

Finding Their Place: Towards the Inclusion of Women with Disabilities in UN-led Peacebuilding Efforts

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Over the past twenty-five years, inclusion has been increasingly integrated into the peace and security pillar at the United Nations (UN). This inclusivity norm was launched through the Women, Peace and Security agenda under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and later in the Youth, Peace and Security agenda initiated by UNSCR 2250. This commitment to inclusion is more broadly applied through the Leave No One Behind Principle of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in UN activities under the peace and security pillar has been slower to emerge. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action and peacebuilding is guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006. UNSCR 2475 on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding and humanitarian action was adopted in 2019 and affirms this inclusion under the peace and security pillar.

There are no policies or Security Council Resolutions within the UN which specifically ensure the inclusion and participation of women with disabilities in activities under this pillar. Moreover, no specific consideration is afforded to this group under the WPS agenda or the emerging disability, peace and security agenda. As a result, women with disabilities are sparsely represented in National Action Plans on WPS and subsequent reporting, and they are also excluded from reporting on the implementation of UNSCR 2475 and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, which also omits gender considerations and was released in the same year.

This exclusion in policy has translated to women with disabilities being overlooked and under-represented in peacebuilding and peace operations. Participants from five UN Departments and Agencies involved in “Finding their Place: The Contributions of Women with Disabilities to Peacebuilding Efforts” described challenges in identifying who women with disabilities are and what role they play in peace and conflict. As a result, they are sporadically included in meetings, consultations, and other activities held by the UN and its agencies, and there is limited specific programming that targets their engagement in peace and security.

This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, women, persons with disabilities, and women with disabilities are all disproportionately targets of violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, during periods of armed conflict and should be included in designing programming for a more peaceful future. This is amplified by the fact that war is disabling and may increase the percentage of the population who have disabilities. In addition, women are members of armed forces and may have pre-existing disabilities or acquire disabilities during conflict. Programming that targets the greater inclusion of women in armed forces should be designed to support women with disabilities. Further, in contexts where women with disabilities are part of armed groups, specific disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration activities should be deployed to support them. Without these parameters, women with disabilities risk returning from armed conflict even more vulnerable to stigmatization and exclusion in their civilian communities.

Recommendations

Based on the preliminary findings of “Finding their Place,” it is clear that there is a need for the codification of the inclusion of women with disabilities specifically within policy and Security Council resolutions in the peace and security pillar of the UN. In order for this to occur, this level of inclusion will require both state and institutional champions. Support from states could be sought among the Groups of Friends engaged in with issues related to women, disability, and peace and security. Ideally, a UN department or agency could also act as a focal point on this matter. Furthermore, establishing a dedicated working group within the UN could drive coordinated efforts and policy development, while fostering partnerships with civil society organizations would help amplify the voices of women with disabilities and ensure their direct participation in the field.

In addition, recommendations were also collected from participants in this study reflecting the technical aspects of disability and gender inclusion within UN departments and agencies. They include:

1. A Dual Track Approach

This type of approach would include both a conducive policy environment and individual accommodations to facilitate the participation of women with disabilities in UN-led peacebuilding activities. A more enabling policy environment could ensure that internal UN policies related to the inclusion of women in peacebuilding are disability-sensitive and that policies supporting disability inclusion are gender-sensitive. Moreover, a new Security Council resolution could be drafted to integrate disability into the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda when political conditions create a more receptive environment for issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Individual accommodations could include ensuring that participants have access to the supports that they need to fully engage in UN-led peacebuilding activities.

2. Education and Training

This training could focus on the roles that women with disabilities play in conflict and peacebuilding. It could emphasize the implementation of an intersectional approach to inclusive peacebuilding.

3. Designated Funds within the UN Peacebuilding Fund

The UN Peacebuilding Fund has already allocated over 30% of available funding to gender equality programming. A portion of these funds could be specifically allocated for the inclusion of women with disabilities in peacebuilding, as well as for peacebuilding activities led by women with disabilities.

4. Improved Data Collection

Monitoring and evaluation activities should include data collection on disabilities and the intersection of gender and disabilities, in addition gender alone, to better understand how women with disabilities are participating in UN-led peacebuilding programs and their

experiences within those programs. This data could then be used to design more inclusive programming.