



# FACTSHEET

## Youth with Disabilities: Rights, Participation and Inclusion

In a global population of 7.4 billion people,  
**1 billion (15%) are persons with disabilities**

**19.2% of the female population are women and girls with disabilities**

There are an estimated **180 million young people (10 – 24 years) with disabilities**—more than 144 million of which live in low income countries

### DID YOU KNOW....

- Persons with disabilities are up to **3 times more likely** to experience **physical, sexual, and emotional violence**
- **19.2% of the female population are women and girls with disabilities**
- Women with disabilities are **up to 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence**
- Between **40% – 68% of young women with disabilities** and between **16% - 30% of young men with disabilities** will experience **sexual violence before the age of 18**
- Women with disabilities in institutions are **more likely to experience forced abortions and sterilizations, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual, emotional and physical violence**

[Knowing and understanding your rights](#) is an important step towards ensuring full inclusion and meaningful participation for you, your friends and others in your communities and in our societies. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other frameworks are powerful tools you can use! Read below for more information, and come with questions to your regional online briefing with representatives from the UN Population Fund, International Disability Alliance and local and regional experts.

## What is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—the CRPD—is a legally-binding human rights treaty that was adopted at the United Nations in New York in 2006. **The CRPD saw a fundamental shift for persons with disabilities: from a medical model of disability to a social model and rights-based approach.**

The social model of the CRPD recognizes that persons with disabilities face barriers as a result of the social structure of our societies. These barriers limit the ability of persons with disabilities to realize their rights and opportunities on an equal basis with all other people in society. It is a whole-of-society approach, and recognizes that persons with disabilities themselves must be involved in decision-making processes that impact their lives if we are to achieve inclusive and accessible societies and human, cultural and social rights for all. The medical model viewed disability as a problem that belonged solely to persons with disabilities; a medical issue to be treated or prevented and the responsibility of persons with disabilities alone.

## What does the CRPD do?

The CRPD lays out all categories of rights and states how they apply to persons with disabilities. It also explains what is required by States Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to effectively exercise their rights, and identifies areas in which their rights may have traditionally been violated and protection of rights must be enforced.

The treaty covers all persons with disabilities in every corner of the world. Women and men, young and old, living in rural areas or in large cities—the Convention does not discriminate. The freedom to make one’s own choices; non-discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; and equality between men and women are listed as some of the Convention’s over-arching principles (Article 3). The CRPD recognizes that everyone has the right to equality, independence, access, inclusion and participation in all elements of society.

## The CRPD places strong emphasis on the full inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities:

Article 4.3 of the CRPD states that “In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall **closely consult with and actively involve persons** with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations”.

## The CRPD is also unique because it is the only treaty to explicitly recognize the right to sexual and reproductive health:

According to CRPD Article 25(a) on right to health, States Parties should “Provide persons with disabilities with the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other persons, **including in the area of sexual and reproductive health** and population-based public health programmes.”

## What else exists that addresses these issues?

- **International human rights treaties:** the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. The CRPD Committee, which monitors the implementation of the Convention, has produced a document which provides further information and details relating to Article 6 of the Convention, called “CRPD Committee General Comment No.3 on women and girls with disabilities”.
- **Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The SDGs address sexual and reproductive health and rights under Goal 3 (Health): “By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. The rights of women and girls with disabilities are addressed under Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), and are included in target 5.1 (ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere). Target 5.6 also puts a strong emphasis on women and girls own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care, while targets 5.2 address violence against women and girls, and target 5.3 on ending harmful practices including female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage.
- **UNFPA and the WE DECIDE Programme:** UNFPA’s programmes center on ensuring that women, adolescents, young people and other vulnerable and excluded groups, including persons with disabilities, are empowered to make decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health and life options. UNFPA and partners have initiated a programme to promote the human rights and social inclusion of young persons living with disabilities, entitled “**WE DECIDE: Young Persons with Disabilities. A Programme for Equal Opportunities and a Life Free of Violence**”. The programme centers on ending gender based violence against women and young persons with disabilities and promoting access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **International Conference on Population and Development “Programme of Action”:** calls on States to address the sexual and reproductive health requirements of persons with disabilities and to eliminate specific forms of discrimination that persons with disabilities may face with regard to reproductive rights, including family planning and sexual health, HIV/AIDS, information, education and communication.

## Questions for consideration:

### 1. The right to social inclusion and participation

- Do you feel there are **barriers or stigma to your participation and inclusion in your community or networks**? Are these barriers physical, communicational, attitudinal, or a mix?
- What are some **positive experiences of inclusion and participation** that you've experienced, in your community, among other young people, in the disability community?
- Do you have any **suggestions for how to improve** the inclusion and participation of young people with disabilities?

### 2. The right to be free from gender-based violence (GBV)

- What was your reaction to the statistic on the **percentage of young women with disabilities experiencing sexual violence** before age 18?
- Are you aware of any **education and awareness campaigns** that have been specifically directed to women and youth with disabilities on sexual and reproductive health rights?
- Are there **gender-based violence services you can access**? If not, why not? Do you feel you have the same access to information as young people without disabilities?

### 3. The opportunity to access and exercise your sexual and reproductive health rights

- Do you feel you have **good access to information on sexual and reproductive health**, and your sexual and reproductive health rights?
- Are there **unique experiences or barriers you think young people with disabilities face** with regards to conversations, information and education on sexual and reproductive health?
- Do you think **health service providers need to think differently** about sexual and reproductive health in order to be more inclusive of young people with disabilities? If so, why?