



Intersecting Agendas: Gender and Disability-Inclusive Peacebuilding at the UN

September 26, 2025

Transcript from Q&A (participants' names anonymous)

[Deborah] And what we'd like to do now is to open up the conversation to the audience, to those of you online. We have about 15 minutes for this final question and answer section. We invite you to use raise your hand feature in the Zoom, which is at the bottom of your screen or you can post your question in in the chat. If you're--if you've got something specific targeted to a specific panelist, please note that as well. And we'll read out any questions in the chat. So anybody have any questions? I'm going to just...I'm not easily seeing anything.

Question 1

[Deborah reading from chat of Audience Member 1] Is there disaggregated data for women with intellectual disabilities in peacekeeping? I think that's open to all of you. And may I invite you to even think more broadly than just to segregated data, but mechanisms to include women with disabilities, with intellectual disabilities in particular, any of our panelists. Thank you. [Audience Member 1] did you want to speak to that at all? No. OK, great. Any of our panelists want to start? Kirstin Lange, can I start with you?

[Kirstin] It's great yes and it's a really great question. So what a good way to kick off our Q&A, a really important one. And I wish I had a very good answer. And unfortunately I don't, I'm not aware of this level of disaggregation of data being available. I'm a bit more, bit more aware of data on persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. And I think we, we are likely a little bit more advanced on, on data in the humanitarian space than we are in

peacekeeping. And even in the humanitarian space, we don't have this level of disaggregation. So I, I think it's definitely a very key challenge. Generally the, the level of desegregation that we have is persons with disabilities, persons without disabilities, which really does mean that we we lose a lot of the very important detail around who exactly is included and and excluded. And we know that it's women and girls with intellectual disabilities that face particularly high levels of exclusion. So I think it's a really important one. I think Deborah's point around making sure that we're not just looking at disaggregated data, but also also processes for strengthening inclusion. And I would say also qualitative data, like we need more information on why is it that women and girls with intellectual disabilities are being excluded? What are some of the specific barriers that they're facing? What are some of the enablers to their inclusion? We, we don't have that so much.

I think there's some really practical approaches that I've seen. So for example, ensuring that information is available in easy read formats, ensuring that women with intellectual disabilities are involved in decision making processes. But it's definitely one where we're falling, falling quite far behind. So thank you for raising it.

[Deborah] Thank you. [Audience Member 1], did you want to follow up? Looks like you're ready. You're, you've got a bated breath.

[Audience Member 1] I was going to type, I was thinking that, you know, if there is no disaggregated data, I'm thinking in the context of Mexico, which I know the best. Perhaps sometimes the human rights violations reported through national commissions or through any other instances or through organizations could inform the need for, for the visibility of, I mean not only the barriers, but what the situation is to start from there, from human rights violations to women with intellectual disability.

[Kirstin] I think it's a really great point.

{Deborah] Anybody else on the panel want to respond?

[Kirsten] I'm just going to respond and repeat that there there's almost no publicly available data on women with disabilities and peace building, which...and specifically there's no data on women with intellectual disabilities in peacebuilding, even in terms of academic articles that exist.

Disability is not disaggregated in anyways and almost every article that's been written just says like the conclusion is that women with disabilities are systemically excluded from peacebuilding, peace operations, and the WPS agenda without getting into the finer minutia. And that is a really challenging place to start from both in a policy and an academic sense.

[Deborah] And if I can just add, I think it's really important that we recognize that there hasn't been...the implication of this lack of disaggregation of experiences of disability-- whether it's women with intellectual disabilities, blind women, deaf women, women with mobility impairments--means that the solutions around inclusion and accessibility are also not representative of that diversity among women with disabilities. And, and so I think that's the importance of what you're pointing us to is that it's not just that we have to think about the inclusion of women, but we need to understand how diverse women with disabilities are and how their experiences vary based on both how they experience disability in their beings, but also in how their community includes or doesn't include them in various ways.

[Bogna] Can I also add something?

[Deborah] Yeah, go ahead Bogna.

[Bogna] Yeah, no, I'm also not aware and I also agree it's a great question. I'm not aware of any data. I think we can only assume that women with intellectual disabilities face additional stigma. I think also when we look at the woman with disabilities being very often victims of violence, sexual-related violence, I can only assume and unfortunately without any data as mentioned that when it comes women with disabilities, they might be of a higher risk.

And I think there's also this social perception on their intellectual capacities, you know how far they can and how how much they can contribute. Not really based on any evidence,. But what I also wanted to mention that I think that I also very much agree with the need to, to make the communication easier. There's a lot of discussion now about the easy to understand language, that we tend to use a lot of words that are very difficult to understand. And I think this is also one of the examples that can prove to be so beneficial for so many groups. No, of course, when we talk about women with intellectual disabilities that can have accessible information, easy to read, easy to read language, easy to read format, that's great. But that will also imply to, I don't know, migrant women that might not be fluent in the language or be applied to all the older women that might also have some reading difficulties. And there are lots of examples.

And then I think this is so important to show that you know, a measure that might be targeting just a specific group might actually be very beneficial to a wide range of women with very different needs and and who found themselves in very different situations.

Question 2

[Deborah] Great, Thank you. Yeah, I want to come back to this if we have time later because I think there's a lot of depth potential here, but I wanted to make sure that [Audience

Member 2], my brand new colleague at University of Guelph, gets a chance. Did you want to ask your question yourself or did you want me to read it from the chat?

[Audience Member 2] It's okay if you read it.

[Deborah] OK, thanks. So [Audience Member 2] is asking, can Kirsten and I'm not sure which one it is, but the Kirstin with an I from Geneva or the Kirsten with an E.

[Audience Member 2] UNICEF. I think UNICEF -- Kirstin Lange spoke about social norms.

[Deborah] Right. So can Kirstin speak more about the changing social norms? I think we agree that one big factor driving women's exclusion in these spaces is social norms and the associated shame that the society often ascribes to disability, not minding some of these disabilities were the result of conflict. So what interventions have worked and where? Thank you.

[Kirstin] Again, a really excellent question. Thank you. And yes, I mean, what we find is that these social norms are one of the biggest obstacles to inclusion and participation. And as you rightly point out, I mean, the social norms are a huge challenge in any context. But if you bring in the element of conflict, we also see in some settings, for example, that people with disabilities are associated with the conflict, with being actors in the conflict, even if that isn't the case in reality. So it's definitely a huge challenge. What we're seeing makes the most difference is if persons with disabilities themselves, children and young people with disabilities, are engaged actively in in peacebuilding initiatives so that they're actually the ones who are co-creating initiatives, develop--delivering initiatives and are seen to have that very important role that they do have in their community.

And maybe I could just share like one or two additional short examples around that. One was from Iraq. So UNICEF and Iraq had enhanced its existing social and behaviour change initiatives to better engage children with disabilities. So they were, for example, having national community workshops, they were having focus group discussions, community feedback sessions. And they launched the the Do It Right campaign which was about breaking barriers and promoting inclusion for persons with disabilities. They reached 5 million people through radio spots, 13 million through mobile phone SMSs, and youth with disabilities were engaged in this as co-creators. In Nepal, for example, UNICEF worked on, I mean it's not a conflict setting, but still still responding to the question, worked on post earthquake response and also implemented peer-to-peer mediation activities where young people with disabilities were trained as peer facilitators in in peace clubs. That's just two examples. I also think what I've seen at UNICEF and with our partners is that what makes a huge difference--and the original Kirsten [Van Houten], not the other Kirstin [Lange], touched on this as well in her intervention--is having people with disabilities as staff of

these organisations. It makes a massive difference. It requires some investment and commitment from the organisation to reasonable accommodation. At UNICEF, for example, we have essentially held a Reasonable Accommodation Fund. We have a Greening and Accessibility Fund and it's really key to ensure that that people with disabilities have had that space that they should have amongst our staff. I hope that goes some way to answering the question.

[Deborah] Thank you. Any other panelists want to respond to this point? It seems to me that if we bring it back to one of the points that the other Kirsten Van Houten mentioned, which is the current global political climate and environment that--I often say to people, it's so important to be able to disclose that you are, for those of us with invisible disabilities like me, to be able to feel safe enough to disclose that. Because I then provide, you know, an example to other people that you can do this, right? Or at least somebody has done this. And, and yet in this current global climate, it's not always safe, frankly, to disclose disability. And those with--who don't have to disclose, you know, whose disability is either apparent or assumed, there are equally as significant safety issues in terms of their experience as persons with disabilities. So I just wonder, not wanting to take up space, but I just want to build off that notion of how do we in this climate, where disability is now seen in for many people and has been in the past as something not to be not just shame, but something not to be visible that you, you need to deal with it. How do we deal with that in these contexts? Anybody have a comment?

[Kirsten] So I'm going to comment on both questions. And then I'm also going to follow up on an administrative note. We seem to have lost Janet.

[Deborah] I did notice that.

[Kirsten] Which wasn't anticipated, but we also see that there's a phone number from the Baltimore area and we're wondering if Janet switched to the phone.

[Janet] I did.

[Deborah] OK, good.

[Janet] I have lost my Internet, I'm so sorry about that, but I'm listening.

[Kirsten] And do you want to add anything at this point before I jump in here?

[Janet] I'd love you to jump right in.

[Kirsten] OK. So I want to talk more about inclusion norms because this is really the focus of this phase of my research. And one of the things that I found interesting and that we're trying to include it in the paper that we hope will be published soon, is that one of our

findings is that inclusion broadly in the international system, it doesn't seem to have happened all at once. So it was really sparked, at least in relation to peace building, with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and subsequent inclusivity agendas have followed. So you know, we saw first women with this - sorry - women, then we saw youth and then with UN SR2475 we have a little bit of dabbling with disability. And what I heard from numerous staff people with UN Women was that they think that the disability inclusivity norm in peace building will sort of emerge at the same pace that women with disability did, but it's 20 years behind. And so because the UN system doesn't deal very well with intersectionality and we've heard varying degrees of UN agencies that are doing better at this like, UNICEF, than others in terms of like the whole whole system or a whole system approach to inclusivity. It's sort of hard to see that lagging and or emerging like it's there, but it's in its infancy, particularly for women with disabilities. And I think that, you know, from a purely intellectual standpoint, that's a really interesting finding in terms of norm evolution. Sorry for yeah, engaging in that little academic sentiment there. And I also wanted to respond to Deborah's comment. And I mean, I think that one of the ways that we can do this in any public space that we're doing is to continue to acknowledge that and there are people with disabilities in the room, encourage self-identification and make sure that supports are available. And this can happen at every level, right? It can happen. I saw that there was somebody from the City of Ottawa here. I don't know if they're still here, but like that could happen in a community meeting. It could happen in, at a City Hall, it could happen in the classroom, it could happen on the floor of the General Assembly, You know, so we can apply that in a multi-scalar sense just in the same way that I would try to apply this project in a multi-scalar sense. Maybe other people have other things to say.

[Deborah] I'm actually going to have to hold us there. I do see that [name withheld] from the City of Ottawa's accessibility office said she is here. So welcome, [name withheld], and thank you, Kirsten for those strong reminders that disclosing in a safer environment with the right supports is possible. And so one of our goals is to create safer spaces and brave spaces where we can take our courage in hand and disclose even though it may not be safe, because that helps others as well as ourselves.

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