabilities and using services to achieve independence. In counselling sessions dedicated to sexuality, Zeitlupe offers a safe space for women with disabilities to talk about topics such as sexual needs, sexual orientation, living in a partnership, pregnancy and being a mother with disabilities. Another branch of counselling emphasizes the use of

services to achieve increased independence. Zeitlupe is already firmly established within the Viennese independent living movement and supports women who want to apply for funds for personal assistants, find personal assistants or change their current living-situation. Zeitlupe is one of two projects of an organization called Ninlil. Ninlil is a support organization that has provided counselling and support to people with intellectual disabilities who have experienced sexual violence since 1996. They focus on activities against sexual violence against women with intellectual disabilities, offer counselling for women who have experienced violence as well as empowerment-workshops with the aim of prevention. Ninlil is not a user-led organization. It has, however, employed women with intellectual disability, who both work in providing support and self-empowerment workshops, and are in charge of administrative issues. Furthermore, women with disabilities are on the board of the organization. Thus women with disabilities are included on all decision making levels. At the request of local government, Ninlil founded Zeitlupe in 2012 and from the outset, women with disabilities have organised and run the Zeitlupe project.

2.2 Specialized victim support services as 'good practice' examples

Many organizations encountered by the research teams were general specialized victim support services (SVSS) such as women's counselling centres, rape crisis centres and refuges for women. Most of these organizations had initially been established and run by and for non-disabled women, and were not familiar with the social situation of people with disabilities, the CRPD or a social understanding of disability. Some SVSSs, however, had placed a particular emphasis on supporting women with disabilities or established projects or programs that focused on violence against women with disabilities and had thus addressed necessary accessibility issues to qualify as 'good practice' examples. In some instances SVSSs had undertaken an assessment of the organization's overall accessibility, sometimes in collaboration with DPOs or ULOs, and made changes in order to provide barrier free support. Other organizations had participated in government funded projects focusing on violence against women with disabilities. Such projects gave the organizations an opportunity to become better acquainted with issues relating to women with disabilities, increase their knowledge and improve their services to better meet the diverse needs of women with disabilities.

Many SVSSs that qualified as 'good practice' provided accessible support options such as online counselling, individual counselling with sign language interpreters and counselling in easy language. They had often taken steps to promote a more knowledgeable and conscious environment by providing special training or education to counsellors about the social situation of women with disabilities and addressing possible attitudinal barriers such as counsellors' fear or insecurity in interaction with and counselling women with disabilities. The disability training provided to counsellors was sometimes organized in collaboration with ULOs or DPOs. The SVSSs identified as 'good practice' examples all had accessible information about the support they offered, such as information on websites in easy language, video clips in sign language and audio files. Some organizations also provided information in several languages to address the ethnic diversity of women with disabilities.

Most of the 'good practice' SVSSs worked within the framework of the CRPD and encouraged its implementation. In cases where this was not specifically stated, it was clear that the work and activities reflected the intention of the Convention. Furthermore, many of the SVSSs had a feminist perspective and viewed violence as the pursuit of control and oppression in society. As a result, they could more easily appreciate violence towards women with disabilities as an expression of their social situation.

***bff* – Bundesverband Frauenberatungsstellen und Frauennotrufe - Germany**

bff is a federal association of rape crisis centres and women's counselling centres in Germany. The federation has more than 170 support facilities that offer support to girls and women who are survivors of violence. The *bff* emphasizes on public relations and awareness raising. They have actively promoted accessibility issues by executing a variety of projects that address violence against women with disabilities and their access to support. They have conducted seminars and conferences and developed and distributed informative material regarding violence and support options. Women with disabilities participate in all the projects and are involved in decision making processes.

The project *Zugang für alle!* (Access for all!) was initiated in 2010 and lasted until 2013. The objective of the project was increasing access to support for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. Activities included assisting SVSSs in removing barriers to their services and increase awareness by offering presentations and seminars on the subject and providing information and training materials to advisors who work in SVSSs. Moreover, they offered counselling to advisors in SVSSs and assisted them in providing a more accessible and successful support. The project has produced barrier-free information about violence against women with disabilities and support options available. Information about how and where women can find accessible support can be found in easy language, in audio format and in German Sign Language. The project also promoted collaboration and networking between different stakeholders, such as ULOs, DPOs and programs and residential homes for people with disabilities. Furthermore project members actively advocate the implementation of the CRPD and campaign for the rights of people with disabilities.

Suse – sicher und selbstbestimmt leben (Suse – safe and self-determined) is another project of *bff* that commenced in January 2014 with a term of three years. The project's general concept is to cultivate a long-term and binding regional cooperation between different stakeholders working with women with disabilities that have been affected by violence (e.g. counselling facilities, self-help organizations, representatives of women with disabilities, police, physicians, advocates). The goal is to establish a regional expertise network that will collaborate to improve support for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. The activities of the project include collecting information about current counselling services and identifying examples of good practice, and helpful tips and information that will prove useful to facilitate barrier free support for other SVSSs. The project will organize workshops with stakeholders about accessible support and promote discussions on practical and theoretical grounds. The main goal is to guarantee a continuous mentoring and professionally grounded evaluation of the support in different regions. Finally, the project plans to carry out a

campaign against violence and raise awareness about violence against women with disabilities and the barrier free support available to them. They will also distribute barrier free information material about support services available to women with disabilities.

When deciding to make changes in order to make their services more accessible to women with disabilities, SVSSs have sometimes hired a disability specialist as a new counsellor prepare and initiate the work, map out the necessary changes and lead the transition. Oftentimes, these counsellors provide support to women with disabilities, address the accessibility issues of the organization and formulate methods of outreach. In some cases only one counsellor remains responsible for addressing issues relating to people with disabilities, thus, support to women with disabilities becomes a separate 'unit' within an organization. As a result it remains unclear to what extent the expertise regarding disability affects the attitudinal barriers within the organizations as a whole and whether the goal is to integrate issues regarding people with disabilities and violence against them into the general practices. In most cases, however, these specialists also train their colleagues and support them in providing support to women with disabilities and address attitudinal barriers, the goal being that all counsellors should have the same level of competence and be able to support women with disabilities. In these cases, support to women with disabilities is viewed as a long term aim and not a temporary project.

Stígamót - Iceland

Stígamót is a support and counselling centre for survivors of sexual abuse and violence. The organization has provided free support to survivors of sexual abuse since 1989 and is the most established SVSS in Iceland. Stígamót provides individual counselling and self-help groups, the aim of which is self-empowerment. The support is for people who have experienced rape, sexual molestation, sexual harassment, pornographic exploitation and prostitution. The organization also engages actively in public debates about violence and provides lectures, education and training regarding violence and support.

Since its founding, women with disabilities have sought support from Stígamót. However, until quite recently the organization was located in facilities with poor access for women with mobility impairments and had not actively engaged in the topic of violence against women with disabilities and barrier free support. During the last two years Stígamót has taken considerable steps to improve their services in order to better meet the needs of women with different impairments. Stígamót has moved its operations to a new location with good physical access and has hired a counsellor who is to assist the organization in developing ways to adapt their activities and supports so that it is more accessible. Although Stígamót has not yet employed women with impairments, the recently hired counsellor works in close collaboration with DPOs and ULOs, and has an active and supportive advisory board, made up of women with disabilities. In collaboration with DPOs and ULOs, the counsellor makes special efforts to reach out to people with disabilities and provide barrier free information and education about violence against women with disabilities and the support options available.

During the last two years Stígamót has placed an increased emphasis on issues of accessibility, physical and attitudinal. They have taken up accessible support options, such as web-based counselling and the provision of information in easy-read language on their web-site and a format where users can manage and change font size on their web to increase the accessibility. Stígamót has furthermore participated in awareness-raising on the subject of violence against women with disabilities. They have participated in public debates and held seminars and training for professionals and staff members in workplaces and schools (including adult education programs) for people with disabilities about issues of violence. In October 2013, the organization held a conference on sexual violence against people with disabilities in collaboration with DPOs, the Centre for Disability Studies and disability services. The conference attracted a great deal of attention, including media attention as well as among people with disability, disability organizations and disability services staff and professionals.

Stígamót has demonstrated energy and willingness to review their activities and improve their services and accessibility. Thus their services for women with disabilities have improved considerably in a short period of time. However, since the changes are quite recent, some of the work is still in the initial stages.

2.3 Examples of special projects

The research teams encountered various projects that addressed violence against women with disabilities and their access to support. These projects were usually formulated and undertaken by either SVSSs and ULOs or governments or municipalities and many involved a collaboration between SVSSs, ULOs, DPOs and sometimes disability service providers, such as residential homes for people with disabilities or other facilities where people with disabilities spend time. The activities of these projects varied considerably. A few projects involved the development of outreach strategies, in some cases addressing especially women with certain types of impairments (e.g. D/deaf women). Some projects aimed to promote access to support and enhance the services of SVSSs, such as by developing educational material on accessible facilities and how to provide barrier-free support. Sometimes networks were created to facilitate accessible support in more specific ways, for example by creating a network for renting accessible rooms in cases where SVSSs did not have barrier free facilities or by providing training to stakeholders or people who work with women with disabilities.

The curriculum “Women w. disabilities” - Austria

The vocational training curriculum “Women w. disabilities” is a project that was initiated by the Austrian Department for women’s affairs in 2008. It consisted of a vocational training course for staff-members and women in decision-making positions in all organizations of the region of Salzburg dealing with women’s affairs, including SVSSs, as well as within social services and services for persons with disabilities and other administrative departments concerning women with disabilities. The training covered basic information about disabilities, issues regarding the lives and social situations of women with disabilities, violence against women

with disabilities, independent and self-determined living, the sexuality of women with disabilities, the legal framework, language and communication.

The aim of the project was to raise the participants' awareness and encourage self-reflection concerning 'being a woman and disabled'. Fears and other attitudinal obstacles which the participants might have concerning interacting with or providing support to women with disabilities were addressed. Participants furthermore contemplated issues such as how to identify their capabilities and limitations while counselling women with disabilities, how to integrate their knowledge and experiences in their daily work and how to improve accessibility of their organizations or departments for women with disabilities. All the activities in the curriculum aimed at providing participants with information and insight in order to better be able to provide a holistic, women-specific counselling for women with disabilities.

The training course lasted 80 hours and 17 women staff members participated in the course. The team of teachers consisted of two female experts in disabilities, a female researcher and a psychotherapist. The curriculum project proved a successful tool for improving the support available to women with disabilities.

Some projects involved awareness-raising or campaigning to promote discussions about violence against women with disabilities. Projects also aimed at empowering women with disabilities. In some cases conferences or workshops were organised for women or girls with disabilities which intended to promote self-empowerment and their knowledge about rights and break the silence around important issues that concern them.

Frauenbeauftragte in Einrichtungen - Germany

The project, Frauenbeauftragte in Einrichtungen (Disabled women's representatives in institutions) was developed by the ULO Weibernetz e.V. – Politische Interessenvertretung behinderte Frauen in cooperation with *Mensch zuerst – Netzwerk People First Deutschland e.V.* The project was funded by the *Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth* and the participating federal states and operated from November 2008 until May 2011; a follow-up project started in October 2013 and will last until September 2016.

The project's general concept is to improve the situation of women with disabilities within institutions, residential homes and workplaces for people with disabilities by providing peer support. The project's activities thus involved training women with disabilities (mostly women with intellectual disabilities) who lived in institutions or residential homes or attended workplaces for people with disabilities to become representatives for other women living or working in those places. As representatives, the women had to be knowledgeable about the rights of people with disabilities and about different manifestations of violence and be able to support women with disabilities in different kinds of situations. The women's representatives received training in skills such as how to listen to and support women who have experienced violence or abuse as well as more general skills such as how to use a computer and e-mail. Furthermore, in collaboration

with other networks and organizations, the women representatives were to work to improve the overall situation of women with disabilities within their facilities and take part in awareness raising about issues relevant to the rights of women with disabilities. Each woman representative is supported by a non-disabled woman, either an employee of the respective facility or an external person.

The project, women's representatives, has received very positive feedback and lead to improvements within several facilities where the women representatives lived and worked. Because of the success of the project, another one, *Frauenbeauftragte in Einrichtungen. Eine Idee macht Schule*, has now been established. In this project, women with and without intellectual disabilities are trained to work as 'couples' or partners, to become trainers for women with intellectual disabilities. After their training, these partners will be able to train women with intellectual disabilities to become women's representatives within their institutions. The hope is that women's representatives will be found in every institution and workplace for people with disabilities.

The project, women's representatives was executed by an ULO, Weibernetz e.V. which is a nationwide network of women lesbians and girls with disabilities. Its main goal is to improve the living situations of women and girls with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. Weibernetz e.V. has been engaged in violence against women since its founding in 1998. It has organized conferences for women with disabilities that aim at self-empowerment and provide a barrier-free website which provides a lot of informative material, such as barrier free information about accessible counselling services.

3. Recommendations

Many recommendations regarding ways to improve services and facilitate access to supports for women with disabilities surfaced in the project. These recommendations were suggested by a range of participants including the women with disabilities who participated in the focus groups and individual interviews, counsellors and specialists from support organizations interviewed during the project, members of national advisory groups that consulted with researchers and from other stakeholders who participated in project meetings. Each national research team listed up to five recommendation themes in their national reports. In what follows we have combined these recommendations. Although formulated by different groups of participants, most of the recommendations overlapped. Furthermore, the recommendations suggested in different countries were, to a large extent, similar and addressed similar issues. This indicates that there are certain key issues that require special attention and implementation when addressing how to improve policies and various support services and programs for women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

3.1 Recommendations for EU policy

Emphasize barrier free access to information

Findings of the project highlight a lack of accessible information about violence against women with disabilities and accessible support options for survivors of violence. It is important that this information be made available in barrier free format for women with disabilities. The EU should stress the issue of accessible information for women with disabilities and promote and fund projects that include the creating and dissemination of accessible information about violence against women with disabilities and support options accessible to them.

Address access to justice for women with disabilities

Participants in the project called for improved access to information about the rights of women with disabilities better access to legal advice. Information about complaint mechanisms and legal procedures must be made more readily available and accessible to women with disabilities. The EU should take measures to facilitate access to legal assistance for women with disabilities and promote barrier free information about the rights of women with disabilities, for example by initiating and strengthening policies, legislation and practices to this effect.

Promote awareness-raising about violence against disabled women

Findings of this project show that when women with disabilities speak up about violence, they are frequently ignored or met with disbelief. Even within disability services there is a lack of awareness of the widespread violence against women with disabilities. The EU should promote and fund awareness-raising campaigns that address discrimination and prejudice towards women with disabilities, including the widespread violence they are subject to.

Focus on women with disabilities

Violence against women with disabilities is intrinsically connected to their marginalization and social exclusion. In order to prevent violence against women with disabilities is necessary to change their overall societal status. The EU should be increasingly engaged in promoting the participation and inclusion of women with disabilities and should initiate and fund projects that aim to improve their marginal status and exclusion.

3.2 Recommendations for national policy

Make a commitment to improve access to support for women with disabilities

Political will is necessary in order to improve access to support services for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. As stated in Article 16 of the CRPD, all appropriate measures should be taken in order to promote the recovery of persons with disabilities who have become victims of violence. States must make a commitment to protect women with disabilities from violence and abuse. States must also ini-

tiate law reforms or put in place legislation and policies to ensure psychosocial and emotional support for women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

Increase funds to specialized victim support services (SVSSs)

Many SVSSs fail to provide accessible support to women with disabilities. Many participants in the project reported inadequate funding and financial difficulties as the main reasons for limited access. Funds to SVSSs should be increased and special attention and resources should be focussed on projects that address support for women with disabilities. Special funds should be provided to organizations working on changing their services and facilities in order to increase access for women with disabilities.

Increase funds to user-led support

The findings of the empirical reports show that many women with disabilities value and prefer peer support, self-help groups and support services organized by and for disabled women. It is important to promote the establishment of such options, actively support those organizations and provide funds for their operations.

Promote support in rural areas

Women with disabilities who live in rural areas generally have less access to resources and supports. States should emphasize access to counselling and support for women with disabilities in rural areas.

Improve access to information

States must ensure access to information for women with disabilities on how to recognize violence and about accessible support options. Such information should be provided in accessible formats (e.g. easy language, braille, sign language videos and audio format) and be made available in public spaces and through different mediums to reach the whole range of women with disabilities (e.g. through radio, television and in print). States should promote and fund projects where women with disabilities play a key role in planning, designing and broadcasting information on the topic of disability and violence through various media outlets. All measures to promote information should be developed in collaboration with women with disabilities to enhance the relevance of these initiatives.

Promote sex education

States should ensure quality sex-education for women with disabilities in schools. Information about sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities must be integrated into school curriculum. Such education should also promote self-empowerment and help women identify inappropriate and abusive behaviour.

Promote awareness-raising about violence against disabled women

It is important that the issue of violence be openly discussed and embedded in a broader discourse emphasizing the necessity of inclusion and equality of women with disabilities. In accordance with Article 8 of the CRPD, states should undertake measures to raise awareness about stereotypes, prejudice and harmful practices, including violence against women with disabilities.

Increase knowledge among professionals

It is important that professionals who work with women with disabilities or work in the support sector receive training about violence against women with disabilities and about their various support needs. Indeed, disability training should be integrated into vocational training of professionals within the social service and health care sectors, disability services, specialized victim services, justice sector and police. This training should aim to address prejudices and provide an understanding about the living conditions and experiences of women with disabilities. This training should be carried out by or in collaboration with women with disabilities.

Promote the participation of women with disability

Participants in the study called out for measures to promote the social and political empowerment of women with disabilities. States/governments/municipalities should take measures to combat common stereotypes and perceptions of women with disabilities by promoting projects and initiatives where women with disabilities are in the forefront, for example in public relations or media. Also, projects that address disability training to media representatives should be organized and supported, preferably in collaboration with women with disabilities.

Endorse independent living

Women with disabilities who are dependent upon services are vulnerable. Service provided to women with disabilities should promote their empowerment and support them to exercise their self-determination. States/governments/municipalities should promote, fund and execute projects that are grounded in the ideology of independent living and support the individual self-determination of women with disabilities.

Improve access to justice

Many participants, including women with disabilities and support service providers, emphasized the importance of improving access to legal assistance for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. States need to develop and disseminate barrier free information about the rights of women with disabilities and guarantee their access to legal aid. States should review or amend legislation to facilitate the participation of women with disabilities in legal proceedings. They should furthermore establish laws that make it possible to remove carers or family members who are perpetrators from the home, rather than requiring the women to leave. This is particularly important in cases when refuges and shelters are physically or in other ways inaccessible. States should ensure that the justice sector is knowledgeable and supportive of women with disabilities and provide disability training and education about violence against women with disabilities to lawyers, judges and law enforcement officials. In addition, anti-discrimination laws should be adopted and where already in place they may need to be changed in order to better address the situation of women with disabilities.

3.3 Recommendations for disability services

Actively engage in the fight against violence

Participants in the project called for increased involvement of disability service providers in preventing violence against women with disabilities. It is important that disability service providers recognize that women with disability are at a great risk of violence, abuse and neglect and that they find ways to address that in within their services. Disability service providers should develop protocols for the identification of situations and acts of violence and address risk factors in their services. They furthermore should make changes and reforms aimed at eliminating discrimination against service users and promote their self-determination and empowerment.

Improve access to information

Disability service providers are in a unique position and can have an important role in providing information about accessible victim support services to the women with disabilities they serve. Disability service providers could therefore participate in outreach projects in collaboration with SVSSs, DPOs and ULOs and disseminate barrier free information about violence and accessible support for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. Furthermore, disability service providers should take measures to improve access to information about the rights of women with disabilities and facilitate their access to complaint mechanism and legal assistance.

Promote awareness-raising

Disability services should emphasize awareness-raising about the rights of people with disabilities, discrimination and violence against them. They should participate in projects that increase awareness among general public as well as among staff and professional groups who work with women with disabilities. Disability service providers should collaborate with SVSSs, ULOs and DPOs on these issues. All awareness-raising measures should be developed in collaboration with women with disabilities to enhance the relevance of the projects.

Endorse independent living

Participants in the project emphasized how being dependent upon services and help from others disempowered them and limited their choices. Disability service providers should promote the empowerment of women with disabilities and discontinue service arrangements that cultivate and sustain power imbalances between disabled service users and non-disabled service providers. Disability services should promote, fund and execute projects that involve the ideology of independent living and empowerment strategies for women with disabilities. It is important that empowerment measures be developed in collaboration with women with disabilities.

Develop clear strategies

Disability service providers must address the fact that violence frequently takes place within the service system. Preventing violence should be systematically implemented in the practices and activities of the services. Service providers must develop proto-

cols or obligatory guidelines to ensure that all instances of violence or 'suspicious acts' are identified and investigated. Such guidelines would encourage staff to intervene and, therefore, be an important measure to improve users' safety. It is paramount that managers and administrators actively support the implementation of such guidelines. When establishing concrete intervention strategies, users of the services should be involved.

Promote knowledge among staff members and professionals

Disability service providers need to ensure increased knowledge and attitudinal change within their services in order to make staff and professionals more sensitive to and aware of violence against women with disabilities. This could, among other things, be done by providing training to all staff about violence against women with disabilities and accessible victim support options and services. It is imperative that staff members receive training about the rights of people with disabilities, social-relational understanding of disability and the CRPD. This training should include a critical reflection about violence related to power imbalances and to what extent dependencies can foster violent acts. All training activities should be carried out by or in collaboration with women with disabilities.

3.4 Recommendations for specialized victim support services (SVSSs)

Be prepared and willing to support women with disabilities

SVSSs need to define women with disabilities as a target group and orient and organize their services in order to reflect that. Organizations have to be willing to undertake necessary changes to provide successful and barrier free supports to women with disabilities. Services should be disability-inclusive and designed and implemented in a manner that ensures they are accessible for women with disabilities.

Address attitudinal barriers and provide disability training to counsellors

Many participants in the research, disabled women and service providers alike, agreed that there is a general lack of awareness and knowledge among non-disabled counsellors who are currently providing victim support. Counsellors must have the skills necessary to adapt their support to the needs of women with disabilities and be aware of issues of power imbalances in the lives of women with disabilities. If counsellors are aware of these issues this will decrease attitudinal barriers which is a common hindrance for women with disabilities who seek support. SVSSs need to promote disability related training on a regular basis for the counsellors, preferably in collaboration with women with disabilities, DPOs or ULOs. The training should address the specific situation of women with disabilities, the diverse manifestations of violence perpetrated against them and a social-relational understanding of disability.

Provide accessible support

The empirical research revealed that most victim support services were not accessible. SVSSs should assess their services and evaluate to what degree they are barrier free and acquaint themselves with ways to promote accessible and successful support to women with disabilities. Facilities need to be physically accessible, the services need to be flexible and counsellors must be knowledgeable about ways to meet

the diverse needs of women with disabilities. Furthermore, SVSSs have to address access for D/deaf women especially and ensure availability of staff members who use sign language.

Employ women with disability

It is important that SVSSs have a clearly stated strategy to employ women with disabilities and ensure their career progression within the organization. SVSSs should furthermore emphasize the participation of women with disabilities in leadership and management position and make sure they are involved in decision making at all levels. This is an important method of ensuring that support to women with disabilities is grounded in their experiences.

Provide services that are successful according to women with disabilities

Many women with disabilities who participated in this project called for increased peer support and peer counselling. SVSSs need to recognize women with disabilities as experts in their own lives and experiences and promote support service options that are valued by them. SVSSs should promote peer support and provide discussion forums and a safe space for women with disabilities, where they can meet and discuss their common experiences and the obstacles they face in everyday life. SVSSs should make sure that support for women with disabilities is always on their own terms and not based on the views and experiences of the non-disabled counsellors or professionals.

Provide accessible information about the services

Women with disabilities who took part in the research pointed to a lack of information about accessible victim support services. SVSSs should ensure that information about their counselling and support be made barrier free, e.g. in easy language, video clips in sign language and audio files. It is important that organizations indicate clearly in what ways their services are accessible.

Actively engage in discussions about violence against women with disabilities

Participants pointed out that public discussion about violence usually does not reflect the experiences of women with disabilities and does not take into consideration the disparity and imbalance of power they experience. SVSSs should acknowledge the oppressive processes and social structures that disempower persons with disabilities. They should publicly take a stance with women with disabilities and participate in awareness-raising about violence against them and participate in projects that increase awareness about violence and stereotypes among the general public and various professional groups. Furthermore SVSSs should participate in the training of professional groups that work within disability services to promote the knowledge of different manifestations of violence and the proper reactions when such cases arise.

Find ways to reach out to women with disabilities

Findings revealed a notable lack of connections between women with disabilities and specialized women's services. SVSSs should take measures to bridge the gap between women with disabilities and victim support services. SVSSs should initiate and engage in proactive projects and measures that reach out to women with disabilities

who have been violated. This should be in collaboration with DPOs, ULOs or disability service providers, preferably making a single point of contact for women with disabilities who seek support due to violence.

Collaborate with other organizations

SVSSs should collaborate with DPOs and ULOs in promoting a network of organizations engaged in advocating and fighting to end violence against women with disabilities.

3.5 Recommendations for disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and user led organizations (ULOs)

Participate in the fight against gendered violence

Several women with disabilities who participated in the project felt that DPOs and ULOs did not address gender based violence adequately. It is important that DPOs and ULOs recognize and advocate for the rights of women with disability to lead a life free from exploitation, violence and abuse, as articulated in Art.16 of the CRPD. DPOs and ULOs should participate in projects that address awareness-raising and preventative measures.

Collaborate with organizations that provide support to women with disabilities who have experienced violence

DPOs and ULOs should actively engage in collaboration with SVSSs and other organizations that offer support to women with disabilities who have experienced violence. For example, DPOs could provide SVSSs with disability equality training and help support organizations to address necessary accessibility issues. Such collaboration between organizations could promote barrier free access to SVSSs for women with disabilities. A united effort would also make for a more coordinated lobbying and advocacy for implementation and funding projects directed at women with disabilities and violence.

Promote information about accessible services for survivors of violence

While many DPOs and ULOs do not have the resources to take on specific aspects of support for women with disabilities who have experienced violence, they could have an important role in providing information and in directing women with disabilities to accessible support services. DPOs and ULOs should provide barrier free information about different manifestations of violence in the lives of women with disabilities and accessible support services. Participants in the project stressed that collaboration between DPOs, ULOs and SVSSs could be important in bringing accessible information to women with disabilities who have experienced violence. ULOs and DPOs can play a crucial role in directing women with disabilities to accessible help and support.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the national empirical research from all four countries that participated in this project revealed that women with disabilities experience many forms of violence including sexual, physical, emotional and service related. This violence is widespread and often takes place over a long period of time. Violence against women with disabilities is closely related to their social exclusion and powerlessness due to reliance on carers and services, among other things. This project also found that women with disabilities who have experienced violence face many and significant barriers in seeking counselling, support services and access to justice.

The national research teams, in collaboration with stakeholders and advisory group participants, developed guidelines for identifying good practices in supporting women with disabilities who have experienced violence. These guidelines were used by each national team to identify good practice examples, some of which have been described in this report. Due to space limitations, only a few examples made their way into this report. However, we have attempted to select examples from the four countries which reflect the various types and kinds of support services, organizations and programs available. Although none of the support services encountered in this project met all the criteria, a number of them met the criteria in many significant ways. We found the guidelines to be particularly helpful and hopefully others can make use of the 'Good Practice Principles and Guidelines', both in developing and monitoring services and access to justice.

We are cautious that it may be inappropriate or problematic to transfer 'best practices' from one location or context to another. However, we do hope that the 'good practice' examples described in this report will be an inspiration to those who are developing accessible support services to women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

An important aspect of this project was to develop recommendations regarding ways to improve services and facilitate access to supports for women with disabilities who have experienced violence, as well as identify preventative measures. The recommendations listed in this report were suggested by a range of participants including women with disabilities, counsellors, members of national advisory groups and other stakeholders. Interestingly, and despite the fact that the recommendations came from a diverse group of participants, there were significant overlaps and similarities, indicating key areas that need attention in addressing how to improve policies and various support services and programs for women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

In conclusion: A main finding of this project is that successful policy making, planning, developing, implementing and monitoring of initiatives regarding violence against women with disabilities requires active and meaningful participation of women with disabilities themselves at all levels and in all areas.

Appendix 1

Good practice principles and guidelines

Guiding principles for ‘good practice’ in specialized service provision

- **Human rights.** Specialized support services should reflect the CRPD, current knowledge and human rights standards with regards to women with disabilities.
- **Social-relational understanding of disability.** Support for and work with women with disabilities should be grounded in the social-relational understanding of disability as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities CRPD.
- **Listening to women with disabilities.** Advisors should believe the stories and experiences of disabled women and begin there – not from the point of view of ‘specialists’. Furthermore, they should use these experiences to inform development of provisions and services.
- **Respecting self-determination.** Specialized support services should take care that the work is grounded on the will and preferences of the women with disabilities. They must be aware of the subordinate status of women with disabilities in society and knowledgeable about methods that counter a common power imbalance between advisors and survivors of violence.
- **Confidentiality and respect for privacy.** Confidentiality is important for women with disabilities who seek assistance – also for those women who may have their legal capacity questioned or removed. If there are legal limits to confidentiality it must be clear from the outset.
- **Safe space.** Specialized support services for women with disabilities should be safe spaces. It is important to note that “safe space” may be defined in different ways by different groups of women and so it is important that safe space should be defined as such by women with disabilities. In order to be a safe space, services must address discrimination and harassment against disabled women within their services.
- **Self-empowerment.** Specialized support services should strive to promote self-empowerment of women with disabilities and offer a range of options/ methods for women to build on their strengths.
- **Accessibility.** Support offered by specialized support services should be accessible to women with different impairments. Services should ensure accessibility as defined by Art.9 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- **Diversity.** Specialized support services must recognise the diversity within the population of women with disability.
- **Employment of women with disabilities.** Specialized support services should include women with disabilities at all levels of the organization, including decision-making.
- **Partnership and participation.** Support services should work in equal partnerships with disabled women and listen to women’s expertise. They should adhere to the principle “nothing about us without us”.

- **Knowledge about violence particular to disabled women.** Support services must understand and recognise that although women with disabilities face the same violence as other women (i.e. domestic and sexual violence, forced marriage etc.) they are likely to face additional forms of violence related to their disability.
- **Holistic view.** Specialized support services should promote the women's overall health and well-being and physical and emotional safety.
- **Individual approach.** Support services should use individualised approach when supporting women, as women with disabilities have different needs.
- **Recognise women with different conditions.** Support services should recognise that some groups of women (e.g. women with autism; D/deaf women) may or may not identify as having impairments but need purposeful measures to ensure the accessibility of services. They should be knowledgeable about the particular situation and requirements of these women and work in partnership with individuals or respective organizations.

Criteria for identifying 'good practices' in the provision of specialized support services for women with disabilities

Accessibility

- Is the support service pro-active in reaching out to women with disabilities, keeping in touch and offering on-going support? Does it offer outreach through hotlines, web-based counselling or other such services with the aim of reaching all women?
- Does the support service ensure that their facilities are accessible to the range of women with disabilities and meet their diverse needs (physical accessibility, assistive communication, access to interpreters etc.)?
- Does the support service provide accessible information about their services (e.g. information in accessible forms on internet or pamphlets)?
- Does the support service ensure technical accessibility that meets the diverse needs of women with disabilities? For example, does it ensure necessary safety equipment and precautions to meet the needs of women with different impairments (e.g. visual fire signals for deaf women and precautions that meet the needs of women with autism)?
- Does the support service welcome women with disabilities as a part of a diverse group of women or are they seen as 'difficult', 'too much work' or 'hard to work with'? Does it take measures to ensure staff to have positive attitudes towards disabled women seeking help?
- Does the support service ensure reasonable adjustment and flexibility in their services to meet the needs of women with disabilities (e.g. take the time needed for effective communication)?

Knowledge/awareness

- Does the support service address the range of different types of violence that are particular to women with disabilities?
- Is there knowledge within the service about the particular social situation of women with disabilities (e.g. the profound prejudice many of them face), the most common dis-

ability related context (e.g. frequency and prevalence of violence) and is it grounded in the social-relational understanding of disability?

- Does the support service promote disability awareness by providing ongoing training to workers on all levels of the support services about disability related issues and violence that is particular to disabled women. Is the training grounded on the social – relational understanding of disability? Is the training delivered by women with disabilities?
- Does the support service integrate the needs of women with disabilities into their policies and practices (mainstreaming) or are services and access for women with disabilities considered on an as needed basis?
- Does the support service challenge limiting social structures and conditions which discriminate against women with disability?

Self-empowerment

- Does the support service ensure provisions that are self-empowering and inclusive which women with disabilities value highly, such as self-help groups and peer support?
- Does the service support disabled women to secure a safe home of their own and ensure independent living support and assistance to develop skills as needed?

Participation

- Does the support service employ women with disabilities?
- Does the service have a commitment to career/leadership development of disabled women (e.g. training, facilitating involvement, support for participation).
- Does the specialized support service collaborate equally with user led organizations/ interest groups/activists and disabled women?
- When the support service decides to introduce a new service (project) for disabled women, are disabled women involved in its development and delivery?

Diversity

- Does the service address the experiences and needs of disabled women from diverse communities (e.g. lesbian women, trans women, Black and Minority Ethnic women, migrant and refugee women)?

Access to justice - ‘good practice’ criteria

Good practice criteria from the perspective of specialized support service providers

- Do women with disabilities receive education and training about their rights or are they assisted to seek such education?
- Are women with disabilities educated about the dynamics of violence or assisted in seeking such education?
- Are women with disabilities supported by the service in gaining access to justice through formal complaint mechanisms, reporting the crime to the police, are interpreters available, etc.?
- Does the service include legal counselling for women with disabilities?

- Does the support service promote access to justice for women with disabilities by providing ongoing training to workers on all levels concerning legislation on violence against women, formal complaint mechanisms, legal counselling and access to compensation?

General criteria for good practices regarding access to justice

- Are there formal complaint mechanisms for women with disabilities who have been violated?
- Have police officers, lawyers, prosecutors and judges received training in the area of disability and violence against women with disabilities in order to strengthen the position of women with disabilities as reliable witnesses in order to ensure that women with disabilities are regarded as credible when they report a crime or in court?
- Are alternative methods and ways of communication regarded as acceptable (e.g. by police, courts, etc.) and equally credible as conventional ways of communication when women with disabilities report violence?
- Are women with disabilities entitled to free legal assistance prior and during criminal proceedings?
- Is the access to existing schemes of legal assistance for women with disabilities ensured?
- Are women with disabilities entitled to free psycho-social assistance during court proceedings?
- Is access to compensation ensured by for instance a compensation-fund for victims of crime or legal/psycho-social assistance during civil proceedings?
- Is the legislation on violence against women (e.g. specific legal act against domestic violence) applicable and applied in practice to women with disabilities living in institutions or care?
- Is there any form of institutionalised communication between police and service providers in case violence against women with disabilities is reported to the police?