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Toward rights and justice of and with women and girls with disabilities

Representing women and girls with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW, 2021 and 2022: WHO REPRESENTS?



EDID-GHDI

Engendering
Disability-Inclusive
Development

Genre, handicap et
développement
inclusif

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List of Abbreviations

BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSCM	Civil Society Coordination Mechanism
COSP	Conference of States Parties to the CRPD
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil society organization
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
NGO CSW/NY	NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN-CSW	Commission on the Status of Women

Executive Summary

This report presents the first results of a research study conducted as part of the Transnational Stream of the project *Engendering Disability-Inclusive Development – Genre, handicap et développement inclusif* (EDID-GHDI), funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Object: This research examines the representation of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities in the meetings of the Conference of States Parties (COSP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and of the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women (UN-CSW). These are the international arenas where their issues are the most regularly discussed in the meetings’ side events and parallel events, and where speakers from organizations centring women and girls with disabilities are most likely to participate.

Goals: The study aims to document and analyze “**who represents**” the diversity of women and girls with disabilities and their issues in these international arenas, which women and girls are engaged and represented in these events, and how this engagement compares between the two settings.

Institutional context: The COSP has been meeting annually since 2008 at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York, with the mandate “to consider any matter with regard to the implementation of the Convention” (UN, 2006, article 40). Annual meetings of the UN-CSW have been held at UN headquarters since 1947. The current mandate of the commission is to evaluate progress made on the implementation of major international treaties and programs, particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), within the human rights framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Method: We collected data at the 2021 and 2022 meetings of the COSP and UN-CSW, held online during the COVID-19 pandemic, paying close attention to the side events and parallel events focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.

Theory: This study is anchored in relevant contributions from feminist theories of representation, critical and feminist studies of disability, and critical geography. We understand representation as having a dual nature. It is the act of producing and exchanging meanings on a constituency by speaking on behalf of, for, or more largely about the latter; it is also the representations themselves, that is, what is said about this constituency’s experiences, issues, problems, and what needs to be done politically. In any given political arena, a variety of actors are engaged in the work of representation, and contests arise among them about who represents best, as well as about what is represented. The motto “Nothing about us without us” embodies this contest. It also asserts that “who represents” matters for what is represented. Feminist theories of representation suggest we distinguish between the different categories of political actors speaking about women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW, and that we pay attention to the intersectional social identities that are mobilized (or not) by civil society actors in these venues. Paired with insights from critical geography, critical and feminist studies of disability in the Global South draw our attention to the differences that spatial and economic geographies may make to the process and substance of representation.

Place of the present report in our research process: This first report on “Who represents” lays the foundations for the second phase of our research, which will focus on “What is represented”—that is, on how the diversity of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities is represented in the substance of the representations put forward by the speakers participating in these events.

Outline: **Section 1** presents our research questions and objectives. **Section 2** details our methodology of data collection. **Section 3** explains how we approach theoretically the question of “who represents” and how we operationalize it for data analysis. **Sections 4 and 5** offer an overview of the organization of the COSP and UN-CSW meetings and the role of civil society in these arenas, as well as a first-level, descriptive synthesis of “who represents” women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in our selection of side events in 2021 and 2022. We describe the institutional context of each annual meeting; then we map out who the speakers and organizers are by categories of political actors and by spatial and economic geographies. We also look at the social differences founding self-representation in these events. **Section 6** moves to a more in-depth analysis of (1) who is doing the work of representation in these settings, (2) why these speakers and not others, and (3) the possibilities and limits of the representation of women and girls with disabilities at COSP and UN-CSW.

KEY FINDINGS

from our study of the side events and parallel events focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022

A. The representation of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities was greater at COSP, where side events focusing on these groups and their issues accounted for 13.3% (2021) and 10.5% (2022) out of a total of about 80 side events each year. In comparison, they were the focus of a smaller number of side and parallel events at the UN-CSW and accounted for less than 1% of a total of about 850 (2021) and 950 (2022) side and parallel events. **Who represents them and their issues?**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ASK “WHO REPRESENTS?” WOMEN, GIRLS, OR GENDER AND SEXUAL MINORITIES AND THEIR ISSUES IN THESE VENUES?

First, it is important because “Who Represents” matters for “What Is Represented” about disability. This idea has been encapsulated in the slogan *Nothing About Us Without Us*, which is based in the claim that the experiential knowledge that persons with disabilities have of their lives, their needs, and the ways to meet them, as well as of their experiences of oppression and changes required, is more effective for elaborating policy and making decisions that maximize benefits to persons with disabilities and can spur progressive societal transformation.

Second, asking “Who Represents” is also important for disability politics because the “Us” in *Nothing About Us Without Us* is not homogeneous. Rather, lived experiences of disability are intersectional; that is, they are criss-crossed in various ways by social hierarchies and power relations, including (and not limited to) those related to gender and sexuality.

B. Who represents – Categories of political actors

A variety of political actors are engaged in the work of representation—in producing, circulating, and exchanging meanings, that is, representations (in the plural)—about women and girls, and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities and their issues in the events we analyzed. There are speakers from civil society organizations (CSOs) OF or FOR women with disabilities, CSOs OF or FOR people with disabilities and CSOs from other domains; representatives of multilateral institutions or governments; as well as unaffiliated activists, academics, and other individuals.

- Speakers from CSOs in the disability sector form the most numerous category of political actors in our selection of events at both the COSP and the UN-CSW. Overall, the proportion of speakers from CSOs in the disability sector was higher at the UN-CSW. In both arenas, about half or slightly fewer of these speakers were from CSOs OF women and girls, and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities and the other half was composed of 2/3 of organizations OF people with disabilities, and of 1/3 of organizations FOR people with disabilities.
- Doing the work of representing women and girls with disabilities and their issues as speakers from disability-led organizations at the COSP and UN-CSW is mostly a women’s affair, as women make up the overwhelming majority of speakers from these organizations at the events focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.
- Representatives of multilateral institutions or governments (i.e., high-level political actors) formed the second most often heard group of speakers in our selection of events at the COSP and UN-CSW, except for CSW65 where they ceded the second place to speakers from other CSOs (women’s or feminist in general; human rights; democracy).
- **Archival data on the yearly COSP meetings shows a changing balance** among the different political actors doing the work of representation about women and girls, and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities and their issues in this arena. There has been an important reduction over the years of the proportion of speakers affiliated with Multilateral institutions, Governments, Other CSOs, and Academia in the side events on these topics, as a growing number of CSOs from the disability sector and especially of organizations OF women with disabilities have provided speakers for these panels. There has also been a marked reduction in the proportions of speakers from CSOs FOR women and people with disabilities to the benefit of speakers from CSOs OF women and people with disabilities.

C. Who represents – social differences, minoritized groups and self-representation

The feminist literature on the representation of women and minority groups has shown that the mere presence of representatives who simply share their social characteristics with that of a minoritized group does not necessarily ensure they represent this group’s interests. Rather, the distinctive voices of minoritized groups flow from the collective act of mobilizing specific social differences as the basis for self-representation.

- At the COSP and the UN-CSW, not all speakers from disability-led organizations who appear to share the social/bodily location of being “women or girls with disabilities” effectively self-represent in this way, that is, speak as or on behalf of women and girls with disabilities or about gender issues in these venues. In fact, many do otherwise, speaking as or on behalf of “persons with disabilities,” “youth with disabilities,” “survivors of institutionalization,” “mad people,” etc., and about the issues that affect these groups, and this without any explicit link to a gender and disability politics.

Which minoritized groups of gender/sexuality and disability are effectively self-representing in these venues? And which are represented by others?

- Women with disabilities, Indigenous women with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities with disabilities (LGBTQI+ folks) were the most common self-representing marginalized groups in our selection of events. Self-representing these differences helps break with the ungendered and overly homogenizing dominant representations of “persons with disabilities” at COSP, and of “women” at the UN-CSW.
- Girls with disabilities, rural women with disabilities, and refugee women with disabilities were not the object of dedicated side or parallel events in 2021 and 2022, although they have sometimes been at past COSPs and UN-CSWs. These groups are very seldom invited to be the actors of their own representation(s)—that is, to speak about their experiences and the issues that affect them. Most of the time, they are represented by others rather than by themselves in these events.
- Racialized women with disabilities and migrant women with disabilities were neither discussed nor taken up as a basis for self-representation by movement actors in our selection of events, nor in any prior ones according to our scan of the archives of both meetings.
- The self-representation of constituencies of women with specific types of disabilities is rather uncommon, and cross-disability representation is the norm among speakers from the gender/sexuality and disability sector.

D. Who represents – spatial and economic geographies (CSOs from the disability sector)

Place matters to representation. The under-representation of voices from different world regions or GNI per capita economies means that less knowledge is shared and discussed regarding the experiences and issues faces by women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities from these contexts. In contrast, the over-representation of speakers from other world regions and economies means more knowledge is shared, and that these voices have more potential to influence international and national discussions, debates, and policy making, because they are present in higher proportions.

- At both the COSP and UN-CSW there was a consistent under-representation of disability sector voices from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (save for COSP15). This means that less knowledge is shared and discussed regarding the experiences and issues faced by women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in these regions. As well, voices from Sub-Saharan Africa were under-represented at COSP, but fairly represented at UN-CSW. Further, our analysis shows that voices from South Asia and North America are over-represented in these arenas. Speakers from CSOs from these two regions are therefore in a better position to influence discussions, debates, and eventually policy making in these arenas.
- There was a consistent over-representation of voices from lower-middle income economies at both the COSP and UN-CSW. Voices from low-income economies were under-represented at COSP but fairly represented at UN-CSW. Upper-middle income economies were under-represented in both arenas. Representation of voices from high-income economies was fair at both the COSP and UN-CSW.
- Overall, speakers from the Global South outnumbered those of the Global North. However, these numbers do not translate into an over-representation of the Global South, as the vast majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments are located in the Global South. Moreover, given that 80% of people with disabilities are in the Global South, there is room to foster a more balanced representation of the experiences and issues faced by women, girls, or

gender and sexual minorities with disabilities from the Global South at the COSP and UN-CSW.

E. Who represents – obstacles to participation for CSOs from the disability sector

Institutional norms and dominant practices that regulate COSP and CSW meetings, coupled with global inequalities, pose obstacles to the presence of speakers from the most marginalized categories of gender/sexuality and disability, including from the Global South.

- Who is invited to speak in these events and on what topics is a direct consequence of who the organizers are and of their political capacity to muster the financial resources to ensure accessibility (especially Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) captioning, closed captioning, sign language interpretation, and simultaneous translation), as well as the physical presence (travel and stay) of speakers when meetings are held in person. It is also tied to the organizers' own networks; that is, on whom the organizers know that can speak to this or that topic while adopting the desired angle. CSOs that are less visible and less connected to potential organizers risk not being solicited to provide speakers.
- Obtaining Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status is necessary for CSOs to organize side events at the COSP and UN-CSW. Hurdles in obtaining such consultative status favour the organization of side events by high-level actors, namely multilateral institutions and governments, and well-established CSOs. Only three organizations of women and girls with disabilities acted as organizers of the events we analyzed, with implications for what gets discussed regarding the experiences and issues faced by women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, and who gets invited.
- Besides depending on organizers to be invited to speak at the COSP and UN-CSW and to fund the associated costs, potential speakers from the disability sector face multiple barriers that limit their effective and meaningful participation in these meetings. Barriers to participation in on-line events include unequal access to reliable internet connections, computers, and technology skills. The most-often mentioned barriers to in-person participation include visa and immigration requirements to travel to New York, lack of on-site accessibility of buildings, and unequal knowledge of language (most events are conducted in English and simultaneous translation is rarely provided). These challenges are not faced equally by all CSOs of the disability sector and can exacerbate inequalities among them.

F. Possibilities and limits of civil society representation of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW

Institutional norms and dominant practices regulating COSP and CSW meetings also structure the possibilities of, and limits to, the effective and meaningful participation of speakers from the gender/sexuality and disability sector.

- The annual priority themes of the conferences may both facilitate or constrain the representation of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. Choosing “women and girls with disabilities,” “multiple discrimination,” or “addressing Beijing+25” as priority themes at past COSPs have incited the organizing of side events on gender-related topics and fostered the participation of speakers from CSOs that centre these categories in their work. By contrast, women and girls with disabilities have never been a priority theme at the UN-CSW. Other targeted priority themes are more constraining but may offer possibilities to innovate and enlarge the range of topics relevant to discussions of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities (for instance: rurality, armed conflict, climate change).

- Main events at the COSP and the UN-CSW are spaces where civil society representation occurs either by invitation or is restricted to CSOs with ECOSOC status. CSOs from the disability sector whose work centres gender/sexuality have so far been offered few possibilities for meaningful engagement.
- Despite its potential, the Civil Society Forum has provided very little formal space for the visibility of gender/sexuality and disability issues, let alone engagement and intra-movement alliance building by organizations of women with disabilities and other feminist disability activists from the disability sector.
- COSP side events are spaces in which CSOs from the gender/sexuality disability sector take it upon themselves to play a role in monitoring the implementation of the CRPD and various other international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, there is no direct mechanism for the substance of side events' testimonies and interventions to feed into policy processes, besides organizers arranging for and counting on the presence of representatives of UN agencies and governments as speakers or audience members.
- Informal spaces for face-to-face organizing and advocacy, such as the UN cafeteria or hallways, lounge areas, and cafés are key spaces for activists and advocates affiliated with CSOs to engage in networking among themselves and with officials, as well as in organizing and lobbying. These informal spaces are the ones that could not be put to fruition during COVID-19, when most COSP meeting went online.
- Finally, COSP meetings do not include substantive work or negotiations among stakeholders to adopt instruments for guiding the implementation of the Convention, contrary to the annual meetings of the UN-CSW, where CSOs have opportunities to influence Member States on the content of the *Agreed Conclusions* which aim at providing guidance on the implementation of the BPfA within the framework set by CEDAW.

1. Introduction

1.1 The study and its objectives

This study is part of the “Transnational Stream” of the *Engendering Disability-Inclusive Development – Genre, handicap et développement inclusif* (EDID-GHDI) research project. The goal of this broad research project is to uncover, co-create, and mobilize knowledge about diverse women and girls with disabilities, and to influence the development of policies that are critical to removing barriers and creating the conditions necessary for inclusion and participation.

The component of the Transnational Stream with which the present study engages is the issue of the representation of women and girls with disabilities in international arenas, namely at the yearly meetings of the CRPD’s Conference of States Parties (COSP) and of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN-CSW).

The initial research questions formulated in the EDID-GHDI project contribute to frame our study:

1. Where are diverse women and girls involved in international treaty body meetings (namely, the CRPD, CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC]) and other international events (UN-CSW, Global Disability Summit, etc.)?
2. Which women and girls are engaged and represented in these settings and events? Who is included and excluded, and why?
3. To what extent are women and girls with disabilities engaged in the processes of disability rights implementation and monitoring in international settings?
4. How are the experiences of diverse women and girls evident and represented in these settings and events? What changes happen over time?
5. How does the engagement and representation of women and girls with disabilities compare between different human rights frameworks?
6. How do women and girls with disabilities mobilize collectively within and across countries (i.e., transnationally) to claim their rights and disability justice?
7. How does what we learn challenge and reframe existing policy, practice, and intellectual approaches?
8. What changes are needed to (further) engage women and girls with disabilities and address their experiences and aspirations?

Research questions 1 to 5 have guided our first phase of data collection, which can be summed up as: where, by whom, and how the experiences of diverse women and girls with disabilities are represented in processes of disability rights implementation in international venues—outside of the Periodic Review cycles.

While our scan of the online archives of international events produced answers to research question 1, we set out to collect data on the annual meetings of the COSP and UN-CSW with the aim to answer research questions 2, 3, 4, and 5. More specifically, our general objectives were:

- A. Documenting and analyzing **who represents women and girls with disabilities in international settings** and where do the speakers come from in terms of organizational/institutional location; social difference and political identities; and geographies of representation;
- B. Documenting and analyzing **how women and girls with disabilities are represented** (that is, how they are talked about in these settings: which women and girls with disabilities, which issues, what analyses, with what kind of languages/discourses);

- C. Identifying and analyzing presences, absences, and under-representation (who is there or not there or is under-represented), and what does it mean in terms of the substance of the representations of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities—that is, of how they are represented.

This report offers an overview of the annual meetings of the COSP and the UN-CSW as international political arenas. It looks more closely at the representation of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities as reflected in the side events and parallel events at the UN-CSW and the COSP in 2021 and 2022. More precisely, the present report deals with the first of the objectives listed above—Objective A: who represents, that is, who is doing the work of representation—and part of Objective C: identifying and analyzing presences, absences, and under-representation. **Overall, the present report will help us understand “WHO REPRESENTS” women and girls with disabilities in these international arenas.**

This report also lays the groundwork for a second report dedicated to the content analysis of what was said at these events and by whom, with an eye to the diversity of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities (RE: Objective B: Research question #4: How are the experiences of diverse women and girls evident and represented in these settings and events? And What changes happen over time?). In a future phase, we hope to interview organizers and women leaders from CSOs of women and people with disabilities to understand better why they are involved (or not) in these events, and to inquire into how women and girls with disabilities mobilize collectively across countries to claim their rights (Research question #6).

1.2 Outline of the Report

In Section 2 of the report, we provide information about how we conducted the data collection (our methodology). In Section 3, we explain how the question of “who represents” is approached theoretically in this research (theory and operationalization). The remaining sections are dedicated to the COSP (Section 4) and the UN-CSW (Section 5) meetings. In each of these sections, we start with providing information about the institutional context in which the side events and parallel events we selected take place, giving an overview of the history, objectives, institutional structure, and organization of each of these international meetings. We also provide background information on the role granted to civil society in these political arenas and highlight some of the criticisms offered in the literature on this subject. Then we offer a descriptive analysis of the side and parallel events that focused on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities at the COSP and the UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022. For each edition of these annual meetings, we first give an overview of its priority themes and list the side and parallel events selected for our observation. Second, we present detailed, descriptive syntheses of who the speakers at these events are. More specifically, we map the distribution of all speakers by category of political actors, then we dwell on the organizational affiliation of speakers from the disability sector (OF/FOR women with disabilities or people with disabilities) as well as on their spatial and economic geographies, and the social differences they mobilize in collective and individual processes of self-representation. We also identify who the other speakers are from multilateral institutions, governments, and other CSOs. We then identify the organizers and sponsors of these side events by category of political actors and geography. Finally, we compare the 2021 and 2022 data.

In the last section of the report (Section 6), we analyze the data in relation to our research objectives A and C and the relevant research questions (#2, #3, and #5) onto which this section roughly maps. First, we look at who is doing the work of representation on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities, analyzing the distribution of speakers in relation to the different categories of political actors present in these settings, their spatial and economic geographies, and the political identities

mobilized by the speakers of the disability sector. Second, we analyze the role played by the organizers in producing the particular configurations of events and speakers we documented. We also highlight the institutional constraints on “who can organize” and their effects on the representation of the diversity of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities, along with those of other barriers on “who can speak” in these venues. Finally, we highlight the possibilities and constraints placed by the meetings’ priority themes on such representation, and we assess the potential and limits of the different spaces of engagement offered by the COSP and UN-CSW.

2. Methodology of Data Collection

2.1 Choice of venues

To identify the international venues in which to examine the (gendered and intersectional) representation of women and girls with disabilities, we started by conducting a scan of the electronic archives of key major international meetings organized by UN institutions and transnational¹ networks of people with disabilities, such as the International Disability Alliance (IDA). These international meetings are distinct from events held as part of the Periodic Review cycles monitored by UN institutions, and in which organizations of women or people with disabilities from signatory countries may also choose to participate to present alternative reports. Participation in the Periodic Review cycles is outside the purview of the present study (but see for instance Masson et al., 2023, on Haïti). What we are focusing on is the representation of women and girls with disabilities in international or transnational venues.

This first step has enabled us to see in which of these venues women and girls with disabilities and their issues have been the most discussed and where women with disabilities as political actors have been the most often involved. More specifically, we have examined the online archives of the following:

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Conference of States Parties (COSP) annual conference
- UN-Women:
 - Commission on the Status of Women (UN-CSW) annual conference
 - Generation Equality Forum
- Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Human Rights Council Social Forum
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Global Disability Summit

This scan of the archives has shown that the yearly meetings of the CRPD’s Conference of States Parties (COSP), held since 2008, and of the UN-Commission on the Status of Women (UN-CSW), held since 1947, are the settings where women and girls with disabilities are the object of the highest number of events and where their issues are regularly discussed. There was also a significant number of events on women with disabilities and their issues at the Global Disability Summit, but only two instances of the Summit (2018 and 2022) have been held to date. As well, there have been attempts

¹ In this report, we reserve the adjective “transnational” to forms of civil society or movement organizing across borders, for instance, networks, forums, or mobilizations (see Stienstra (2019) for more detail). For its part, the qualifier “international” is associated with the multilateral spaces of the UN and its institutions, with the systems of norms these produce, and with networks involving state representatives and other stakeholders.

to make women and girls with disabilities and their issues visible at the Generation Equality Forum in 2021. We have found traces of a more sporadic presence at some special events organized under the auspices of the Human Rights Council and CEDAW. We have not found events focusing on girls with disabilities in the archives of the CRC (Abdelmoumeni et al., 2022).

We have thus chosen to focus our research on the yearly meetings of the COSP and UN-CSW, in 2021 and 2022. As well, we found that speakers from organizations that centre women and girls with disabilities are most likely to participate actively in official side events and parallel events hosted during these two annual gatherings.

The relevance of studying side and parallel events

The presence of speakers from CSOs at side events and parallel events to major international meetings of treaty bodies is one of the most visible aspects of the participation of civil society in UN processes. Side and parallel events are considered spaces where civil society and states representatives can meet and “convey their messages outside the more constrained formal negotiations” (Hjerpe et al., 2008, p. 11). These events are also rated as high value to gain exposure and for networking and lobbying by civil society organizations. However, the participation of civil society in the side events and parallel events of these international gatherings is often overlooked in the literature, as states are considered the main actors in these meetings (Hjerpe et al., 2008).

2.2 Data Collection

Ahead of the COSP and UN-CSW meetings, we first identified these meetings’ side events or parallel events with the potential to host discussions of the topic of women and girls with disabilities, with the objective of including them in our study. It is important to note that all side events and parallel events were held online in 2021 and 2022, which facilitated the collection of data.

Using the annual programs of side events of the COSP, and of the side and parallel events of the UN-CSW available on these international meetings’ websites, we used key terms to conduct our research into sessions where issues related to women and girls with disabilities would likely be discussed in the upcoming meetings. For the COSP, whose annual meetings focus on issues related to people with disabilities, the key terms we used to identify potentially relevant sessions were: *woman/women, girl/girls, feminist, intersectionality, sexual/sexuality, reproductive, gender, queer, LGBT*. For the UN-CSW annual meetings, which focus on issues related to women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities, the key terms we used were *disability/disabilities/disabled* and *handicap/handicapped*. This search provided us with a preliminary list of the sessions to attend, for which we collected the information included in the program and event concept notes, such as the title of the panel, date and time, a brief description of the topic, and the list of the panelists with their names and organizational affiliations.

Registration for attending the COSP Side Events and the Civil Society Forum online (by Zoom) was free and open to anybody in the world. We registered as researchers to the panels featuring topics related to women and girls with disabilities and their issues and/or including representatives of organizations of/for women and girls with disabilities among their panelists. We attended all these sessions, except for a few due to time zone differences or because some sessions were held concurrently and none of us could be present.

All selected COSP Side Events and Civil Society Forum “Dialogues” were video recorded by the organizers of the sessions using the Zoom recording feature, which informs panelists that they will be recorded. We saved the video recordings of the meetings when they were made available to the

public by being posted on organizational websites after the sessions. As well, for all the events, subtitles were provided in both closed captioning and live transcript formats as part of the events' accessibility measures. We collected the closed captioning and/or live transcript documents when they were made available to the audience. We also made audio recordings during the sessions to be able to revise the captioning/transcripts and took some notes as these data would be the basis of the second part of our analysis, namely the content analysis of the side events and parallel events.

After having attended the side events identified in our preliminary list, we found that in most of the sessions where they appeared in the title or description of the event, women, girls, and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities were indeed the focus of the discussion. In some, however, women and girls with disabilities and their issues were barely discussed and sometimes were not even named, even if they were clearly mentioned in the official description of the session. We excluded these from our analysis.² We also excluded the rare side events that were postponed.

We used a similar method of data collection method for the UN-CSW.

On four Excel spreadsheets—COSP 2021, COSP 2022, UN-CSW 2021 and UN-CSW 2022,³ we provide a final list of all the sessions in which women and girls, and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities were the focus of the discussions, with the names of the speakers and the organizations they were presented as affiliated with in the official description of the event. We included moderators and session chairs and co-chairs, as these persons were often also speaking (reformulating, commenting, directing questions to panelists) during these sessions. The Excel sheets also identify the organizers of each session. **These are the sessions we kept for our analysis of who organized and who spoke at events focused on women and girls with disabilities.**

2.3 Collaborative Analysis

Between our 2021 and 2022 data collection, a collaborative data analysis session was organized on February 24, 2022, with six members of the larger EDID-GHDI team. The objective was to gain insights from other members of the team on the data we had collected in the 2021 meetings. The collaborative analysis session consisted of each participant reviewing our two Excel Spreadsheets using a document with a list of preliminary analytical questions that was provided prior to the meeting (Appendix A). At the meeting, participants shared their insights on the data and raised some theoretical, analytical, practical, and methodological issues. Based on their recommendations, we made some changes to our data collection for the UN-CSW and the COSP in 2022, paying closer attention to identity/identification markers and to the format of the sessions. We also made note of issues raised regarding our initial attempts at categorizing "who represents" women and girls with disabilities, which we integrated into the theoretical reflections developed in the next section. In parallel to this collaborative analysis session, we held individual Zoom meetings with two other members of the EDID-GHDI team to help us gain a better understanding of the institutional context of our study.

² It has been our experience at the COSP14 and 15, as well as at the UN-CSW65 and 66, that when women and/or girls with disabilities were mentioned in the descriptions of the side events, but not as a focal point, few speakers spoke about them and fewer mentioned them in ways other than "in passing" (COSP) or only among a list of intersectional categories (UN-CSW).

³ Access the [2021 Excel sheets for COSP](#) and [2021 Excel sheets for UN-CSW](#); Access the [2022 Excel sheets for COSP](#) and [2022 Excel sheets for UN-CSW](#).

3. Categorizing and Analyzing Who Represents Women and Girls with Disabilities

In this section, we clarify how the question of “who represents” women and girls with disabilities is approached theoretically and analytically in this research.

3.1 Who represents – A Central Issue in Disability Politics

The question of **who is representing—of who is doing the work of representation—is a crucial one** when studying the contemporary representation of women and girls with disabilities, especially given the centrality of the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” for the disability sector, as well as the variety of actors engaged in the international arenas where the representation of women and girls with disabilities occurs.

3.1.1 “Nothing About Us Without Us” and its underlying claims

While the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” emerged during the 1990s in disability activist circles (Charlton, 1998, p. 4), it had its roots in at least two decades of struggles by the disability movement⁴ for the recognition of the right of persons with disabilities to have a determining voice in policy making, and more largely over all decisions affecting their lives. Key to these struggles was the principle of self-determination, which fueled a contest over who had the legitimacy to represent people with disabilities, their experiences, their needs, and how these needs were to be met. For movement activists, at issue was the representation and control of people with disabilities by others—at the time: parents, charities, doctors, and other “specialists”—and its consequences, namely the powerlessness of people with disabilities and the paternalism of public interventions (Charlton, 1998; Harpur, 2017). “Nothing About Us Without Us” expresses the goal of wrenching away control over the ways the experiences of people with disabilities are represented and responded to in policies, programs and myriad other decisions, and placing such control in the hands of the people most concerned: persons with disabilities themselves.

As a call for self-determination, “Nothing About Us Without Us” encompasses three inter-related claims that have a direct impact on disability politics and, therefore, on its analysis.

Firstly, it is grounded in the **epistemological claim that people with disabilities “know what is best for themselves and for their community”** (Charlton, 1998, p. 5). Demands for self-representation (or self-advocacy) in policy and other decision-making processes are based in claims that the experiential knowledge persons with disabilities have of their lives, needs and ways to meet them, or, alternately, of oppression and changes required, is better, more valid, or truer than that of non-disabled political actors. More pointedly, “Nothing About Us Without Us” makes the claim that experiential knowledge is more adequate to elaborating policy and making decisions that maximize benefits to people with disabilities or, in the best scenario, to spurring progressive societal transformation.

Secondly, the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” makes a very explicit **claim to full and effective political participation including, ultimately, to having a determining influence on**

⁴ The contemporary disability movement and its struggles are linked to the adoption of the “social model of disability,” which placed the responsibility for disablement largely on ableist social relations—which could and should be changed—rather than on physiological impairments (Waldschmidt et al., 2015, pp. 105–106).

policy content. Against the widespread disenfranchisement of people with disabilities from policy making and the truncated citizenship that has historically ensued, the slogan encapsulates not only a demand for people with disabilities to play a role in policy making and other decision-making processes, but a recognition that their participation, on the basis of their experiential knowledge, is “*pivotal* in making decisions that affect their lives.” (Charlton, 1998, p. 17, our emphasis)

Thirdly, the slogan is under-girded by **a claim to redistribution of power, priorities, and resources.** A demand for redistribution of power is explicit in the militant assertion of self-determination of persons with disabilities against their control by others, and in the demand for full-fledged and ultimately determining political participation. Flowing from such redistribution of power is an implicit claim for “a fundamental reordering of priorities and resources” (Charlton, 1998, p. 17) with the goal of meeting the self-defined needs of people with disabilities and enabling them to lead a meaningful and “decent life” (p. 16).

The slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” thus brings to the forefront the question of the representation of people with disabilities and their issues, as it **problematizes the issue of *who represents*** people with disabilities in policymaking processes.

3.1.2 Representing people with disabilities—the disability movement and the CRPD

Strong activism by the disability movement contributed to institutionalizing the participation of people with disabilities and their organizations in the 2006 CRPD, as well as in the Convention’s provisions and mechanisms.

The Ad Hoc Committee created in 2001 by the UN to draft the Convention “was formed on the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’ and followed this approach through its deliberations” (Harpur, 2017, p. 11). The governance model of the Ad Hoc Committee was a paradigmatic change:

At the time the Ad Hoc Committee was formed, the governing public policy models discounted the voices of persons with disabilities, so that persons without disabilities spoke for persons with disabilities. The Ad Hoc Committee rejected this approach and adopted an approach that provided persons with disabilities and their representative organizations a voice in the United Nations debates.... From the first session, the Ad Hoc Committee enabled disability person organizations to have a central role in the discussions. (Harpur, 2017, p. 6)

The participation of actors from the disability movement in the Ad Hoc Committee had a significant influence, in turn, on the drafting of the CRPD, notably on the definition of disability, on the rights of persons with disabilities, and on their political participation as a central feature of the implementation of the Convention (see Sabatello, 2014; Sabatello & Schulze, 2014). Indeed, according to the UN Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, “the effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, is thus at the heart of the Convention.” (UN, 2018, article 1).

Notably, the 2006 Convention “establishes a framework which enables persons with disabilities ... to continue to have a voice on international and domestic laws and policies that impact them.” (Harpur, 2017, p. 11). For instance, at the domestic level, the Convention declares that “**Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully**” in the process of national implementation and monitoring of the convention (UN, 2006, article 33(3)), including “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” (article 4(3)).

“Representative organizations” are thus for the UN the main vector of the voice of people with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention and other relevant processes of policy making. UN mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention specify that these representative organizations consist solely of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). These “are established predominantly with the aim of collectively acting, expressing, promoting, pursuing and/or defending the rights of persons with disabilities” (UN, 2018, article 11(a)). Part of the broader category of civil society organizations (article 14), they are comprised of only “those that are led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities,” with persons with disabilities making up “a clear majority of their membership” (article 11). These organizations are “to be distinguished from organizations ‘for’ persons with disabilities, which provide services and/or advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities” (article 13) while not meeting the above set of criteria.

The CRPD Committee’s distinction between organizations ‘of’ and organizations ‘for’ persons with disabilities, it is important to note, builds on a militant one established from the 1970s onwards with the objective of putting the disability rights movement “firmly within the control of disabled people” (Blackmore & Hodgkins, 2012, p. 72). It rests on similar epistemological and political claims than were later encapsulated in “Nothing About Us Without Us.” The specificity and political legitimacy of what were at the time named Disabled Peoples’ Organizations (DPOs), that is, organizations ‘of’ people with disabilities (as different from organizations ‘for’ them) is anchored in the principle of self-advocacy, understood as “a collective notion that involves self-determination, mobilization, organization, representation,” and the “creation of space” for expression, communication and interaction among persons with disabilities (National Disability Authority [NDA], 2021, p. 65). The collective dimension of self-advocacy is the basis for the production of knowledges and the elaboration of analyses, demands, and claims that are to be carried and defended into the political processes in which DPOs are involved. This conception of the role of organizing and of collective self-advocacy in the political representation of people with disabilities concurs with the work of feminist political theorists on the representation of marginalized social groups (see for instance Young, 2000; Weldon, 2002).

As well, encapsulated in the distinction between organizations ‘of’ and ‘for’ **is the notion that the ‘Who’ of representation**—who is doing the work of representing people with disabilities in policy making and decision-making arenas—**matters for the ‘What’ of representation**, that is, for what is represented regarding people with disabilities and, most importantly, how. Not only are representations of disability and of the interests of people with disabilities put forward by charities and medical “specialists” contested by the disability movement but, for the UN Committee of the CRPD, organizations advocating ‘for’ people with disabilities may find themselves prioritizing their “purpose as private entities over the rights of persons with disabilities.” (UN, 2018, article 13). Waldschmidt et al. suggest in a more nuanced way that “organizations *for* people with disabilities ... *can* advocate actual interests of disabled persons, but do not necessarily do so.” (2015, p. 114, italics in the original). Whether they do or not should thus be considered an empirical question that will find its (varied) responses in the study of the substance of the representations these organizations articulate in actual settings.

3.2 Who Represents Women and Girls with Disabilities – Categorizing Political Actors

As we have been able to appreciate during our observation of the annual meetings of the COSP and of the UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022, a wide variety of political actors is involved in representing women and girls with disabilities in these international arenas. Here, we mean that a variety of actors are engaged in the work of representation (as distinguished from claims to representativity).

“Representation,” Hall writes, “is a practice, a kind of ‘work’” (1997, p. 25), through which meanings about things, people, groups, and their relations are “produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (p. 15). Thus, in the international arenas we have observed, diverse political actors are engaged in producing, circulating and exchanging meanings—that is, representations in the plural—about women and girls with disabilities. (For a similar argument on the substantive representation of women, see Mackay, 2008; Celis et al., 2008, 2014.)

Because meaning production is enmeshed in social relations of power, contests over meanings arise, hence the emergence among the actors of a politics of representation aimed at establishing or contesting the dominance of certain types of representations, or of certain actors, over others. We contend that the notion of “representative organizations,” political claims to greater representativity and epistemological claims to privileged grounds for knowledge production, are to be seen as part of these politics.

To analyze the “Who” of the representation of women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and the UN-CSW, we start by categorizing the political actors engaged in the above “work of representation.”

The sessions of the COSP and the UN-CSW are populated by individuals—that is, by speakers and chairs who are the ones that, very practically, engage in the work of representation in these settings. Yet the spirit and the letter of the Convention strongly suggest that, analytically, the main actors of the political representation of people with disabilities in these arenas are organizational–institutional. This is to say that most of the speakers are present in these arenas by virtue of their organizational affiliation, for instance as leaders, members, or staff of organizations ‘of’ or ‘for’ persons with disabilities, or as officials mandated to represent the actions of their governments or of their UN agency. Different organizational locations come with differential access to resources, power, and privilege in these settings, and outside of them. Identifying which organizational actors are there or not there, and discerning relations of power and privilege in these politics of presence and absence is part of an analysis of ‘Who’ represents.

For this report, we categorize as follows the organizational locations speakers are indicated as affiliated with—that is, as reported in the official description of the COSP and UN-CSW side and parallel events we have chosen and observed for this report’s analysis.

First, we use a now classical conceptual definition of ‘civil society’ as distinct from both the state sector and the private sector—the latter being understood as the sphere of privately owned, for-profit businesses—to distinguish the different actors (see the overview and discussion of the concept of civil society in Young, 2000, pp. 157–160). Within the state sector we make a further distinction between governments (or state parties) and multilateral institutions, such as specialized agencies and other entities or bodies of the UN, as these are responsible for guiding international norm elaboration and monitoring norm compliance by state parties. Within the civil society sector, we also make a further distinction, this time between “Civil Society Organizations”⁵ (CSOs) and “Academia.” The significance of the latter category is suggested to us by feminist political science research on the role

⁵ “Civil society organization” is a broad umbrella term that refers not only to community organizations. For instance, the Committee of the CRPD writes: “The term ‘civil society organization’ comprises different kinds of organizations, including research organizations/institutes, organizations of service providers and other private stakeholders. Organizations of persons with disabilities are a specific type of civil society organization” (UN, 2018, article 14).

of the “velvet triangle”—women’s/feminist organizations, academic research, and state officials (notably femocrats and female parliamentarians)—in furthering women’s/feminist interests in policy making (Woodward, 2004, 2015).

This first attempt at classification produces five categories of political actors:

- Government
- Multilateral institution⁶
- Business
- Academia⁷
- Civil Society Organization

Within the category “Civil Society Organization” (CSO), we aligned with the endogenous distinction made in the disability sector between the following categories: organizations OF persons with disabilities (OPDs/DPOs)—those that correspond to the criteria of the UN Committee of the CRPD reviewed above—and organizations FOR persons with disabilities acting, for instance, as “pressure groups,” “service providers,” “charities,” foundations, and others (Waldschmidt et al., 2015, p. 114). To operationalize this distinction, we used the following indicators to search and collect the relevant information available on each organization’s website (or Facebook page if needed):

1. the organization’s self-definition (Who we are). We were looking for keywords found in the literature, such as: we are a DPO, self-help, self-advocacy, or grassroots organization, or statements such as “We are the voice of people with disabilities in [country X]”;
2. the percentage of people with disabilities in the organization’s membership—or any other significant statement, such as in the example “Our members are people with disabilities”;
3. the number and percentage of people with disabilities among Board members, as revealed in the biographies of Board members available on organizational websites;
4. the number and percentage of people with disabilities among staff, as revealed in the biographies of staff available on organizational websites.

To classify CSOs as ‘of’ or ‘for’ women with disabilities and ‘of’ or ‘for’ people with disabilities, an organization had to qualify robustly on one or more of the first three criteria; criteria #4 was an additional indicator we collected data on, but never a deciding factor. Appendix B further explains how we developed our four criteria and reflects on some of the methodological challenges we encountered.⁸

The distinction between organizations ‘of’ and ‘for’ is crosscut by another within the disability sector, that between CSOs whose primary or exclusive focus is on the gender categories of women

⁶ Speakers identified in the descriptions of the sessions as officials from UN-Women, UN Population Fund (UN-FPA), the CRPD Committee, for instance, have been classified as belonging to the category “Multilateral institution.”

⁷ Speakers identified in the descriptions of the sessions as researcher, professor, lecturer, Ph.D. Candidate, or graduate student and affiliated with a university—in the absence of other, more immediately relevant organizational affiliation—have been classified as belonging to the category “Academia.”

⁸ See our [classification tables for CSOs-PwDs](#) and [classification tables for CSOs-WwDs](#).

and/or girls and/or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, and CSOs whose focus is more largely on “people” or “persons” with disabilities. This distinction is warranted by our object of analysis (the representation of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities). It also acknowledges a history of increased self-organizing by women with disabilities, whose contestation of gender inequalities in disabled lives includes protesting against the marginalization of the experiences and issues of interest to women and girls with disabilities in mixed-gender disability organizations dominated by men. Underlying such self-organizing is also the epistemological claim that women and girls with disabilities are the ones with the experiential knowledge of what is best for themselves and for their communities.

The combination of these two distinctions—(1) organizations ‘of’ vs ‘for’ and (2) organizations that focus on women and/or girls, gender and sexual minorities⁹ with disabilities vs those that focus on “people with disabilities”—produces four distinct categories:

- CSO - Organization **OF** Women with disabilities
- CSO - Organization **FOR** Women with disabilities
- CSO - Organization **OF** People with disabilities
- CSO - Organization **FOR** People with disabilities

Further, we have also chosen to capture the specificity of each of these organizations by adding information on the category of women or people with disabilities they focus on in their action, when applicable. For instance, the category CSO – Organization OF Women with disabilities can be followed, when applicable, by the specification “Indigenous,” “Deaf,” etc. Similarly, other sub-categories of organizations OF (or FOR) people with disabilities could be “Youth,” “Indigenous,” “Psychosocial,” etc., as distinct from those focusing on people or women with disabilities “in general.” This is useful to identify potential or actual *dedicated organizational vectors* for the representation of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities. Alternately, when warranted, we have also added information on the nature of the CSOs (for instance: Charity, Foundation, Funder, etc.). All these additions are important to characterize the organizational location of the speakers.

Similarly, we have deemed it potentially useful to categorize CSOs whose exclusive or primary focus is NOT on disability according to the social group, social category, or domain of intervention on which they focus primarily—for instance: Youth, Women/Feminist “in general,” Human Rights, etc.

Finally, in the few cases where there was a lack of information about a speaker’s organizational affiliation, we categorized these speakers as “Activists.” This category was introduced for speakers who were not presented in their session’s documents nor introduced by the Chair of their session as affiliated with an organization or institution. In these cases, we gathered online relevant biographical information to better understand the nature of the link between these individuals and the disability sector. These speakers are to be distinguished from speakers affiliated with organizations as they are present, or so it seems, in their individual capacity, most often to give public testimonials about their lives or the experiences of the wider disability community in which they are embedded.

⁹ For instance, our category “CSO – Organization of women with disabilities” is inclusive of those, such as Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), who define themselves as “run by and for women, girls, feminine identifying and non-binary people with disabilities” (WWDA, n.d.).

We also created the category “Practitioner” for speakers who were presented as such in the sessions’ documents or introduced by the Chair as such, when no other categories were applicable.

Our working hypothesis is that **the organizational location of the speakers—civil society, government, multilateral institutions—matters not only for an analysis of “who represents,” but also in various ways for the substance of representation**, that is, for the ways women and girls with disabilities are represented, in language and in discourse, in these arenas. To what extent does it matter and how? These are questions for our future analysis of the sessions’ transcripts.

3.3 Who Represents – Social difference and political representation

Asking the questions “Which women and girls are engaged and represented” in the international meetings of the COSP and UN-CSW and “Who is included and excluded”—with an eye to the diversity of women and girls with disabilities and the representation of their experiences in these settings—**presumes the existence of a relationship between the presence of members of groups bearing specific, ascribed social identities or, alternately, inhabiting specific kinds of bodies, and the representations they bring to these political arenas.** There exists a strong assumption in disability circles as well as in earlier feminist scholarship on representation that the visible presence of representatives of minoritized social groups in policy processes is closely related to the adequacy of the representations—the portrayals of their constituency’s experiences, needs, interests, claims, etc.—put forward by these representatives in political arenas. **Yet debates and contemporary developments in the feminist literature warn against any simplistic approach to the link between descriptive representation, defined as “the correspondence between the characteristics of the representative and the represented”** (Celis et al., 2014, p. 152) and **substantive representation, defined as the articulation of interests through the discursive elaboration of representations—that is, of specific sets of meanings—about or on behalf of the social group** (Celis et al., 2008, 2014). This section aims to set up the theoretical elements necessary to support our inquiry into the political dynamics of presence and absence of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities and their substantive representation in the political arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW.

Varied demands for an equal, proportionate, or fair presence, in the arenas of political representation, of previously excluded social groups have indeed been an intrinsic part of the contemporary politics of social movements denouncing the existence of social, economic, and political exclusions on the basis of gender and sexuality, ethnicity, race, (dis)abilities, or indigeneity (Phillips, 1998). Movement claims for political inclusion have challenged the liberal notion of political difference regarded primarily as a matter of opinions, beliefs, and policy preferences “abstract[ed] from social difference” (Phillips, 1998, p. 38). Rather, **movements have insisted that social difference matters for politics: the “who” of political representation cannot be separated from the “what” is to be represented.** Demands for inclusion and increased participation of women or other minority social groups as actors in processes of policy making thus rest on the belief that those who can best represent, for transformative purposes, the “what” of the experiences, realities, needs and claims of oppressed or disadvantaged groups within and outside political arenas are the members of those groups.

Feminist and disability scholars have made strong epistemological claims about the bodily characteristics of who represents and the “what” of movement politics. Patterned structural relations of power, such as gender, ableism, racism, and colonialism differentiate between people and sort them into social categories by marking certain characteristics of bodies, such as sex, ability, skin colour, etc. and making these socially salient as part of the construction and maintenance of relations of privilege and inequality (Guillaumin, 1992; Garland-Thomson, 2002). Axes of difference and hierarchization “position bodies with particular attributes in relations that have consequences for how

people are treated, the assumptions made about them, and their opportunities to realize their plans” as well as their access to resources and to self-determination (Young, 2000, p. 98). Women’s bodies, disabled bodies, as well as racialized and other “marked” bodies are thus seen as indexing social locations in broader relationships of power, and as privileged sites from which more adequate knowledge about the lived experiences of oppressed groups is produced—that is, about what it means to live in these bodies, to experience life from these particular social/bodily locations. More broadly, according to feminist political theorist Iris Marion Young:

Differently positioned people have different experience, history, and social knowledge derived from that positioning. I call this social *perspective*. Because of their social locations, people are attuned to particular kinds of social meanings in relationships to which others are less attuned. Sometimes others are not positioned to be aware of them at all. From their social locations people have differentiated knowledge of social events and their consequences.... Structural social positions thus produce particular location-relative experience and a specific knowledge of social processes and consequences. (2000, p. 136)

This type of argument validates movements’ demands for the visible and increased presence of members of minoritized social groups in political arenas, as these are seen as bearers of differently located experiences and differentiated knowledges that must be represented in politics for the latter to reflect the interests of those groups and enable social transformation. It is on these grounds, for instance, that people with disabilities have rebelled against their representation by others and have coined the slogan “Nothing about us without us.”

YET feminist debates in political theory warn us that the relationship between the who and the what of representation is not as direct as that between the presence of people with specific kinds of bodies and the representation of group interests. “Bodies,” Weldon argues, are in fact “extremely limited as an avenue of *substantive* representation” (2002, p. 1154, italics in the original). Here lies a seeming paradox. The absence of individuals with “marked bodies” in political arenas—be they people with disabilities, racialized or Indigenous people, women, girls, etc.—too often makes for the absence or truncated account of minoritized groups’ concerns in political discussions. Presence thus seems to be crucial: “Without descriptive representation (the physical presence of members of marginalized groups) there are no members of the group who can self-organize, develop, and articulate the minority group perspectives” (Weldon, 2006, p. 57). On the other hand, however, the feminist literature on the representation of women and minority groups since the 1990s has repeatedly shown that “the mere presence of descriptive representatives does not guarantee the representation of group interests” (Erzeel & Rashkova, 2022, p. 2, our emphasis; Mackay, 2008; Childs & Lovenduski, 2013).

For instance, at the COSP and the UN-CSW, not all speakers who appear to share the social/bodily location of being “women or girls with disabilities” effectively represent, that is, speak as or on behalf of women or girls with disabilities or about gender issues in these venues. In fact, many do otherwise, instead speaking as or on behalf of “persons with disabilities,” “youth with disabilities,” “survivors of institutionalization,” “mad people,” etc., and about the issues that affect these latter groups, and this without any explicit link to a gender and disability politics. The same can be said of speakers with other bodily/social characteristics. The problem with establishing a direct link between the “who” and the “what” of the representation of social groups in relation to social difference is that “who one is” in sociological terms is never one-dimensional. Social groups are not discrete entities but are crisscrossed by other social divisions. Patterned structural relations of power intersect in such ways that individuals are **simultaneously positioned** in relations of gender and sexuality, (dis)ability, race and ethnicity, age, and the like. It follows that “every individual necessarily has affinities with many social groups” (Young, 2000, p. 99), **all of which and their intersections**

potentially offer different opportunities to mobilize in different contexts and at various points in time.

Self-organizing activities in civil society or social movements are crucial to such mobilizations, as shared affinities do not translate automatically into political engagement. They “enable people who believe that their sorts of experiences, interests, and needs are socially and politically marginalized to find one another” (Young, 2000, p. 164). Furthermore, lived experiences and individuals’ knowledges do not come into politics unmediated. They must be shared and discussed by members of the group, interpreted through discourses, and politicized to enter the political realm. These reflexive acts of identification and interpretation of the social relations of power and inequality that make the group, of articulation of its needs and interests, and of what ought to be done by whom, are collective ones. “The distinctive voice of marginalized groups,” Weldon argues, “flows from group organisation and mobilisation; it is the product of interaction among members of a social group.” (2002, p. 1156).

The work of Jenson (1989, 1990, 1993) on the dual nature of representation in movement politics offers useful insights for understanding the representation of marginalized social groups in the context of intersecting axes of differentiation. The efforts of movement actors at political representation, she argues, proceed along two distinct, if interrelated, dimensions of representation:

One type denotes actors’ *representation of self* to others, via collective identity. The second type, familiar from the language of liberal democracy, is the *representation of interests*.... These two senses are closely linked by the fact that both involve *power*, the power to give meaning to social relations and thereby represent “interests.” (Jenson, 1990, p. 128–129)

Jenson foregrounds the process of creation of political identities, a process in which people self-organize and attempt “to carve out a constituency for themselves” (Jenson, 1990, p. 128) by delimiting the boundaries of a social group for the purpose of seeking political recognition for this group by others and of themselves as representatives of the group. This is done through the **naming** of specific social differences and relations of power, as well as through the **politicization** of the social categories these create and the self-identification of movement actors—via the elaboration of **collective and personal identities**—with the aggrieved circumstances of the constituencies that ensue. In any society, given the intersection of social relations, “a multitude of relationships of difference exist” (Jenson, 1989, p. 238). **The representation of social groups is thus always contextual, as it depends on how the various actors of civil society and/or social movements name difference.** There exists a politics of naming, in which certain social differences are made visible and certain social identities are politicized and mobilized, and not others, by movement actors: “Therefore, we must always ask which specific differences are politicized and how they are politicized” (Jenson, 1989, p. 238).

In the disability sector, movement actors have successfully transformed ascribed social categories, such as “people with disabilities” or “women with disabilities,” into political identities around which people who self-identify with these constituencies and with movement goals mobilize. Movement actors may even fashion new political identities altogether (recent examples being, for instance, “Queer folks with disabilities” or “non-binary people with disabilities”). **By naming specific differences and laying claims to self-representation, these collective actors make a variety of social groups visible in processes of political representation. In doing so, they make specific sets of social relations visible with a view to social change. Most importantly, they also take up, in political discourse, these specific social locations and associated political identities as the basis from which to organize and to make claims—for recognition and redistribution, for policy change, for social transformation—that is, to articulate their visions of the group’s interests**

within and outside of institutional arenas.

What are the implications of the above for our inquiry? **First**, it is not enough for people of different kinds “to be there” for the substantive representation of their social groups to occur. Asking “who is there and who is not there or is under-represented” with regards to the diversity of women and girls with disabilities and the representation of their experiences and issues is a question whose rightful answer is not so much dependent on the presence of individuals with specific kinds of bodies or social experiences in international arenas than it is contingent on the presence of collective actors politicizing specific social differences (and not others) in these arenas. In short, it is necessary to bypass a—necessarily fraught—focus on the presence/absence of “marked bodies” in favour of the analysis of a “who” of representation more closely dependent on the politicization of specific social relations by collective actors, their mobilization around specific, politicized identities, and the political identifications of movement organizations and members with the latter.

Second, it suggests that what we should be looking at to analyze the “who” of the representation of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities in this report, in relation to social difference, is which intersectional categories of gender and disability are politicized in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW, and through what kind of mechanisms these intersectional categories enter the representational process. For instance, which intersectional constituencies of gender/sexuality and disability are carved out, named, made visible, and elaborated on by movement actors in the side and parallel events under study? Which types of political self-identifications are articulated by movement speakers and their organizations as a way of making these political identities visible and gaining recognition for them in the public sphere? And which are not—what politics of naming are at work?

Third, our discussion does not mean that the social/bodily characteristics of the speakers are totally irrelevant to our analysis. Rather, we have established that what really counts for the analysis of political representation are the differences that are politicized by movements’ actors and around which they mobilize in these arenas. It follows that what is important for our study are the political identifications of the speakers as members of organizations of women and/or girls with disabilities, or of sexual or gender minorities with disabilities, or of other sub-groups of women with disabilities (for instance, Indigenous women with disabilities, etc.). We will also be attentive to individual speakers’ self-identifications, as they may make visible other intersections of gender/sexuality and disability. As well, in a historical context where minority groups organize around specific social and/or bodily differences to self-advocate, it seems fair to assume that the social/bodily characteristics of the speakers would be congruent with those made salient by the self-advocating group, unless clear information to the contrary is available. This could be the case, for instance, with organizations employing specialized paid staff—other examples of speaking for or about others in movement milieus can certainly be found. Regarding the “what” of representation, we would argue that what should be assessed in this case is the quality of the representations put forward more than who conveys them: speakers may be usefully relaying or amplifying knowledges produced from marginalized positions, even if it is not theirs. Regarding the “who” of representation, however, we acknowledge that the absence of collective actors self-advocating from given marginalized social positions remains worrisome from the point of view of justice and of the relations of power structuring “who can speak” in those spaces.

Fourth, and while it may be interesting—as has been suggested in the collaborative analysis session—to know the class background of the speakers or any other personal characteristic (regarding, for instance, their social location in relations of ethnicity, indigeneity, racialization, or sexuality in their home context) that may put them in a privileged or subordinate position regarding “who can speak” in these venues, such information is not something that can be acquired from our

technique of data collection—the observation of online meetings. In the absence of self-identification—which is usually the case with privileged social categories, this would require a fine knowledge of local social stratification and of speakers’ personal circumstances, which we cannot acquire in this research. In the same way, the existence and nature of disabilities cannot be ascertained from the online observation of the speakers. In this report, we rely on their collective (organizational) identifications. Speakers’ self-identification with specific categories of disability will also be considered in our (future) analysis of transcripts to see if their disclosed social location is taken up by them as a basis from which to make claims.

Finally, an exception we make to identifying the personal characteristics of the speakers for this report is that of the gender categories of “women” and “men.” Women activists with disabilities have, in a variety of contexts, complained that men with disabilities, who have dominated the movement of people with disabilities, have not historically paid much attention to their issues nor taken them up in movement politics. Moves towards the self-organizing and self-representation of women with disabilities, in the 1980s and 1990s, have ensued in many countries (Meekosha, 2002; Price, 2011; Masson et al., 2023). Feminist theorists have made similar remarks about the effects of the dominance of men in political institutions. It may thus seem relevant to inquire into the gender of who speaks on behalf of or about women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW. Our indicators for categorizing speakers as “women” or “men” are a combination of gendered terms of address (Ms., M.), pronouns (he/him, she/her), and presentation of self. **Identifications with non-conforming gender categories**,¹⁰ however, are visible to online observation only if speakers make them publicly visible through self-identification (for instance, in the event’s concept note, or through self-declaration and/or use of the pronoun “they/them/their” on their Zoom screen). This we will also note, as it does contribute to politicizing non-conforming gender categories of disabilities in international political arenas.

3.4 Who Represents – Geographies of Representation

The notion of “geographies of representation” **aims to capture the potential significance of geographical location for analyzing who represents** (who is doing the work of representation) **and what is represented** (the substance of representations). “Social processes and the social relations that constitute them occur in space, are deployed through space, and thus shape space in ways that involve variations in the spatial distribution of people and activities” (Masson, 2010, p. 37). In turn, these variations affect how social processes work in different places and at different scales. Critical geographer Doreen Massey theorizes geographical ‘place’ as both a locus and a moment at which “economic, political and cultural relations, each full of power and with internal structures of domination” intersect “in a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations” (Massey, 1994, pp. 154, 156). This conceptualization directs our attention to the ways in which a variety of social processes translate ‘on the ground’ in the specific dynamics of particular places, shaping place-based differences with consequences, as argued below, for our inquiry into the political representation of disability. Place is a unit of analysis and can be set by the analyst at various scales. Scale, for its part, can be understood “as the focal setting at which specific boundaries are defined for a specific social claim, activity” or politics (Agnew, 1997, p. 100).

¹⁰ The percentage of persons self-identifying as non-binary and transgender among the population of people 15 years and older in the 2021 census was 0.33% according to Statistics Canada. Other national estimates vary from 0.5 to 0.8% (Statistics Canada, 2022).

The specificities of place and the inequalities embedded in it affect in various ways the capacity of disabled activists and their organizations to be present in international arenas. At the COSP and the UN-CSW, speakers herald from institutional or organizational locations that are also situated in the specificities of places and scales. The varied geographical locations of the actors of representation can be said to matter for the analysis of ‘who represents.’

According to the critical and feminist disability literature, a major issue is the representation of disabled lives from the Global South, where 80% of disabled people are said to reside (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 64). The variegated geopolitical places that constitute the Global South, with their distinct “histories, contexts, cultures and epistemologies” and ways “disability is ontologically constructed and lived” (Grech & Soldatić, 2015, p. 2) are marked by the legacies of colonialism, unequal development, and neoliberal globalization (Meekosha, 2011; Grech & Soldatić, 2015; Price & Goyal, 2016; Nguyen, 2018). **Disability activists and DPOs in the Global South are engaged in practices of self-representation of disabled lives and self-advocacy** (Chataika et al., 2015, p. 188). Yet in current post-colonial contexts, their ability to participate in the international spaces of implementation and monitoring of the CRPD, other treaty bodies, and UN institutions is made difficult by their **unequal access to resources**. Drawing examples from Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone, Chataika et al. argue that “[s]ecuring human and civil rights through existing legal frameworks requires resources people often do not have” (2015, p. 197). Among these resources, access of disabled people, disability activists, and DPOs to electricity and to the Internet, command of English and of UN terminology, as well as funds and opportunities for international representation are more scarce compared to the resources available to their counterparts in the Global North (Chataika et al. 2015, pp. 201–205). Funding from international NGOs may alleviate these difficulties, but the authors warn that it comes with strings attached that can affect the substance of representation—the ‘what is represented’ and how (in what type of language and discourse).

The varied geographical locations of the actors of representation, it is also posited, also matters for what is represented and, thus, for the analysis of the substance of representations. **At the more basic level, the specificities of place are significant in shaping lived experiences of disability; they also contribute to shape the production of local knowledges of disability** reflecting “the complexities and uniqueness of specific geopolitical environments and culture” (Chataika et al., 2015, p. 192). DPOs in various countries and locales, it is argued, possess such place-based knowledges of lived experiences of disability, of cultural understandings of disability, of the ways disability is being addressed (or not) by local and national authorities, and of practical solutions adapted to their contexts (Hall & Sands, 2011). **To the extent that speakers from organizations of women and girls with disabilities choose to speak about the realities of their particular places—country, region of the world, or rural vs. urban—the representations they produce in their speeches are expected to reflect** place-based specificities and to contribute to our understanding of the ways the lives of women and girls with disabilities are shaped in/by particular social, cultural, economic, and political contexts.

The feminist disability literature also makes claims about the Global South as a site of differentiated knowledge production. Disability in Southern geopolitical places intersects with both colonial legacies and the effects of contemporary neocolonial relations of power (Meekosha, 2011; Chataika et al., 2015; Price & Goyal, 2016). Knowledge production from the point of view of women and girls from the Global South is thus expected to reflect the experiences and insights of those who live “in the undercapitalized, highly precarious South, affected as it is by the ravages of climate change, war, economic maldevelopment and growing, under-resourced populations” (Price & Goyal, 2016, pp. 316–317), as well as by structural adjustment policies and neoliberal capitalism. Following this line of argument, the substance of the representations elaborated from the perspective of women from the

Global South has the potential of challenging universalized discourses of disability produced from the point of view of the Global North. Making visible and affirming the differing realities of women and girls with disabilities in the Global South is but one dimension of this challenge. Among other possibilities are: questioning international inequities; denouncing the role of colonialism and neocolonialism in the lived experiences of disability in the Global South (Meekosha, 2011); contributing different cultural definitions of disability—different concepts (for instance: *ubuntu*) and priorities (for instance: hard rights) than those elaborated in the Global North (Chataika et al., 2015); and calling into question the CRPD, especially its insistence on “liberal ideals of autonomy” (Price & Goyal, 2016, p. 309) and its neoliberal stance on soft rights and soft laws (Chataika et al., 2015, p. 190).

In this report, we categorize the geographical location of the actors first by identifying the country (place) in which the speaker’s organization is headquartered. While recognizing that some organizations may be national and others local in scope, some rural and others urban, we count on the content analysis of the transcripts to yield substantial information on the scale as well as on the specificity of those different places. Exceptions to such categorizing include CSOs whose headquarters are located in specific places but whose work is self-defined as transnational in scope. For instance, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) is headquartered in Delhi but has chosen “the Global South” as a whole as the focal setting for its activities. The [Disability Rights Fund](#) is headquartered in Boston, yet its scale of activity is also transnational. Other CSOs present similar profiles. In order to reflect these geographies, we use the double categorization of country (place) / self-defined scale of activity (for instance, “Southern,” “World,” etc.).

In the feminist disability literature referenced above, common usage suggest that countries considered part of the Global South are those with a history of colonization by Western European powers and the US, and which continue to be affected negatively by its legacies, as well as by neoliberal globalization.

Southern countries are, broadly, those historically conquered or controlled by modern imperial powers, leaving a continuing legacy of poverty, economic exploitation and dependence. ... The ‘North,’ the global metropole, refers to the centres of the global economy in Western Europe and North America. Many of the countries of the North were imperial powers that colonized other parts of the globe and have remained major centres of global capitalism. ... (Meekosha, 2011, p. 669)

However, terms such as Global South and Global North are notoriously unwieldy (for an overview of the history and genealogies of these terms, see Clarke, 2018; Mahler, 2017). In the sense used by Meekosha, and more broadly in the feminist disability literature, these designations are generated through a political economy analysis centring Western colonisation and capitalism that seems “able to incorporate the centrality of historical and contemporary patterns of wealth and power” but, nevertheless, maps only “loosely” onto world geography (Schafer et al., 2017, as cited in Clarke, 2018). For instance, how do Russia and other former socialist countries from Eastern Europe fit into this analysis? How about contemporary China, or South Korea? Or formerly colonized, but wealthy Middle Eastern oil countries? When it comes to operationalizing the term “Global South” and determining which countries are to be considered as part of it, the answer is not straightforward.

This inquiry is complicated by other uses of the term in critical theory that “unhinge the South from a one-to-one relation to geography” (Mahler, 2017, para. 1). A post-national, de-territorial conception of the term Global South is meant to capture both the existence of processes of internal colonisation in the North—such as that experienced by Indigenous and racialized people in the US—and “a deterritorialized geography of capitalism’s externalities.” Here, “Global South” refers to “subaltern

relational positions” “within the borders of wealthier countries, such that there are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic Souths” (Mahler, 2017, para. 1). As well, a third use of the term focuses on the politics of resistance, that is, the construction of “lateral solidarities” (Mahler, 2017, para. 1) and transnational political imaginaries of struggle highlighting shared experiences of the negative effects of colonisation and/or contemporary neoliberal, global capitalism across a variety of spaces, scales, and social identities (Clarke, 2018; Mahler, 2017). We acknowledge the contributions of these non-geographical conceptions of the Global South and will see if and how they translate in the self-designations and speeches of the actors in the arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and limitations highlighted above, we still think it interesting for our analysis to attempt to operationalize the “Global South” in geographical terms, that is in relation to countries. Reasons to do so have to do with our object of study. The actors of the representation of women and girls with disabilities intervene in international arenas—the COSP, the UN-CSW—where international norms give the national authorities of their country a crucial role in implementing UN conventions, such as the CRPD or CEDAW, through territorially based programs and policies. From our preliminary observations, we find that national geopolitical environments are the political contexts referred to in the speech of many of the actors.

Like Clarke (2018), we think that another use of the term Global South, although less critical and imperfect but indexical of political economy processes and inequities in international settings, may still be useful for our analysis. Proceeding from a genealogy intended to capture the realities of unequal economic development, this conception of the Global South “refers to countries classified by the World Bank as low or middle income that are located in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean” (Clarke, 2018). In this view, the label “Global North” would be reserved for countries from Western and Eastern Europe and North America, as well as for other countries classified as high income. To these combined criteria of world region and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, it may be necessary to add a consideration for histories of colonization by Western powers, for example, in the case of Chile, Puerto Rico, Panama, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, which are currently classified as high income.

For this report, we thus use the World Bank’s categories of Gross National Income (GNI)¹¹ and corresponding categorization of countries. The World Bank’s GNI categories are the following:

For the current 2023 fiscal year, low-income economies are defined as those with a GNI per capita, calculated using the [World Bank Atlas method](#), of \$1,085 or less in 2021; lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1,086 and \$4,255; upper middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$4,256 and \$13,205; high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of \$13,205 or more. (World Bank, 2025)

The list of countries corresponding to each of the four GNI category appears on the same page. From this World Bank data, we established the following distribution of countries to help us analyze the under-representation or over-representation of speakers from these economic geographies (listed as Income categories (World Bank) and distribution (%) of countries):

¹¹ The [World Bank’s definition of the GNI](#) is “the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employee and property income) from abroad.”

- Low-income economies: 28 countries (12.9% of total)
- Lower-middle income: 54 countries (24.9% of total)
- Upper-middle income: 54 countries (24.9% of total)
- High-income economies: 81 countries (37.3% of total)
- **TOTAL = 217 countries (100%)**

The World Bank notes that “Venezuela has been temporarily unclassified as of July 2021 pending release of revised national accounts statistics.” See the names and number of countries by category as calculated by the World Bank (World Bank, 2025).

In our data analysis, we thus first categorize the geographical location of the actors of representation by identifying the country in which the speaker’s organization is headquartered. This enables us, in turn, to map out the economic geographies of the speakers in our selection of events. We have also chosen to categorize the participants further in terms of spatial geographies, using the World Bank’s world regions categories for consistency, which appear on the same webpage (World Bank, 2025). These spatial categories (+ number of countries and percentage in each category) are the following:

Table 1: Spatial geographies – World Regions (World Bank) and distribution (%) of countries

World Region	Number of countries	Distribution of countries
East Asia and Pacific	38	17.4%
Europe and Central Asia	58	26.6%
Latin America & the Caribbean	42	19.3%
Middle East and North Africa	21	9.6%
North America	3	1.4%
South Asia	8	3.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	48	22%
TOTAL* (countries and %)	218	100%

* Total includes Venezuela. See the names and number of countries by category as calculated by the World Bank (World Bank, 2025).

Going back to the categories of “Global South” or “Global North,” we have had to make decisions regarding the classification of speakers from three countries: Chile, Armenia, and Georgia. Chile is considered a high-income economy by the World Bank. However, we have decided to classify it as part of the Global South. First, Chile has an history of more than 300 years of colonization by Western powers which has had important impacts on its demographics and economic, cultural, and political contexts. Second, Chile is part of the Group of 77, an international coalition of countries self-proclaimed as part of the Global South (Group of 77 [G77], n.d.). For these combined reasons, we have classified Chile as part of the Global South. The economies of Armenia and Georgia are considered “upper-middle-income” by the World Bank. However, these transcontinental countries are most often understood as part of Europe. Both have been impacted by Russian imperialism, but not in the same way as countries from the Global South that were colonized by Western imperialist

states (Yale University, n.d.; Spetschinsky & Bolgova, 2014). Furthermore, neither Armenia nor Georgia is part of the G77. We have thus decided to classify these two countries as part of the Global North. Our decisions concur with the classification proposed by the Wikimedia Foundation (Wikimedia, 2022). As an indication, according to this list, the Global South makes up 72.1% of all the world countries, territories, and overseas departments and the Global North, 27.8%.

Finally, we recognize that such general terms as the Global South and the Global North should not be essentialized and that their employ should not detract from considering what scholars insist are the variegated histories and trajectories, “contexts, cultures and epistemologies” of disability in specific places and/or scales (Grech & Soldatić, 2015, p. 2).

4. The Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP)

4.1 Context

4.1.1 Brief overview of the COSP’s History

To understand the context in which the COSP has emerged and its purpose, we first have to look at the CRPD and its link with the disability rights movement. Following at least two decades of intense activism by the disability rights movement (Sabatello & Shulze, 2014), the CRPD was adopted by the UN General Assembly (GA res 61/106) in December 2006 (UN, 2006). The drafting of the CRPD was negotiated from 2002 to 2006 by an Ad Hoc Committee of the UN General Assembly, which makes it the “fastest negotiated human rights treaty” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN-DESA], n.d.). Moreover, as Sabatello and Shulze explain, “civil society participation in the process exceeded by far previous cases of involvement in the formulation of international human rights treaties. It has, in fact, taken the idea of ‘new diplomacy,’ referring to civil society’s involvement in international processes, to a new level.” (2014, p. 5).

When the Convention and its Optional Protocol opened for signature in March 2007, there were 82 signatories of the Convention, 44 signatories of the Optional Protocol, and only one ratification (UN-DESA, n.d.-a). States, but also regional integration organizations¹² (such as the European Union), have the capacity to sign the CRPD. In fact, the CRPD was the first human rights treaty opened to signature by the latter. The Convention came into force almost two years after its adoption, in May 2008, upon the 20th ratification (UN-DESA, n.d.-a). Since then, the CRPD has been ratified almost universally,¹³ “although there are some notable absences, such as the United States of America” (Abualghaib et al., 2019).

Article 40 of the CRPD stipulates that “The States Parties shall meet regularly in a Conference of States Parties in order to consider any matter with regard to the implementation of the present Convention” (UN, 2006). According to Stein and Lord, “convening a periodic Conference of States Parties to consider implementation matters is a novelty” (2010, p. 697). Here, drafters of the CRPD

¹²According to Article 44 of the CRPD, regional integration organization is “an organization constituted by sovereign States of a given region, to which its member States have transferred competence in respect of matters governed by this Convention” (UN, 2006).

¹³ See a complete and up-to-date list of states that have ratified the CRPD (UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, n.d.).

took the example of other global treaties, like the *Convention of Biological Diversity*, which also convenes at a periodical meeting of all State Parties (Della Fina et al., 2017).

The COSP has been held annually at the UN headquarters in New York since 2008. Each year, a range of themes and issues related to the implementation of the CRPD is discussed in roundtables, interactive dialogues, and side events by the signatories of the Convention, other international institutions, and civil society organizations (International Disability Alliance [IDA], n.d.).

4.1.2 Mandate

As stated earlier, Article 40 of the CRPD establishes that the COSP will be held annually so that States Parties and other organizations can discuss the global implementation of the Convention. This meeting usually lasts for three days and is held at the UN headquarters in New York. Discussions take various forms (to be discussed more in-depth in the “Events” section). Each year, an overarching theme for the conference is chosen by the COSP’s Bureau (see under Composition below). This theme should reflect “the most relevant concern or problem in the world regarding the rights of people with disabilities” (Tekuchova, 2022). Between two to four sub-themes can also be chosen.

It is also during the COSP that members of the CRPD committee are elected every other year. This committee is composed of 18 independent experts elected for a period of four years. Each committee member needs to be a national of a State party to the CRPD with extensive and recognized knowledge in the field of human rights (International Justice Resource Center [IJRC], n.d.). Attention is given to equitable geographical representation of the CRPD committee members. Although it was not always the case, as of 2022, there is an equitable representation of both sexes. The Committee’s responsibilities include monitoring the implementation of the CRPD and evaluating the reports submitted periodically by States Parties in the Review cycle (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [UN-OHCHR], n.d.-a).

4.1.3 Composition

Member States

As of August 2022, 185 countries of the 193 UN Member States have ratified the CRPD. These countries are considered the “Member States” who are supposed to meet and discuss matters related to the Convention at the COSP main events (UN-OHCHR, n.d.-a).

Bureau

The COSP has a Bureau, which oversees the organization of the yearly conference. **The Bureau decides the yearly themes of the COSP.** The Bureau is composed of five elected Member States representing the five regional groups. Here is the composition of the 2022 Bureau (UN-DESA, 2022a):

President: Finland (Western European and Others Group)

Vice-Presidents: Republic of Iraq (Asia-Pacific Group), Poland (Eastern European Group), Guatemala (Latin American and Caribbean Group), and Zambia (African Group).

Secretariat

The Secretariat for the CRPD-DESA is responsible for servicing the COSP. The secretariat is in the Division for Social Policy and Development, a part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York (UN-OHCHR and Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2007).

4.1.4 Events and the participation of CSOs

State Parties and other signatories of the Convention can participate in all COSP events. In the spirit of the Convention, “A Conference of States Parties to the CRPD must include persons with disabilities and their DPOs in order to meet the commitments laid out in the CRPD” (NDA, 2021, p. 73). In fact, throughout the negotiation process and adoption of the CRPD, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations have maintained their call of “Nothing About Us, Without Us.” This statement confirms the importance of the participation of organizations “of” people with disabilities to the COSP, and more largely of civil society organizations.

Main Event

Each annual meeting of the COSP features the following components:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Organization of work.
4. Election of the members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
5. Matters related to the implementation of the Convention:
 - a. General debate;
 - b. Roundtable discussions;
 - c. Interactive dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention.
6. Decisions by the Conference of States Parties.
7. Closure of the session (from Programmes of the COSP14 and 15)

There are guidelines for participating in the “General debate” and reading statements (UN-DESA, 2022a). Speakers from all State Parties and authorized organizations, including ECOSOC-accredited civil society organizations, wishing to make a statement at the general debate need to notify the Secretariat before a specific date. Speakers have a limit of three minutes per each statement (exceptions to this limit can be allowed in the case of people with disabilities). Speakers must provide a copy of their statement before each meeting. Speakers are invited to share their statement for publication on the UN Journal Portal (see Guidance Note on the General Debate in UN-DESA, 2022a).

“Roundtable discussions” are three-hour long meetings related to the priority themes and sub-themes of the conference (IDA, n.d.). The format of these roundtables is the following: first are presentations by various speakers from State Parties, CSOs, and academia; then an interactive discussion takes place, with interventions from people in the audience, which are limited to three minutes. Each event is usually three hours long and can be attended virtually or in-person (UN-DESA, 2022a).

Each year, a number of speakers from accredited and non-accredited CSOs are invited to participate in the Roundtable discussions by providing statements as part of panels of speakers.

However, only representatives of civil society organizations with accreditation or consultative status with ECOSOC can attend the Main Events in person. Main events are televised on UN WebTV.

On the last day of the Conference, there is an “Interactive dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention” (UN-DESA, 2022a). Part 1 of the Interactive dialogue features speakers from “United Nations entities.” Part 2 features speakers from “Mandates and other stakeholders,” such as the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility. It also includes one invited representative of civil society.

A final report is produced for each conference, which summarizes the content of the speeches made during the main event, except for the General Debate, presenting the results of the elections to the CRPD Committee (item 4 of the agenda) and the decisions adopted by the Conference of States Parties (item 6).

Side Events

Side events are events happening during the COSP and organized within the sidelines of the main events. They provide spaces for attendees of the conference to share ideas and exchange information about a broad variety of issues related to the annual themes of the Conference, but not always. “Only Governments, UN agencies, and accredited civil society organizations (CSOs) can conduct side-events at sessions of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD. CSOs include NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC and NGOs accredited to the COSP, including organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs)” (UN-DESA, 2022a).

Organizers of side events express their interest in organizing an event during the conference and need to be selected by a special committee. To do so, they submit a proposal providing a detailed description of their proposed side event (UN-DESA, 2022a). See the [application for side events](#).

Not all side events proposals are accepted by the Bureau. In addition to being related to disability rights and the CRPD, side events “should be closely related” to the overarching theme and sub-themes of the Conference. Also, according to the application for COSP side events, “priority will be given to multi-stakeholder events that include the Member States, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders as well as side events with gender balance and cross-regional representation.”

Given the three-minute speaking-time rule at the General Debate, side events are opportunities to have more in-depth discussions on the topics and priorities chosen by the organizers (Tekuchova, 2022). Organizers of side events have the responsibility to ensure accessibility to their events, e.g., by providing closed captioning, interpretation, or simultaneous translation. Thus, organizing a side event requires significant financial resources. It also requires the ability to deliver in a very short time frame, as organizers sometimes have only one month to prepare their event (Tekuchova, 2022). While organizers are the ones in charge of submitting side events proposals and covering the fees related to the organization of side events they are in charge of, more often than not they have to associate themselves with sponsors, which can be member states, multilateral institutions, or even other CSOs.

Civil Society Forum

The Civil Society Forum has been held since COSP3, in 2010. It is a one-day event that takes place the day before the start of the official conference and is organized around a series of panel discussions on topics usually distinct from the overarching theme and sub-themes of the COSP. The Civil Society Forum is an additional opportunity for civil society and other participants to discuss relevant issues related to the CRPD and other disability-related issues.

The Civil Society Forum is facilitated by the International Disability Alliance. Since 2016, it has been organized by a Civil Society Coordination Mechanism (CSCM).

In 2016, through the International Disability Alliance (IDA), civil society established a coordination mechanism to promote the meaningful engagement of all persons with disabilities in the Conference of States Parties. The Civil Society Coordination Mechanism (CSCM) is a self-organizing, voluntary group of persons with disabilities, DPOs, non-governmental organizations and other civil society stakeholders committed to ensuring the implementation of Article 4.3 in the COSP. A Steering Committee comprised of 20 individuals leads the CSCM. It advocates for the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in all stages of the Conference; selects speakers/civil society representatives in the Conference through an open and transparent voting process, and organises the Civil Society CRPD Forum. (NDA 2021, pp. 73–74)

Article 3 of the Terms of Reference for the CSCM (IDA, 2018) stipulates that “the objective of the Civil Society Coordination Mechanism is to engage with the Conference of States Parties Bureau, the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the Division for Social Policy and Development in the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and other relevant stakeholders to ensure greater substantive engagement of civil society in the COSP. The Mechanism is intended to bring to life the right to participation of all persons with disabilities in decision-making as mandated in CRPD Article 4.3 and to meet the intent of the disability community’s slogan, ‘nothing about us without us.’”

In addition, Article 2 of the Terms of Reference stipulates that “the civil society coordination mechanism, open to all interested civil society colleagues, will enhance [the opportunity “to actively engage in the preparation and planning of the Conference”] by providing a means for DPOs and other civil society stakeholders to advocate with a unified voice for inclusion in all elements of the Conference” (IDA, 2018).

Article 4 of the Terms of Reference states, “Membership of the Civil Society Coordination Mechanism is open to organisations of persons with disabilities, non-governmental and other organisations working on the rights of persons with disabilities, and non-governmental donors working in this space” (IDA, 2018). In addition, “50% + 1 members” of the Steering Committee of the CSCM “must be representatives of organisations of people with disabilities” (IDA, 2018, article 17-a).

Accreditation and Consultative Status with the ECOSOC

Not all organizations can participate in the COSP the same way. Only CSOs considered “accredited” can participate in the official sessions of the Conference and can organize side events (more details on the ECOSOC accreditation status to be given in the final analysis section of the report). “According to rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accreditation shall be granted to:

- Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council;
- Non-governmental organizations previously accredited to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention;
- Other non-governmental organizations subject to the approval of the Conference by consensus” (UN-DESA, 2019).

Consultative Status with the ECOSOC:

Under Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations and on ECOSOC Resolution 1996/3, accredited NGOs are granted consultative status to the ECOSOC. The official ECOSOC website indicates that “consultative status provides NGOs with access to not only ECOSOC, but also to its many subsidiary bodies, to the various human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, ad-hoc processes on small arms, as well as special events organized by the President of the General Assembly” (UN Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC, n.d.).

Accreditation to the Conference of States Parties:

CSOs that do not have consultative status with the ECOSOC and have not been accredited to the Ad Hoc Committee of the CRPD can still apply for accreditation to participate to the COSP. This application process opens four weeks before each Conference, and accreditation is given during the first meeting of every edition of the COSP. Once a CSO is accredited to the COSP, it remains accredited for all future editions of the Conference (UN-DESA, 2019).

4.2 The 14th Session of the COSP (2021)

4.2.1 Overview

Context

The 14th session of the Conference of States Parties (COSP) took place virtually from June 15 to 17, 2021. Only the Opening of the conference and matters related to the implementation of the Convention and the General debate were held in person, at the UN headquarters in New York (IDA, 2021).

Themes

Given the context in 2021 and the ongoing pandemic, the overall theme of the 2021 edition of the COSP was “Building back better: COVID-19 response and recovery; Meeting the needs, Realizing the rights, and Addressing the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities.” There were also three sub-themes:

- Sub-theme 1: Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies
- Sub-theme 2: Living Independently, being included in the community
- Sub-theme 3: Right to education; challenges with inclusive education and accessibility during COVID-19 (UN-DESA, 2021).

CRPD documents that were prepared to facilitate the roundtable discussions on each of the sub-themes are available at UN-DESA (2021).

Main Event

The 2021 Program of the Main Event featured seven speakers affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector. Ms. Hauwa Ojeifo, Executive Director, She Writes Woman (Video message), a CSO OF people with disabilities (mental health), was invited to present a statement during the item “Organization of work” of the Main Event (although “woman” is in the name of the organization, the latter defines itself as “A movement OF people with mental health conditions FOR people with mental health conditions.”) (Ajala, 2022).

Videos of the opening session, roundtable discussion on the sub-themes, and general debates are available at UN-DESA (2021).

We did not attend any item of the Main event at the 14th edition of the COSP.

The final report is available (UN, 2021).

Civil Society Forum

The [program of the Civil Society Forum](#) in 2021 was as follows:

Opening session

- The Covid-19 Pandemic: What do we know and what is being done?
- Our Communities Online: How are we adapting to this online world?
- Our Communities “IRL” In Real Life: The Right to Live Independently in the Community
- Concluding Comments and Closing Remarks

[Recordings of the Civil Society Forum](#) are also available.

We did not attend any of the events hosted during the Civil Society Forum in 2021.

4.2.2 Preliminary synthesis for our analysis of side events

There were 80 side events at COSP14. Filter by the date June 2021 to search the [list of all COSP14 side events](#). Thirteen (13) of the side events included our keywords in their official description (see details of the keywords in Section 2: Methodology of data collection). Of these thirteen (13) events, eleven (11) focused specifically on women and girls with disabilities. It means that only 13.8% of side events at the 14th edition of the COSP were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

List of the side events focusing on women and/or girls with disabilities:

1. Gender and Disability Dimensions of the COVID-19 Crisis: A Global Launch of Resources to Address Critical GBV and SRHR Gaps
2. Achieving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Menstrual Wellbeing for All: Introducing Tools, Policy and Practice
3. Moving the Needle on Gender and Disability: from gender aware to gender transformative
4. The Situation of Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Recovery Efforts from the Pandemic of COVID-19
5. Rise Up 2.0: Reuniting the International Feminist Disability Coalition
6. Women with Disabilities Affected by Armed Conflict

7. [Gender Responsive Disability Inclusion in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings¹⁴]
8. Every Girl and Woman's Right - Inclusive Education and Employment Responses to COVID-19 for Girls and Women with Disabilities
9. Leadership of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Building Back Better COVID-19 Response & Recovery Meeting the Needs, Realizing the Rights and Addressing the Socioeconomic Impacts on Persons with Disabilities
10. Nothing About Us, Without Us: Amplifying the Priorities of Women and Girls with Disabilities at the CRPD and CEDAW Committees in the Post-COVID Recovery Process
11. The Pandemic and Women with Disabilities: Building Feminist Solidarity

Of these eleven (11) side events on women and girls with disabilities, eight (8) were directly linked to the overarching theme of the 14th edition of the COSP “Building back better: COVID-19 response and recovery; Meeting the needs, Realizing the rights, and Addressing the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities.” Two (2) additional side events were focused on Sub-theme 1 which is “Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies” (sessions 6 and 7). Only one (1) of the side events was not related to the overarching theme or any of the sub-themes but was specifically focused on activism of women and girls with disabilities (session 5).

Table 2: Distribution of all speakers at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities by category of actors, number, and %

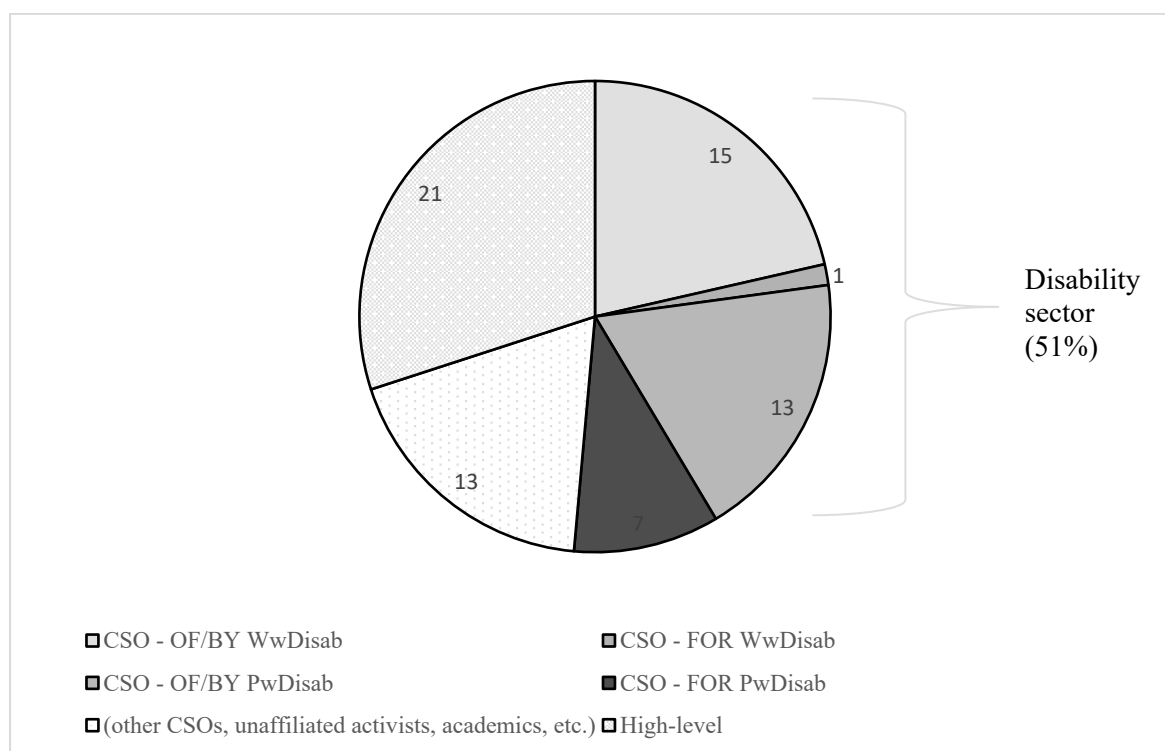
Type of speakers	Number	Proportion in % (/70)
CSO - OF/BY WwDisab	15	21%
CSO - FOR WwDisab	1	1%
CSO - OF/BY PwDisab	13	19%
CSO - FOR PwDisab	7	10%
CSOs - Disability – OF/FOR and to clarify - Total	36	51%
CSO Women’s and Feminist (general)	1	1%
CSO - LGBTQ or Queer	1	1%
CSO Democracy	0	0%
CSO HR	2	3%
CSO Charity/Foundation	1	1%

¹⁴ According to the concept note, this event aimed to increase “the visibility of the leadership role of women with disabilities in post-conflict and transition context,” and CSOs were to participate, alongside “experts, member states and UN entities.” Unfortunately, this is an event we were not able to attend. As we do not have the list of speakers either, it will not be reflected in our analysis. It is thus bracketed out.

Type of speakers	Number	Proportion in % (/70)
Activists	3	4%
Practitioners	0	0%
Academia	5	7%
Multilateral Institution	15	21%
Government	6	9%
Total	70	100%

Table 2 provides a first lens to inquire into the variety of political actors involved in representing women and girls with disabilities, that is, in doing the work of producing, circulating and exchanging meanings—that is, representations—about women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW side events.

Chart 1: Distribution of all speakers by category of actors at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities (Total of speakers: 70)



Who—that is, in Table 2, speakers from which categories of political actors—spoke about women and girls with disabilities at the COSP14’s side events focusing on them?

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers by categories of actors at the COSP14 side events:

1. **Half of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in these side events (36/70 = 51%) were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector**, that is, CSOs OF or FOR women with disabilities or people with disabilities. As well, the three (3) speakers categorized as “activists” are also from the disability sector.
2. **Sixteen (16) of the 36 speakers presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector are from the “Women with disabilities” sector—that’s about a third of the speakers from this sector.** They account for 22% of the total (70) of speakers. All these speakers but one are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
3. Speakers from disability-led organizations, be it BY women or BY people with disabilities (28) **outnumber by three to one** the speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities (8).
4. The other half of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in these side events is composed mostly of **high-level speakers (30% of the total)**, that is, of representatives of multilateral institutions (15 = 21%) and of governments (6 = 9%). Speakers from multilateral institutions were present at 6 of the 10 events and government representatives at 5. Altogether, only one event out of 10 had no speaker from a multilateral institution or government.
5. **Other CSOs**—Women’s and Feminist (general), LGBTQ or Queer, Human Rights, Charity/Foundation—provided 5 speakers (7% of the total). **Academia** provided 5 speakers as well (7%).

Table 3: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY WwDisab at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Amanda McRae	Women Enabled International (WEI)	2
Nandini Gosh	Women with Disabilities India Network	1
Maryangel Garcia Ramos	Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad	1
Sajana Gurung	National Indigenous Disabled Women Association – Nepal (NIDWAN)	1
Abia Akram	National Forum for Women with Disabilities	2
Bonnie Brayton	Disabled Women’s Network (DAWN) of Canada	2
Representative (NO NAME)	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Rose Achayo	National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda	1
Pratima Gurung	National Indigenous Disabled Women Association – Nepal (NIDWAN)	1
Stephanie Ortoleva	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1
Nidhi Goyal	Rising Flame	1
Reena Mohanty	Women with Disabilities India Network	1

Table 4: Speakers from CSOs – FOR WwDisab at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Karine Grigorian	Agate Rights Defense Center of Women with Disabilities	1

Table 5: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY PwDisab at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Yazz Davies and Dawn Wiltshire	My Life, My Choice	1
Sylvain Obedi (identified as male)	Enable The Disable Action (EDA)	1
Yeni Rosa Damayanti	Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) / Perhimpunan Jiwa Sehat	1
Anne Siodi	Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN)	1
Denisse Taya	Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN)	1
Susan Sygall	Mobility International USA (MIUSA)	2
Johileny Moran	National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange	2

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Zara Todd	European Network on Independent Living	1
Judith Ekaete Umoh	International Disability Alliance (IDA)	1
Sofia Savoy	Movimiento Estamos Todos en Acción (META)	1
Natalia Farias	Movimiento Estamos Todos en Acción (META)	1

Table 6: Speakers from CSOs – FOR PwDisab at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Diana Samarasan	Disability Rights Fund (DRF / DRAF)	1
Representative (NO NAME)	Sened.org	1
Elaine Green	Leonard Cheshire	1
Nichakarn (Khim) Kaveevorayan	Leonard Cheshire	1
Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame	Sightsavers	1
Nunu Supaanong	Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APDC)	1
Asha Hans	Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Center (SMRC)	1

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector at the COSP14, some spoke more than once in the side events on women and girls with disabilities:

- Amanda McRae—Women Enabled International (WEI), (US-International) (2 sessions)
- Abia Akram—National Forum for Women with Disabilities (Pakistan) (2 sessions)
- Bonnie Brayton—DAWN (Canada) (2 sessions)
- Susan Sygall—Mobility International USA (MIUSA) (USA) (2 sessions)
- Johileny Moran—National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (USA) (2 sessions)

Social differences - collective and individual identifications of the speakers

- What are the collective political identifications of movement actors (CSOs OF) from the disability sector—that is, the categories of social difference around which these CSOs are organized?**

At COSP14, 15 speakers were affiliated with organizations of **women with disabilities**. Among these, 13 were from CSOs of women with disabilities “in general,” and two were from organizations of **Indigenous women with disabilities**. Also invited to speak to the specific differences of gender/sexuality and disabilities in these events were 11 speakers affiliated with organizations of people with disabilities. Among these, nine were from CSOs of people with disabilities “in general,” one centred on the difference that **psychosocial disabilities** (mental health) makes, and the other on **Indigenous persons with disabilities**.

- b) **What are the individual political identifications of movement actors from the disability sector, if different from that of their organizations, OR if individual activists—that is, the specific differences with which they publicly self-identify in these arenas?**

One individual activist speaker from the disability sector was identified as a “**non-binary person**” in the description of the event.

- c) **What is the gender of the speakers? Researchers’ identifications of the gender of the speakers as “women” or “men”**

Out of a total of 70 speakers at these side events, nine were identified by the researchers as men. Of these, five were from high-level institutions or government, one from a CSO OF people with disabilities, two from other CSOs, and one from Academia. Thus, taking into account the presence of the non-binary person, 60 out of 70 speakers—including 35 from the 36 speakers from disability-led CSOs—can be classified as belonging to the gender category “women.”

Table 7: Spatial geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, COSP14, number, and %

CATEGORIES														
(World Bank)														
1- East Asia & Pacific														
2-Europe & Central Asia														
3- Latin America & the Caribbean														
4- Middle East and North Africa														
5- North America														
6- South Asia														
7- Sub-Saharan Africa														
8- Transnational Networks**														
GLOBAL SOUTH														
GLOBAL NORTH														
WORLD														

*3 CSOs are transnational networks whose membership goes beyond one world regions or more (in Table 7, these are International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the Indigenous people with disabilities global Network (IPWDGN) (2 events)).

Table 7 provides an overview of the spatial locations of the speakers from the disability sector in the side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities at COSP14. It shows the distribution of all speakers from CSOs from the disability sector (i.e., OF/BY Women with Disabilities, FOR Women with Disabilities, OF/BY People with Disabilities, FOR People with Disabilities) according to their spatial geographies: each speaker is classified according to the world region where the speaker’s organization is headquartered. If speaking in two different side events, speakers are counted twice. World regions categories are those of the World Bank—see this report, Section 3.4. For Global South and Global North categories, see the discussion in this report in Section 3.4.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by spatial geography categories at the COSP14 side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

1. The **most represented world regions are:** North America (11/36 speakers), South Asia (8/36 speakers), and Europe and Central Asia (6/36 speakers). Speakers from these three (3) regions combined represent (25/36 = 70%) of all speakers. As a note, the vast majority of

the speakers from North America (10/11) and South Asia (7/8) are from organizations OF women with disabilities or OF people with disabilities. Only in Europe and Central Asia are most of the speakers (4/6) from organizations FOR people with disabilities.

2. **North America is over-represented** among the speakers (31%) compared to the number of countries in this region (3 countries, 1.4% of all countries in the world.) **South Asia is also over-represented** among the speakers (22%) compared to the number of countries in this region (8 countries, 3.7% of all countries in the world).
3. **The least represented world regions are** Middle East and North Africa (1/36 speakers), East Asia and Pacific (2/36), and Sub-Saharan Africa (2/36). Speakers from these three (3) regions combined represent (5/36 = 14%) of all speakers. These regions are considerably under-represented as they account for, respectively, 9.6%, 14.4%, and 22% of all the world's countries. Under-represented, but to a lesser extent are Europe and Central Asia (17% of the speakers vs. 26.6% of the world's countries), and Latin America and the Caribbean (8% of the speakers vs. 19.3% of the world's countries).
4. There are about as many speakers from countries of the Global South (16/36 = 44%) and the Global North (17/36 = 47%). However, this is unbalanced in favour of the Global North, as a large majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world are in the Global South.

Table 8: Economic geographies, CSOs – Disability, COSP14, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF /BY WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF/BY PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL ALL CSOs Disab.	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1- Low income	1	7%	0	0%	1	8%	0	0%	2	7%	0	0%	2	6%
2- Lower-middle income	7	47%	0	0%	1	8%	1	14%	8	29%	1	13%	9	25%
3- Upper-middle income	1	7%	1	100%	0	0%	2	29%	1	4%	3	38%	4	11%
4- High income	6	40%	0	0%	5	38%	4	57%	11	39%	4	50%	15	42%
5-Not Applicable**	0	0%	0	0%	6	46%	0	0%	6	21%	0	0%	6	17%
TOTAL	15	100%	1	100%	13	100%	7	100%	28	100%	8	100%	36	100%

**6 CSOs OF/BY PwDs income categories by country are not applicable because these CSOs are networks (in Table 8, these are International Disability Alliance (IDA), Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWGN) (2), META, and European Network on Independent Living)

Table 8 provides an overview of the economic geographies of the countries in which the speakers' CSOs (Disability sector) are headquartered. Economic categories are those of the World Bank—see this report, Section 3.4. In the category “Not applicable,” we find CSOs whose status as OF or FOR people with disabilities remain to be clarified, and CSOs that are networks.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by economic geographies at the COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented income category is “High income economies”** (15 speakers out of 36 = 42%) while countries in this category make up 37.3% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, high income economies are slightly over-represented at the COSP14.
2. **The least represented income category is “Low-income economies”** (2 speakers out of 36 = 6%), while countries in this category make up 12.9% of all world economies. Therefore, there is an under-representation of speakers from low-income economies at the COSP14.

3. **Also under-represented are** speakers from upper-middle income economies (4 speakers out of 36 = 11%), while countries in this category make up 24.9% of all world economies.
4. Speakers from lower-middle income economies (9 out of 36) account for 25% of the total of speakers, which corresponds to the proportion of these economies in the world (24.9%).

List 1: List of high-level speakers (representatives of multilateral institutions and governments) at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which multilateral institutions are these 15 speakers from?

- CRPD Committee (2 speakers)
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People with Disabilities
- CEDAW Committee (2 speakers)
- UN-Women (2 speakers)
- UNGEI (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative)
- UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)
- DPPA-DPO (UN Department of Political and Peace Building Affairs and Peace Operations)
- UN Secretary-General's Office
- UN-OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)
- UN-DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)
- World Bank¹⁵

Which governmental institutions are these 6 speakers from?

- Canada—Global Affairs (two speakers)
- Haiti—BSEIPH (Bureau du Secrétariat d'État à l'intégration des personnes handicapées)
- Kenya—Ministry of Education
- Kenya—National Council for Persons with Disabilities (State Corporation)
- United States—USAID (US Agency for International Development)

List 2: List of speakers from other CSOs at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which CSOs are these 5 speakers from?

- CSO - LGBTQ or Queer
 - Joseph Wandega - Out, Loud and Proud Minority Support Association of Uganda (Uganda)
- CSO - Human Rights
 - No Name - Human Rights Watch (HRW) (US-International)
 - Rebecca Brown - Center for Reproductive Rights (US-International)
- CSO - Charity (Youth)
 - Chris Hearle - Plan International (UK-International)
- CSO - Women's and/or Feminist (general)
 - Jeeja Gosh - Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (India-Southern)

¹⁵ The representative of the World Bank was acting as chair of the side event.

Table 9: Organizers and sponsors at COSP14 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
UNFPA (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>A - Gender and Disability Dimensions of the COVID-19 Crisis: A Global Launch of Resources to Address Critical GBV and SRHR Gaps</i>
UN Women (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN- International	<i>A</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>A</i>
UNFPA (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B - Achieving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Menstrual Wellbeing for All: Introducing Tools, Policy and Practice</i>
UNICEF (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META) (organizer)	CSO-Disab (To clarify)	Uruguay-Latin American Network	<i>B</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>C - Moving the Needle on Gender and Disability: from gender aware to gender transformative</i>
Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (organizer)	Government	Canada	<i>C</i>
Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (organizer)	Government	Australia	<i>C</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>C</i>

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
International Disability Alliance (IDA) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-Transnational Network	<i>D - The Situation of Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Recovery Efforts from the Pandemic of COVID-19</i>
Red Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Personas con Discapacidad y sus Familias (RIADIS) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Ecuador-Latin American Transnational Network	<i>D</i>
Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Asia/Latin America-Transnational Network ¹⁶	<i>D</i>
DAWN Canada (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY WwD	Canada	<i>E - Rise Up 2.0: Reuniting the International Feminist Disability Coalition (Disabled Women's Network Canada)</i>
Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN (organizer)	Government	Ireland	<i>F - Women with Disabilities Affected by Armed Conflict</i>
International Disability Alliance (IDA) (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-International Network	<i>F</i>
CBM-Ireland (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	Ireland	<i>F</i>
Human Rights Watch (HRW) (sponsor)	CSO – Human Rights	US-International	<i>F</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (sponsor)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>F</i>
Leonard Cheshire Disability (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	UK-International	<i>G - Every Girl and Woman's Right - Inclusive Education and Employment Responses to COVID-19 for Girls and Women with Disabilities</i>

¹⁶IPWDGN had no head office but has two coordinators based in Asia and Latin America (IDA, 2019).

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
UNITAR (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>H - Leadership of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Building Back Better COVID-19 Response & Recovery Meeting the Needs, Realizing the Rights and Addressing the Socioeconomic Impacts on Persons with Disabilities</i>
UN Women (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>H</i>
University of Tokyo (organizer)	Academia	Japan	<i>H</i>
Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Pakistan	<i>H</i>
African Disability Forum (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Ethiopia-African Network	<i>I - Nothing About Us, Without Us: Amplifying the Priorities of Women and Girls with Disabilities at the CRPD and CEDAW Committees in the Post-COVID Recovery Process</i>
International Disability Alliance (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-Transnational Network	<i>I</i>
Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (organizer)	CSO – Women’s and/or Feminist (general)	India-Southern	<i>I</i>
Center for reproductive rights (organizer)	CSO – Human Rights	US-International	<i>I</i>
Mobility International USA (MIUSA) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	US	<i>I</i>
Government of Canada (organizer)	Government	Canada	<i>I</i>
Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	India	<i>J - The Pandemic and Women with Disabilities: Building Feminist Solidarity</i>
Women with Disabilities India Network (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY WwD	India	<i>J</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (sponsor)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or	US-International	<i>J</i>

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
	other gender minorities with disabilities		
USAID (sponsor)	Government	US	J

Table 9 provides an overview of who organized and/or sponsored the side events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP14. Some organizations are involved in the organization of more than one side event.

Table 9 is based on information we found in the official description of the events (concept notes and flyers). The distinction between organizers and sponsors was usually clear, but not always—an organization can be listed as an organizer on a document and as a sponsor on another. Sometimes, only the logo of organizations is provided without specifying if they are sponsors or organizers. Therefore, the information on Table 9 might not be an accurate representation of all organizers and sponsors.

Organizers and sponsors of side events have distinct roles. Organizers are responsible for planning and coordinating the event, while sponsors provide financial or in-kind support to help cover the costs of the event, for example paying for CART captioning, or bringing in a speaker (personal communication, 2024).

Following are the highlights of who organized or sponsored side events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP:

1. Four (4) side events out of ten (10) were organized **solely by CSOs from the disability sector**. These are:
 - a. The Situation of Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Recovery Efforts from the Pandemic of COVID-19
 - b. Rise Up 2.0: Reuniting the International Feminist Disability Coalition (Disabled Women's Network Canada)
 - c. Every Girl and Woman's Right - Inclusive Education and Employment Responses to COVID-19 for Girls and Women with Disabilities
 - d. The Pandemic and Women with Disabilities: Building Feminist Solidarity
2. Six (6) other side events were organized by various combinations of multilateral institutions, CSOs from the disability sector, governments, and, in one case, other CSOs.
3. **Twelve (12) of the 22 organizers (more than half) are CSOs from the disability sector. Two (2) of them are CSOs led BY women with disabilities**—these are: DAWN Canada (1 event); Women Enabled International (WEI) (2 events). As a note, five (5) out of the twelve (12) organizing CSOs from the disability sector are regional/transnational networks.
4. **Seven (7) of the 22 organizers are high-level organizations:** four (4) are from multilateral institutions (both UNFPA and UN-Women contributed to the organizations of two side events) and three (3) from governments, namely Canada (2 side events), Australia, and Ireland.
5. Three (3) of the 22 organizers are other types of organizations (i.e., academia, charity, CSO-Women's and/or Feminist (general)).
6. **Three (3) organizing CSOs are based in the Global South, to which we should add three (3) regional networks. Ten (10) organizing CSOs and governments are based in the Global North, two (2) are transnational networks (IDA, IPWGN) which are planetary in scope, and four (4) organizers are multilateral institutions.** Given that a large majority

of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world are in the Global South, there is an under-representation of the Global South and an over-representation of the Global North among organizers.

7. Regarding the sponsors: Two (2) side events were sponsored by various combinations of CSOs from the disability sector, government and Other CSOs. In total, there were six (6) sponsors, and two (2) of them are CSOs led by women with disabilities: Women Enabled International (2 events) and Women with Disabilities India Network (1 event).

4.3 The 15th Session of the COSP (2022)

4.3.1 Overview

Context

The 2022 edition of the COSP (15th) was held in-person and virtually. Most side events were online. In-person side events could be attended only by Member States. Main events were in-person at the UN, but some speakers were able to participate virtually. The [COSP application for side events](#) also indicated the option of sending a pre-recorded statement.

There were 180 Member States participating in the 15th edition of the COSP, making it the most popular edition so far. The COSP15 included for the first time an Easy-to-Read program and Easy-to-Read background notes. It was also the first time that a youth delegate was included by the Bureau (Lung, 2022).

Themes

The overarching theme of the COSP 2022 was: “Building disability-inclusive and participatory societies in the COVID context and beyond.” There were 3 sub-themes:

- Sub-theme 1: Innovation and technology advancing disability rights
- Sub-theme 2: Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities
- Sub-theme 3: Participation of persons with disabilities in climate action, disaster risk reduction and resilience against natural disasters (UN-DESA, 2022a).

Main Event

Various documents are available:

- View the [program of the COSP15 main event](#)
- At UN-DESA (2022a), view the CRPD documents prepared to facilitate the roundtable discussions on each of the sub themes, Videos of the Opening session, Roundtables on the sub-themes, and General Debates.
- View the final report of the meeting (UN, 2022).

Our observations:

We attended all the activities of the main event at COSP15. Very few speakers mentioned, even if in passing, women and girls with disabilities during the main event.

At item 3, “Organization of Work” (opening of the session), six high-level speakers and two speakers from CSOs of the disability sector (World Blind Union and Transforming Communities for Inclusion) presented short statements. The Chair of the CRPD Committee, Rosemary Kayes, spoke about issues related to gender equity and women and girls with disabilities. She insisted on the need to maintain gender parity of the Committee. She also made a pitch for embracing an intersectional approach “so that the multiple layers of identity, of life statuses are respected and responded to, including in relation to sex, age, indigeneity, LGBT” etc. (verbatim, our notes). The final report indicates that “she commended the Conference for discussing important issues, including in the side events where the intersectional perspectives on women with disabilities, the LGBTQI community and Indigenous peoples were explored, even though there remained much to be done” (UN, 2022, p. 15). The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, mentioned she was working with UN-Women towards “a resolution on women with disabilities” (UN, 2022, p. 15).

There was only one speaker affiliated with a CSO OF/BY Women with disabilities: Pratima Gurung from the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal at the Main event. She was slated to speak at Roundtable #3 on the topic of “Participation of persons with disabilities in climate action, disaster risk reduction and resilience against natural disasters,” but could not deliver her talk due to connectivity issues (UN, 2022, p. 4).

According to the official report of the 15th edition of the COSP (UN, 2022), 92 States parties made statements at the General debate, as well as 19 NGOs. There were only two speakers from CSOs in the Women with disabilities sector at the General Debate: Women Enabled International and Women with Disabilities Australia. These two interventions were the only ones substantially visible and politicizing women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities using a feminist lens in the General Debate.

It is worth noting here that, despite its name, there is no debate nor dialogue in the General Debate. State representatives and NGOs present their achievements and/or best practices, research results, or tools they have developed. The general tenor of the speeches is “look at what we have been doing; we are making progress.” There is no protest or combative language on the part of the speakers. The strongest language we heard was from Mr. Gerard Quinn, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, who emphasized that ending the invisibility of people with disabilities “requires that ableism be uprooted” (our notes). This was the only time the word “ableism” was mentioned in the General Debate.

Civil Society Forum

Program (downloaded from International Disability Alliance (IDA) website prior to the Forum – excerpts from our electronic copy):

Plenary Session: Working together for the rights of persons with disabilities - International Cooperation

First Panel Dialogue: Taking advantage of opportunities to move forward on deinstitutionalization

Second Panel Dialogue: Knowledge sharing for inclusive education in digital classrooms

Third Panel Dialogue: Intersectionality and sexual and reproductive health rights for persons with disabilities

Closing Session: Looking to the week ahead

Our observations:

The civil society forum on Monday, June 13, was organized as a 3-hour, morning event. We attended the whole event online. **The 3rd session of the program**, on “Intersectionality and sexual and reproductive health and rights for people with disabilities,” **featured significant and substantial discussion on women and girls with disabilities**. The goal of this panel was to “explore challenges and good practices realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights for persons with disabilities experiencing multiple forms of discrimination (women, girls, Indigenous persons, sexual orientation and gender identity-diverse, and underrepresented disability identities including, specifically, persons with psychosocial disabilities).” (Source: excerpt from detailed Program of Civil Society Forum downloaded from International Disability Alliance (IDA) website prior to the Forum, our electronic copy). Speakers in this Third Panel Dialogue were introduced to the audience as:

Yeni Rosa Damayanti, Chair of Indonesian Mental Health Association, moderator for this third panel of Civil Society Forum

Ms. Irene Cuvees, youth activist from Argentina

Ms. Ana Peláez Narváez from Spain, a member of the CEDAW Committee

Maulani Rotinsulu from Indonesia, Advisory board of Indonesian association of women with disabilities

Ms. Agnieszka Krol, manager of programmes and innovation, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (Source: streamed text)

4.3.2 Preliminary synthesis for our analysis of side events

There were 86 side events at COSP15. Filter by the date June 2022 to search the [list of all COSP15 side events](#).

Fifteen (15) of the side events included our keywords in their official description (see details of the keywords in Section 2: Methodology of data collection). Out of these fifteen (15) events, nine (9) focused squarely on women and girls with disabilities.¹⁷ It means that only 10.5% of side events at the 15th edition of the COSP were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

¹⁷ One of the sessions initially on the program, “The missing history: In Solidarity as sisters! From Beijing 1995 to the Article 6 of the CRPD,” was postponed by the organizers and thus is not included in our calculations.

List of side events focusing on women and/or girls with disabilities:

1. Role of Women with Disabilities in Building Disability Inclusive Participatory Society
2. An Intersectional Approach to Disability Inclusion and Beyond
3. Generation Equality Comes to COSP: Ensuring the Participation of Women, Girls, and Non-binary Persons with Disabilities in Advancing Gender Equality
4. Our Site: Empowering Women and Girls with Disability through Co-Design
5. Women with disabilities leading climate action
6. LGBTIQ youth with disabilities re-envisioning the road to equality
7. Equal rights for women and girls with disabilities: Leveraging the power of innovation and technology to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights
8. Using Technology to Bring Together Women and Gender Minorities with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic
9. Toward inclusive societies: Making data and statistics disability- and gender-inclusive: Launch of the 2022 Disability Data Initiative's report

Among these nine (9) side events, concept notes show that four (4) were linked to the overarching theme of the conference, “Building disability-inclusive and participatory societies in the COVID context and beyond” (sessions 1, 2, 3, 6). Four (4) side events were linked to Sub-theme 1 “Innovation and technology advancing disability rights” (sessions 4, 7, 8 and 9). One (1) side event was linked to Sub-theme 3 “Participation of persons with disabilities in climate action, disaster risk reduction and resilience against natural disasters” (session 5). No side event was without a link to the COSP15's assigned themes.

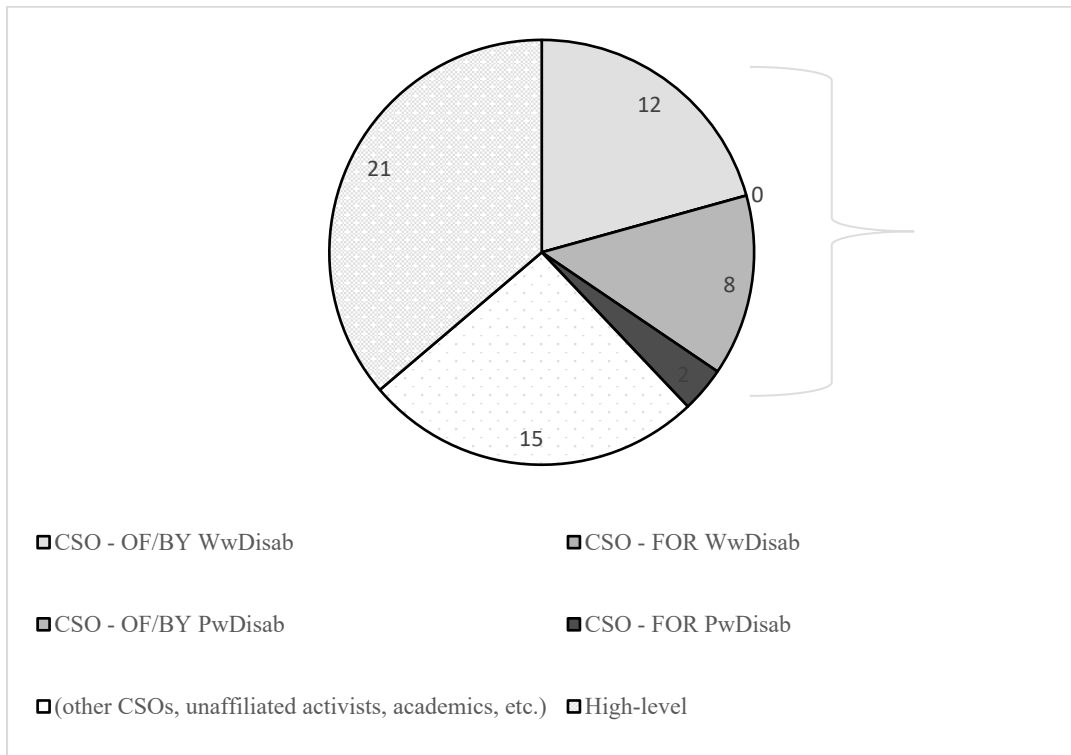
Table 10: Distribution of all speakers at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities by category of actors, number, and %

Type of speakers	Number	Proportion in % (/58)
CSO - OF/BY WwDisab	12	21%
CSO - FOR WwDisab	0	0%
CSO - OF/BY PwDisab	8	14%
CSO - FOR PwDisab	2	3%
CSOs - Disability – OF/FOR to clarify	22	38%
CSO Women’s and Feminist (general)	3	5%
CSO - LGBTQ or Queer	0	0%
CSO Democracy	0	0%
CSO HR	0	0%
CSO Charity/Foundation	2	3%
Activists	5	9%
Practitioners	0	0%
Academia	5	9%
Multilateral Institution	16	28%
Government	5	9%
Total	58*	100%*

*We did not have any information for 3 speakers. They are not included in the results.

Table 10 provides a first lens to inquire into the variety of political actors involved in representing women and girls with disabilities, that is, in doing the work of producing, circulating, and exchanging meanings—that is, representations—about women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW side events.

Chart 2: Distribution of all speakers by category of actors at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities (Total of speakers: 58)



Who—that is, here, speakers from which categories of political actors—spoke about women and girls with disabilities at COSP15’s side events focusing on them?

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers by categories at the side events at COSP15:

1. **About four out of ten of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in the side events (22/58 = 38%) were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector**, that is, CSOs OF or FOR women with disabilities or people with disabilities. As well, the five (5) speakers categorized as activists are also from the disability sector.
2. **Twelve (12) of the 22 speakers presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector are from the “Women with disabilities” sector.** They account for 21% of the total (58) of speakers. All these speakers are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
3. **Speakers from disability-led organizations, be it BY women or BY people with disabilities (20) largely outnumber** speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities (2).
4. Among the other actors who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in these side events are **high-level speakers (37% of the total)**, that is, representatives of multilateral institutions (16 = 28%) and of governments (5 = 9%). **Speakers from multilateral institutions were present at 7 of the 9 events, and government representatives at 3. Altogether, only 2 events had no speaker from a multilateral institution or government.**
5. **Other CSOs**—Women’s and Feminist (general), and Charity/Foundation—provided 5 speakers (9% of the total). Academia provided 5 speakers as well (9%).

Table 11: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY WwDisab at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Abia Akram	Global Forum on Leadership of Women with Disabilities Pakistan	1
Bonnie Brayton	DAWN Canada	1
Pratima Gurung	National Indigenous Disabled Women Association – Nepal (NIDWAN)	2
Elizabeth Campos	Blind Women’s Commission of Peru - Comisión De Damas Invidentes Del Perú (CODIP)	1
Amanda McRae	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1
Ashrafun Misti Nahar	Women with disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)	1
Libbi Cunnington	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	1
Saphia Grant	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	1
Marin Un	Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities (HWDI)	1
Kayla Rodriguez	US Alliance of Women, Non-Binary Persons and Gender Minorities with Disabilities	1
Sofia Savoy	Collectivo La Luz de Frida	1

* There was no speaker from CSOs – FOR WwDisab in our selection of side events

Table 12: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY PwDisab at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Zara Todd	European Disability Forum	1
Risnawati Utami	OHANA Indonesia	1
Muhammad Atif	Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP)	1

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Mehdi Benmoussa	Arab Organization of Persons with disabilities	1
Nu Mistra	Revival India	1
Yeni Rosa Damayanti	Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) / Perhimpunan Jiwa Sehat	1
Daniela Gordon	Movimiento Estamos Todos en Acción (META)	1
Sofia Fernandez	Movimiento Estamos Todos en Acción (META)	1

Table 13: Speakers from CSOs – FOR PwDisab at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side events
Dwi Ariyani	Disability Rights Fund (DRF/ DRAF)	1
Priscilla Poupore	Humanity & Inclusion	1

Among the speakers from CSOs from the disability sector at COSP15, which spoke more than once in the side events on women and girls with disabilities?

- Pratima Gurung—National Indigenous Disabled Women Association (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (2 sessions)

Social differences - collective and individual identifications of the speakers

- a) What are the collective political identifications of movement actors (CSOs OF) from the disability sector—that is, the categories of social difference around which these CSOs are organized?**

At COSP15, 10 speakers were affiliated with organizations **of women with disabilities**. Among these, eight were from CSOs of women with disabilities “in general,” one from an organization of **Indigenous women with disabilities**, and another from a **blind women association**. One more was affiliated with an organization of “**Women, Non-Binary Persons and Gender Minorities with Disabilities**.” Also invited to speak to the specific differences of women with disabilities in these events were six speakers affiliated with organizations of people with disabilities. Among these, four were from CSOs of people with disabilities “in general,” one centred on the difference that **psychosocial disabilities** (mental health) makes, and the other on **Queer persons with disabilities**.

- b) What are the individual political identifications of movement actors from the disability sector, if different from that of their organizations, OR if individual activists—that is, the specific differences with which they publicly self-identify in these arenas?**

One individual activist speaker from the disability sector self-identified as “**a gay person with autism**” during the event and one as “**a queer young person with a disability.**” Another self-identified as “**queer and with a disability**” and used **they/them pronouns**. Finally, a third one self-identified as “**a deaf woman.**” Among speakers from disability-led CSOs, one self-identified as “**queer**” during the event and the other self-identified as “**a girl.**”

c) What is the gender of the speakers? Researchers’ identifications of the gender of the speakers as “women” or “men.”

Out of a total of 58 speakers at these side events, nine were identified by the researchers as men. Of these, seven were from high-level institutions or government, and two from a CSO OF people. As self-identification as “queer” may mean both non-conforming gender and/or sexual identities, we will simply say, without entering into fraught calculations, that about four-fifths (80%) of the 58 speakers, including the 17 speakers from disability-led CSOs, can be classified as belonging to the gender category “women” (“girl” included).

Table 14: Spatial geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, COSP15, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(World Bank)														
1- East Asia & Pacific	3	25%	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%	5	25%	0	0%	5	23%
2-Europe & Central Asia	0	0%	0	0%	1	12.5%	1	50%	1	5%	1	50%	2	9%
3- Latin America & the Caribbean	2	17%	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%	4	20%	0	0%	4	18%
4- Middle East and North Africa	0	0%	0	0%	1	12.5%	0	0%	1	5%	0	0%	1	5%
5- North America	3	25%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	3	15%	1	50%	4	18%
6- South Asia	4	33%	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%	6	30%	0	0%	6	27%
7- Sub-Saharan Africa	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
8 - Transnational Networks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	12	100%	0	0%	8	100%	2	100%	20	100%	2	100%	22	100%
GLOBAL SOUTH	7	58%	0	0%	7	87.5%	0	0%	14	70%	0	0%	14	64%
GLOBAL NORTH	5	42%	0	0%	1	12.5%	2	100%	6	30%	2	100%	8	36%
WORLD	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	12	100%	0	0%	8	100%	2	100%	20	100%	2	100%	22	100%

Table 14 provides an overview of the spatial locations of the speakers from the disability sector in the side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP15. It shows the distribution of all speakers from CSOs from the disability sector (i.e., OF/BY Women with Disabilities, FOR Women with Disabilities, OF/BY People with Disabilities, FOR People with Disabilities) according to their spatial geographies: each speaker is classified according to the world region where the speaker's organization is headquartered. If speaking in two different side events, speakers are counted twice. World regions categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4). For Global South and Global North categories, see the discussion in this report, in Section 3.4.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by spatial geographies categories at the COSP15 side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented world regions** are South Asia (6/22 speakers = 27.2%), East Asia and Pacific (5/22 speakers = 22.7%), and North America (4/22 speakers = 18.2%). Speakers from these three (3) regions combined represent (15/22 = 68%) of all speakers. South Asia and North America are considerably over-represented among the speakers as they account for, respectively, 3.7% and 1.4% of all countries in the world. Over-represented, but to a lesser extent, are East Asia and Pacific (22.7% of the speakers vs 17.4% of the world's countries).
2. **The least represented world regions** are Sub-Saharan Africa (0/22 speakers = 0%), Middle East and North Africa (1/22 speakers = 4.5%) and Europe and Central Asia (2/22 = 9%). Speakers from these three (3) regions combined represent (3/22 = 14%) of all speakers. Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and Central Asia are considerably under-represented as they account for, respectively, 22% and 26.6% of all the world's countries. Under-represented, but to a lesser extent, are Middle East and North Africa (4.5% of the speakers vs 19.3% of the world's countries).
3. The number of speakers from Latin America and the Caribbean (18%) corresponds to the number of countries in this region (19.6%) compared to all the countries in the world.
4. There are more speakers from countries of the Global South (14/22 speakers = 64%) than from the Global North (8/22 speakers = 36%). As an indication, these proportions are close to that of the number of world countries, territories, and overseas departments in each category.

*As a note, all speakers from CSOs OF/BY women with disabilities are from organizations headquartered in the Global South, and all speakers from CSOs FOR people with disabilities are from organizations headquartered in the Global North.

Table 15: Economic geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, COSP15, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF /BY WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF/BY PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(World Bank)														
1- Low income	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2- Lower-middle income	5	42%	0	0%	4	50%	0	0%	9	45%	0	0%	9	41%
3- Upper-middle income	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%	0	0%	1	5%
4- High income	5	42%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	5	25%	2	100%	7	32%
5- Not Applicable**	1	8%	0	0%	4	50%	0	0%	5	25%	0	0%	5	23%
TOTAL	12	100%	0	0%	8	100%	2	100%	20	100%	2	100%	22	100%

*4 CSOs OF/BY PwDs and 1 CSO OF/BY WwDs income categories by country are not applicable because these CSOs are transnational networks (in Table 15, these are European Disability Forum, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, and META (2) and Collectivo la Luz the Frida)

Table 15 provides an overview of the economic geographies of the countries in which the speakers' CSOs from the disability sector are headquartered. Economic categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4). In the category "Not applicable" we find CSOs whose status as OF or FOR people with disabilities remain to be clarified and CSOs that are networks.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by economic geographies at the COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented income category** is "Lower-middle income economies" (9 speakers out of 22 = 41%), while countries in this category make up 25% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, lower-middle income economies are over-represented at the COSP15.
2. **The least represented income category** is "Low-income economies" as there are no speakers (0%) from this income category at the COSP15, while countries in this category make up 12.9% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, low-income economies are under-represented at the COSP15.
3. **Also considerably under-represented among speakers are upper-middle income economies** (1 speaker out of 22 = 5%), while countries in this category make up 25% of all world economies.

4. Speakers from high-income economies (7 speakers of 22) account for 32% of the total of speakers, while countries in this category make up 37.3% of all world economies. Therefore, there is a slight under-representation of high-income economies.

List 3: List of high-level speakers (representatives of multilateral institutions and governments) at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which multilateral institutions are these 16 speakers from?

- CRPD Committee
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People with Disabilities
- UN-Women (4 speakers)
- UNPRPD-MPTF¹⁸ (United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Partner Trust Fund)
- UN-DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) (2 speakers)
- UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) (3 speakers)
- ILO (International Labour Organization)
- UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth
- UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund)
- World Bank

Which governmental institutions are these 5 speakers from?

- Canada (two speakers: 1 Global Affairs + 1 n.a.)
- Finland (three speakers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

List 4: List of speakers from other CSOs at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which CSOs are these 5 speakers from?

- CSO – Women’s or Feminist (general)
 - Xenia Kellner—Young Feminist Europe (Belgium-Europe)
 - Subha Wijesiriwardena—Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (India-Southern)
 - Gretchen Gasteier—Women Deliver (US-International)
- CSO - Funder - Feminist
 - Melinda Wells—Equality Fund (Canada-International)
 - Tariro Tandi—Urgent Action Fund Africa (Kenya-Africa)

¹⁸ The representative of the UNPRPD-MPTF was acting as moderator of the side event.

Table 16: Organizers and sponsors at COSP15 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
Special Talent Exchange Programme (STEP) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Pakistan	<i>A - Role of Women with Disabilities in Building Disability Inclusive Participatory Society</i>
UN Women (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B - An Intersectional Approach to Disability Inclusion and Beyond</i>
UNPRPD (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
UNFPA (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
UNICEF (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
UN-DESA (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
OHCHR (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>B</i>
International Disability Alliance (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US- Transnational network	<i>B</i>
International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	Belgium-International Network	<i>B</i>
Government of Canada (sponsor)	Government	Canada	<i>B</i>

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
<p>Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership (organizer)</p> <p>(please note that this is a multistakeholder group of CSOs, States, UN agencies, private sector actors, and others)</p>	To clarify	International	<p><i>C - Generation Equality Comes to CoSP: Ensuring the Participation of Women, Girls, and Non-binary Persons with Disabilities in Advancing Gender Equality</i></p>
<p>Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (organizer)</p>	<p>CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities</p>	Australia	<p><i>D - Our Site: Empowering Women and Girls with Disability through Co-Design</i></p>
<p>Disability Rights Fund (DRF/ DRAF) (organizer)</p>	<p>CSO – FOR PwD</p>	US-International	<p><i>E - Women with disabilities leading climate action</i></p>
<p>International Disability Alliance (IDA) (organizer)</p>	<p>CSO – OF/BY PwD</p>	Switzerland/US-Transnational network	<p><i>E</i></p>
<p>Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (organizer)</p>	<p>Government</p>	Canada	<p><i>E</i></p>
<p>Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network (organizer)</p>	<p>CSO – FOR PwD</p>	Switzerland-International network	<p><i>E</i></p>
<p>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (organizer)</p>	<p>Government</p>	Finland	<p><i>E</i></p>
<p>UN-PRPD (co-sponsor)</p>	<p>Multilateral Institution</p>	UN-International	<p><i>E</i></p>

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
UN-WOMEN (co-sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>E</i>
Ford Foundation (co-sponsor)	Funder	US	<i>E</i>
Office of the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>F - LGBTIQ youth with disabilities re-envisioning the road to equality</i>
International Disability Alliance (IDA) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-Transnational network	<i>F</i>
UNFPA (organizer)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>G - Equal rights for women and girls with disabilities: Leveraging the power of innovation and technology to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (co-sponsor)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>G</i>
Permanent mission of Finland to the UN (co-sponsor)	Government	Finland	<i>G</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>H - Using Technology to Bring Together Women and Gender Minorities with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>

Organizer/Sponsor	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side event
Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (sponsor)	CSO – Women’s or/and Feminist (general)	India-Southern	<i>H</i>
Government of Canada (sponsor)	Government	Canada	<i>H</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>H</i>
Fordham Research Consortium on Disability (organizer)	Academia	US	<i>I - Toward inclusive societies: Making data and statistics disability- and gender-inclusive: Launch of the 2022 Disability Data Initiative’s report</i>
UN-DESA (co-sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>I</i>
CBM-Global (co-sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	Netherlands-International	<i>I</i>

Table 16 provides an overview of who organized and/or sponsored the side events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP15. Some organizations are involved in the organization of more than one side event.

Table 16 is based on the information we found in the official description of the events (concept notes and flyers). The distinction between organizers and sponsors was usually clear, but not always—an organization can be listed as an organizer on a document and as a sponsor on another. Sometimes, only the logo of organizations is provided without specifying if they are sponsors or organizers. Therefore, the information on Table 16 might not be an accurate representation of all organizers and sponsors.

Organizers and sponsors of side events have distinct roles. Organizers are responsible for planning and coordinating the event, while sponsors provide financial or in-kind support to help cover the costs of the event, for example paying for CART captioning, or bringing in a speaker (personal communication, 2024).

Following are the highlights of who organized/sponsored side events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP15:

1. Three (3) side events out of nine (9) were organized **solely by CSOs from the disability sector**. These are:

- Role of Women with Disabilities in Building Disability Inclusive Participatory Society
 - Our Site: Empowering Women and Girls with Disability through Co-Design
 - Using Technology to Bring Together Women and Gender Minorities with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic
2. Six (6) other side events were organized by various combinations of multilateral institutions, CSOs from the disability sector and governments and, in one case, from academia.
 3. **Six (6) of the fourteen (14) organizers are CSOs from the disability sector. Only two (2) of them are CSOs led BY women with disabilities**—these are: Women Enabled International (WEI) and Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA).
 4. **Six (6) of the fourteen (14) organizers are high-level organizations:** four (4) are multilateral institutions—UN Women, UNPRPD, Office of the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, and UNFPA—and two (2) are from governments, namely Canada and Finland.
 5. **Two (2) of the fourteen (14) organizers are other types of organizations** (i.e., academia and an international network of multiple stakeholders).
 6. **Only one (1) out of the fourteen (14) organizers is based in the Global South** (Special Talent Exchange Programme (STEP)). Six (6) are based in the Global North, four (4) are multilateral institutions, one (1) is a transnational network of CSOs OF people with disabilities, one (1) is a transnational network of CSOs FOR people with disabilities, and one (1) is an international network of multiple stakeholders. As a vast majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world are in the Global South, there is a considerable over-representation of the Global North among organizers and an under-representation of the Global South.
 7. Five (5) side events were sponsored by various combinations of CSOs from the disability sector, governments, multilateral institutions and Other CSOs.
 8. Out of fifteen (15) sponsors, only one (1) sponsor is a CSO led by women with disabilities: Women Enabled International (WEI).

4.4 Comparing COSP14 and COSP15

When we **compare the number and % of sessions focusing on women and girls with disabilities**, we find that the number and percentage of side events focused on women and girls with disabilities was slightly higher at the COSP14 ($11/80 = 13.8\%$) than at the COSP15 ($9/86 = 10.5\%$).

The distribution of the categories of speakers in the side events focused on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP14 (Table 2) and COSP15 (Table 10) **is roughly similar in both meetings:**

1. More than half (COSP14) and about 40% (COSP15) of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in the side events of the COSP were presented as affiliated with the disability sector. The vast majority of these were from CSOs, and a few were categorized as individual activists from the sector.
2. Among all the speakers presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector at these two COSP meetings, half were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the “women with disabilities” sector, and all the remaining but one (COSP14) were affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
3. Speakers from disability-led organizations, be it BY women or BY people with disabilities, largely outnumbered speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities.

4. After speakers from the disability sector, high-level speakers (from multilateral institutions and governments) were the second most represented broad category of actor in the side events (respectively 30% and 37% of the total). The vast majority of the side events (9 out of 10 at COSP14; 7 out of 9 at COSP15) focusing on women and girls with disabilities had one or more of these speakers on their panels.
5. Speakers from other CSOs (Women's and Feminist (general), LGBTQ or Queer, Human Rights, Charity/Foundation) and from Academia were present in similar proportions at both COSP meetings.

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector, who spoke at COSP14 AND ALSO at COSP15 in the side events on women and girls with disabilities?

- Zara Todd—Representing two different CSOs: European Network on Independent Living (COSP14) and European Disability Forum (COSP15) (total: 2 sessions)
- Abia Akram—Representing two different CSOs: National Forum for Women with Disabilities (Pakistan) (COSP14) AND Global Forum on Leadership of Women with Disabilities Pakistan (Pakistan) (COSP15) (total: 3 sessions)
- Bonnie Brayton—DAWN Canada (Canada) (3 sessions)
- Amanda McRae—Women Enabled International (WEI) (USA-International) (3 sessions)
- Yeni Rosa Damayanti—Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) (Indonesia) (2 sessions)
- Pratima Gurung—National Indigenous Disabled Women Association (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (3 sessions)

Together, these six (6) frequent speakers have spoken 16 times at the two editions of the COSP. As speakers from CSOs of the disability sector spoke for a total of 58 times at COSP14 and COSP15, these frequent speakers represent 27.5% of the disability sector's "voices."

The spatial geographies of CSOs of the disability sector at the COSP14 (Table 7) and COSP15 (Table 14) are roughly similar in both meetings.

1. South Asia and North America were the **two most over-represented** world regions among speakers at the COSP (both editions) in comparison to the number of countries they represent in the world.
2. In general, Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa **were considerably under-represented** among speakers at both editions of the COSP in comparison to the number of countries these world regions represent in the world.
3. Latin America and the Caribbean was an under-represented world region among speakers at COSP14 (8% of the speakers) but fairly well-represented at COSP15 (18% of all speakers), as countries in this world region make up 19.3% of the world's countries.
4. East Asia and Pacific was fairly well-represented among speakers at COSP14 (17% of the speakers) and slightly over-represented at COSP15 (22.7% of all speakers), as countries in this world region make up 17.4% of the world's countries.
5. There were about as many (COSP14) or more (COSP15) speakers from countries of the Global South than the Global North. As a large majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world is located in the Global South, the latter was under-represented at COSP14 and, consequently, the Global North was over-represented. However, at COSP15, proportions were fair.

The economic geographies of CSOs of the disability sector at the COSP14 (Table 8) and COSP15 (Table 15) are roughly similar in both meetings.

1. Low-income economies were the **least represented** income category among speakers at both editions of the COSP.
2. Upper-middle income economies **were under-represented** among speakers at both editions of the COSP relative to the number of economies in this income category.
3. Lower-middle economies were fairly well-represented among speakers at COSP14 (25% of all speakers) and considerably over-represented at COSP15 (41% of all speakers), as countries in this category make up 25% of all the world's economies.
4. High-income economies were slightly over-represented among speakers at COSP14 (42% of all speakers) and slightly under-represented at COSP15 (32% of all speakers), as countries in this category make up 37.2% of all the world's economies.

5. The Commission on the Status of Women (UN-CSW)

5.1 Context

5.1.1 Brief overview of the UN-CSW's history

According to UN Women, UN-CSW is

... without doubt the leader of the global movement for gender equality and women's empowerment. It is a place where governments deepen policy commitments and expand the global normative framework; where advocates and activists share good practices and lessons learned in a marketplace of ideas; and where networks are strengthened, and new collaboration initiated. (2019, p. 19)

Before becoming a separate body within the UN system entirely dedicated to the status of women and girls, the UN-CSW was first considered a sub-commission of the *Commission on Human Rights* (UN Women, 2019). Following pressure from women delegates and NGO representatives who believed a separate commission was needed to fight for women's issues, the CSW was officially established in 1946 as a fully functional commission of ECOSOC (see ECOSOC, 1946, resolution 11(II)). The UN-CSW became the: "principal global intergovernmental policy-making body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women" (UN Women, n.d.-a). While its first meeting was held in 1947 in Lake Success (NY), it took 10 years for the first official annual conference of the UN-CSW to be held (this explains why 2021 was the 65th meeting and not the 75th). At that first session in 1947, three key principles of the UN-CSW were established:

(a) freedom and equality are essential to human development, and therefore women as human beings are entitled to share in them with men; (b) the well-being and progress of society depend on the extent to which both men and women have a definite role to play in the building of their society; and (c) women must take an active part in the fight for peace, the prevention of aggression, and the elimination of fascist ideology. (ECOSOC, 1947)

Later, these principles became the three goals of the first World Conference on Women, in Mexico City in 1975 (Arat, 2015). At its inception, the UN-CSW was open to the general public: 250 seats were reserved for members of the public, and 250 seats were reserved for educational groups and other organizations (Baldez, 2014).

Some of UN-CSW's major achievements

- contributing to gender-inclusive language in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- passing two declarations and three major binding multi-country conventions (including CEDAW);
- creating the International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985);
- playing a major role in the organization of four World Conferences on Women (Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, Beijing 1995). (Rincker et al., 2019, p. 2)

A year after the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the UN-CSW saw its mandate expanded by a resolution from ECOSOC. It granted more responsibilities to the Commission in terms of monitoring the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfa). At that time, it was also decided that the Commission must play a leading role in “mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities” (UN Women, n.d.-a). Since 2015, the UN-CSW also has become responsible for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation with women and girls' empowerment and equality.

Just like many other UN treaty bodies, the state-sovereignty principle is at the basis of state's collaboration at the UN-CSW. Therefore, finding consensus over priorities and strategies adopted by the UN-CSW has proven to be challenging in the past, especially during the Cold War era (Arat, 2015; Rincker et al., 2019). Also, recommendations emerging from UN-CSW are implemented by states on a voluntary basis only. Some critics contend that the UN-CSW has proven to be ineffective to protect women and girls from state discriminations because of its “bureaucratic” way of proceeding (Owen, 2016). Others believe the UN-CSW is: “less powerful and effective than other major UN commissions” (Engle Merry, 2006, p. 66). Despite these limits, “the UN-CSW has had near global participation across its history, with 75% of countries having participated at some point in time” (Brannon, 2022, p. 2).

5.1.2 Mandate

The UN-CSW is an annual gathering that convenes all 45 Member states (see Composition of the UN-CSW in this report), representatives of other UN agencies or international institutions, actors from civil society, and researchers at the UN headquarters in NYC. This meeting usually lasts for a period of two weeks and takes place in March. At first, in 1946, the UN-CSW's mandate was to “prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields and to make recommendations on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights” (ECOSOC, 1946). As mentioned above, the UN-CSW has seen its mandate evolve over time, but its focus has remained centred on women and girls. The annual meeting in New York has also remained the main activity of the UN-CSW. Across the years, its aim has always been to shape the global agenda to improve the status of women and girls, and to evaluate progress made on the implementation of major international treaties and programs, particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN Women, 2019).

Prior to each UN-CSW, preparatory work and consultations are conducted with many stakeholders across the globe. UN Women supports all activities of the UN-CSW as well as ensuring civil society's participation. The UN-CSW establishes in advance a multi-year calendar which determines annual priorities and review themes for each conference. While the priority theme is a new topic for discussion, the review theme “looks back at the Agreed Conclusions of a previous year and asks Member States to report on what they have done to implement the actions which were previously

agreed” (Boone, 2022). These themes are chosen following states’ deliberations, and women’s NGOs are not involved in this process. As Rincker and colleagues explain, “On the positive side, the priority theme gives shape and consistency to what the UN-CSW regional consultations and preparatory documents look like, and women’s NGOs fit their issues into this theme. On the negative side, a top-down priority theme may limit representation and responsiveness to diverse women’s NGOs” (2019, p. 9). At the conference, recommendations emerging from each session are shared with ECOSOC for formal follow-up (UN Women, n.d.-a):

The outcome of the Commission’s consideration of the [annual meeting] priority theme take[s] the form of agreed conclusions, to be negotiated by all Member States. This outcome document outlines actions to be taken on the priority theme by governments and other stakeholders including UN agencies, private sector, civil society organizations, trade unions and more. The outcome document is produced through a series of negotiations called ‘informal consultations.’ Every decision begins with a first draft of the document called the ‘Zero Draft,’ which is available for download on the UN Women’s CSW website towards the end of January. (NGO Committee on the Status of Women Forum 67 [NGO CSW67], 2022, p. 12)

This draft is shared among all stakeholders for comments before the meeting in March. All comments are compiled into a document called “REV 1” which is distributed among Member States and discussed informally before the annual meeting of the UN-CSW. At the meeting, “informal consultations on agreed conclusions,” which take place throughout the two weeks of the meeting, are the locus of “a series of rounds of negotiations and changes,” with the goal of finding common language for the document to be adopted by Member States’ consensus (NGO Committee on the Status of Women/New York [NGO CSW/NY], 2019, p. 36). The goal of the document is to “articulate general principles of policy and action for the global community” (Engle Merry, 2006, p. 68). The “Agreed Conclusions” final document formally reflects the outcomes of negotiations among Member States, but recommendations are not enforceable. Once the Agreed Conclusions document is adopted, it goes through an approval process by ECOSOC. Member States have the possibility to make statements on the content of the approved document (Black, 2022).

For Cabrera Balleza and Webbe, these recommendations are “important tools for women’s activism at the national and local level” (2010, p. 94). However, some have argued that the vocabulary used in the outcome document often fails to induce progressive change. It is rare to see expressions like “the Commission insists or the Commissions demands” (Lloyd, 2017, p. 6).

Throughout the year, the UN-CSW publishes reports and shares recommendations on various pressing issues related to women and girls across the globe. The UN-CSW also has the mandate to monitor some complaints, but this activity is far less developed than in the case of the High Commission for Human Rights, for example (Engle Merry, 2006). Individuals and civil society organizations can submit complaints, petitions, and appeals to the UN-CSW in cases of alleged violations of rights affecting women and girls (UN-OHCHR, n.d.-b). However, “The UN-CSW considers such communications as part of its annual programme of work in order to identify emerging trends and patterns of injustice and discriminatory practices against women for purposes of policy formulation and development of strategies for the promotion of gender equality, but does not take decisions on the merit of communications that are submitted to it.” (UN-OHCHR, n.d.-b). Therefore, the UN-CSW does not provide relief to the plaintiff and does not have the power to sanction a state. The complaint procedure only serves to provide information to the Commission.

5.1.3 Composition

Member States

When the UN-CSW was implemented, only 15 Member States served on the Commission. Now, the latter is composed of 45 UN Member states (Brannon, 2022). Each Member State is elected by ECOSOC for a period of four (4) years and needs to appoint a commissioner who is officially representing their government's interests and priorities at the UN-CSW (Brannon, 2022). According to a principle of equitable geographic distribution, thirteen (13) members are from Africa, eleven (11) from Asia, nine (9) from Latin America and the Caribbean, eight (8) from Western Europe and other states, and four (4) from Eastern Europe (UN Women, 2019). Member State representatives are considered the “principal actors” of the UN-CSW (Rincker et al., 2019). Although in its first 20 years of operation, all Member States' representatives appointed to the UN-CSW were women, “by 2000, men on average made up more than 50% of representatives—making women a minority in an organization dedicated to improving their status” (Brannon, 2022, p. 1). View the [Membership of the CSW at its 67th session](#).

Bureau

The UN-CSW's Bureau is composed of five (5) Member States (each representing one of the five geographical regions). These representatives are appointed for a period of two (2) years. The Bureau's mandate is to prepare and facilitate the annual session of the Commission, including all preparatory meetings before the two-week session in New York (UN Women, n.d.-b). After each UN-CSW, the members of the Bureau organize a meeting to elect their new Chairperson and start the preparatory work for the next annual meeting.

List of the Bureau's members in 2022:

- Chair: Mathu Joyini (South Africa)
- Vice-Chairs: Antje Leendertse (Germany) and Māris Burbergs (Latvia), Hye Ryoung Song (Republic of Korea)
- Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur: Pilar Eugenio (Argentina)

5.1.4 Events and the participation of CSOs

Main Event

Rincker et al. (2019) describes the main event:

According to the ECOSOC Resolution 2015/2016 on the CSW's “method of work,” each CSW session must consist of eight components. The first is a ministerial segment, the second a consideration of one priority theme based on BDPfA and the 23rd special session of the UN General Assembly (GA), and the third is discussion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fourth component is evaluation of progress in implementing conclusions from previous sessions, the fifth engagement in general discussion of the status of gender equality in light of previous goals, and the sixth, a discussion of new issues affecting women requiring timely response. The seventh component is mainstreaming in the UN System, hearing the Working Group on Communications, agreeing to further actions by adopting conclusions and resolutions, and the eighth is observing International Women's Day if during the formal session (United Nations). (p. 8)

NGO CSW/NY (2019) describes the first week:

The first week of the CSW is called the “High-Level Segment,” which ministers of gender equality and women’s affairs usually attend. This is also the main period of “general discussions.” A general discussion at the United Nations includes statements delivered by the delegations of Member States, observers, organizations, and representatives of civil society. All statements are available on the website of the CSW. (p. 32)

In accordance with the multi-year programme decided in advance by ECOSOC, multiple sessions are organized on the annual priority themes and review themes during the UN-CSW’s annual meeting. These sessions can take various formats, such as plenary sessions, roundtables, interactive dialogues, expert panels discussions, etc. (Beichner et al., 2022). NGO CSW/NY (2019, p. 32) indicates that NGOs may sign up to participate, and the sessions are often webcast live.

Negotiations among Member States on the Agreed Conclusions document occur throughout the two weeks of the meeting under the item “Informal consultations on agreed conclusions.”

Side events

Side events of the UN-CSW “provide an excellent opportunity for Member States, UN entities and NGOs to discuss themes of the Commission and other critical gender equality issues.” (UN Women, n.d., see CSW68 Side Events). They are considered to be more high-level meetings than parallel events (Lee, 2020). They are hosted by UN entities, Member States, and sometimes by accredited civil society organizations. Side events need to be relevant to the annual themes. Approximately 200 side events are organized annually during the conference.

Parallel events

Parallel events occur during UN-CSW’s two-week meeting, but they take place outside UN headquarters. The NGO Committee on the Status of Women (a group of New York-based women’s NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status) coordinates the organization of parallel events. These events constitute opportunities for civil society organizations who do not hold an ECOSOC-accreditation or UN grounds pass to participate in person and engage with the UN-CSW process (NGO CSW/NY, 2021). These organizations can also host parallel events, and registration is open to the general public. More than 400 parallel events are organized annually (NGO CSW, n.d.). Member States and UN entities sometimes co-sponsor or co-organize parallel events.

Regional consultations

Prior to each annual conference, the UN-CSW Committee organizes consultations within the five official regions to solicit more in-depth information about regional realities connected to the annual theme, as a way to prepare for the official session in New York. Even though regional consultations are said to be quite inclusive of women NGOs and are attended by many CSO representatives who cannot attend UN-CSW in New York for various reasons (cost, difficulty obtaining visas, etc.), these consultations are considered not sufficiently institutionalized, meaning they have a limited impact on policy making (Rincker et al., 2019).

The Place of Civil Society

There is a vast literature pointing out that the mobilization of women’s organizations is crucially important to the development of effective cross-national policies (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Arat, 2015; Rincker et al., 2019). And UN-CSW is one of the UN agencies that does not limit participation to States and stresses the importance to involve society organizations, especially of women. The UN-

CSW official website indicates that “[t]he active participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a critical element in the work of the Commission. ... NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women’s empowerment and gender equality” (UN Women, n.d.-c). The Commission’s funding documents state that CSOs are more likely to possess critical information reflecting the lived realities of women and girls. Therefore, CSOs’ input is necessary to align policies emerging from UN-CSW with the needs of women and girls (Rincker et al., 2019). However, some researchers have concluded that the involvement of women’s organizations in the work of the UN-CSW is mostly rhetorical and that, in reality, the Commission remains mainly responsive to state delegations (Arat, 2015; Rincker et al., 2019).

Participation of civil society in the Main event:

As the Secretariat for the UN-CSW, UN Women also manages the written and oral statement applications by NGOs. UN rules stipulate that only NGOs with official relations with the UN through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have full privileges, such as speaking at official inter-governmental meetings. It should be noted that some NGOs are accredited to the UN through the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) or through UN conferences; these NGOs cannot submit written or oral statements to UN Women for the UN-CSW. (NGO CSW67, 2022, p. 6)

One of the main ways CSOs can participate in UN-CSW’s work is by submitting petitions, research reports, and recommendations. They can also submit complaints and make appeals and statements (UN Women, n.d.-a, see under Communications procedure). CSOs can be involved before formal sessions of the UN-CSW by participating in advance regional consultations (Rincker et al., 2019). During these consultations, NGOs have the possibility to discuss the priority themes in relation to regional realities (Rincker et al., 2019). CSOs also play a key role in the dissemination of documents that originate from the UN-CSW, such as the Agreed Conclusions document (Engle Merry, 2006, p. 51).

At UN-CSW meetings, NGOs who are officially accredited with ECOSOC (details about this process will be given later in this report) can participate in high-level plenary sessions and share insights about their work with Member States. They can also organize and participate in official side events and parallel events. These events are often considered to be highly valuable networking and lobbying opportunities for civil society (Lee, 2020). However, only fully accredited NGOs can organize and host side events.

NGO CSW Forum

Non-accredited organizations can participate in the UN-CSW through the NGO CSW Forum. Often considered “the civil society side” of the UN-CSW, the NGO Forum is organized by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW/NY). This committee was founded in 1972 and supports and monitors NGOs’ participation at the UN-CSW, mainly by overseeing the organization of parallel events during the annual meeting in New York. Its mission is “to provide a platform for the voices and leadership of feminists and women’s rights organisations across the globe” (NGO CSW, n.d.). In addition, “the NGO CSW/NY is a volunteer-based, non-profit NGO funded largely by individual contributions and is one of the women’s committees of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO)” (NGO CSW/NY, 2019, p. 5).

To expand its international presence, the NGO CSW has established offices around the world in Geneva (1973) and Vienna (1985), and regional offices in Africa, Arab States/MENA, Asia/Pacific, and Latin America/Caribbean (2015). Also a Youth Leaders and Young Professionals Program was

established in 2011 to help raise the collective voices of youth leaders within the NGO CSW community (NGO CSW/NY, n.d.).

The NGO CSW Forum is separated from the official events of UN-CSW and takes place outside the official program of the UN-CSW. Parallel events are not hosted at the same venue as official events and side events. Table 17 shows the main differences between the NGO CSW Forum and the official UN-CSW meeting.

Table 17: Main differences between NGO CSW Forum and UN-CSW

NGO CSW Forum	UN-CSW
Organized by NGO CSW/NY (a civil society organization)	Organized by UN Women (a UN agency)
Civil society forum (not part of the formal UN system)	Official United Nations Commission
No need for ECOSOC accreditation to attend	Must be ECOSOC-accredited to attend
Has Parallel Events hosted by civil society (+400)	-Has Main Events attended only by Member States and ECOSOC-accredited organizations. -Has Side Events hosted by Member States, UN agencies, and ECOSOC-accredited NGOs (+200). Attendance is open to all.

5.2 The 65th Commission on the Status of Women (2021)

5.2.1 Overview

Context

While the 64th edition of UN-CSW, in March 2020, was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that the 65th meeting would take place entirely online, from March 15 to March 26, 2021 (UN Women, 2021). It was the first time in UN-CSW history that the annual gathering was held online. As a positive outcome, many people who usually can't participate in the meeting in New York city because of challenges to participation were able to participate that year. However, since much of the networking, organizing, and lobbying is done outside the formal events, in the UN hallways for example, the 65th session would have been disappointing for many civil society organizations and other actors.

The NGO UN-CSW Forum was also held virtually from March 14 to March 26, 2021.

According to the official website of the NGO UN-CSW Forum, more than 27,000 advocates from 142 countries participated in one or more of the parallel events. About 25% of the participants were under the age of 40. Approximately 40% of participants were from the Global South, and for 60% of participants, it was their first time participating in the NGO UN-CSW Forum (NGO CSW/NY, 2021).

Themes

The priority theme of the UN-CSW in 2021 was: “Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.” There was also a review theme: “Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development” which had been the priority theme of the UN-CSW 60th session in 2016 (UN Women, 2021).

Main Event

Access is available for the [program of the Main event](#) for the two-week session of the 65th edition of the UN-CSW .

Agreed Conclusions

The 65th UN-CSW Agreed Conclusions document is published (UN ECOSOC, 2021).

5.2.2 Preliminary syntheses for our analysis of side events and parallel events

Side events and parallel events

There were over 148 side events at UN-CSW65. See [the list of all UN-CSW65 side events](#). Only two (2) included our keywords in their official description (see details of the keywords in Section 2: Methodology of data collection). Out of these two (2) events, one (1) focused squarely on women and girls with disabilities. It means that less than 1% of side events at the 65th edition of the UN-CSW were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

There were more than 700 parallel events organized during the NGO CSW Forum (CSW, 2021). Six (6) included our keywords in their official descriptions (see details of the keywords in Section 2: Methodology of data collection). Out of these six (6) events, five (5) focused squarely on women and girls with disabilities. It means that less than 1% of parallel events at the 65th edition of the UN-CSW were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

List of side events focusing on women and/or girls with disabilities:

SIDE EVENTS

1. Barriers to the full and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities

PARALLEL EVENTS

2. Is the way you think about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) ableist?
Good practices for disability inclusive SRHR programmes and advocacy
3. Visibility of Women with Disabilities in the Gender Equality Fight
4. Practicing Feminist Disability Rights Organizing: Strategies for Collective Action
5. Build back safer, inclusively: Women with disabilities addressing violence
6. Diversity and inclusion: intersectionality is key to building back better

Of the six (6) side/parallel events on women and girls with disabilities, one (1) side event was clearly focused on the priority theme, which is “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” (session 1). Four (4) parallel events were loosely related to

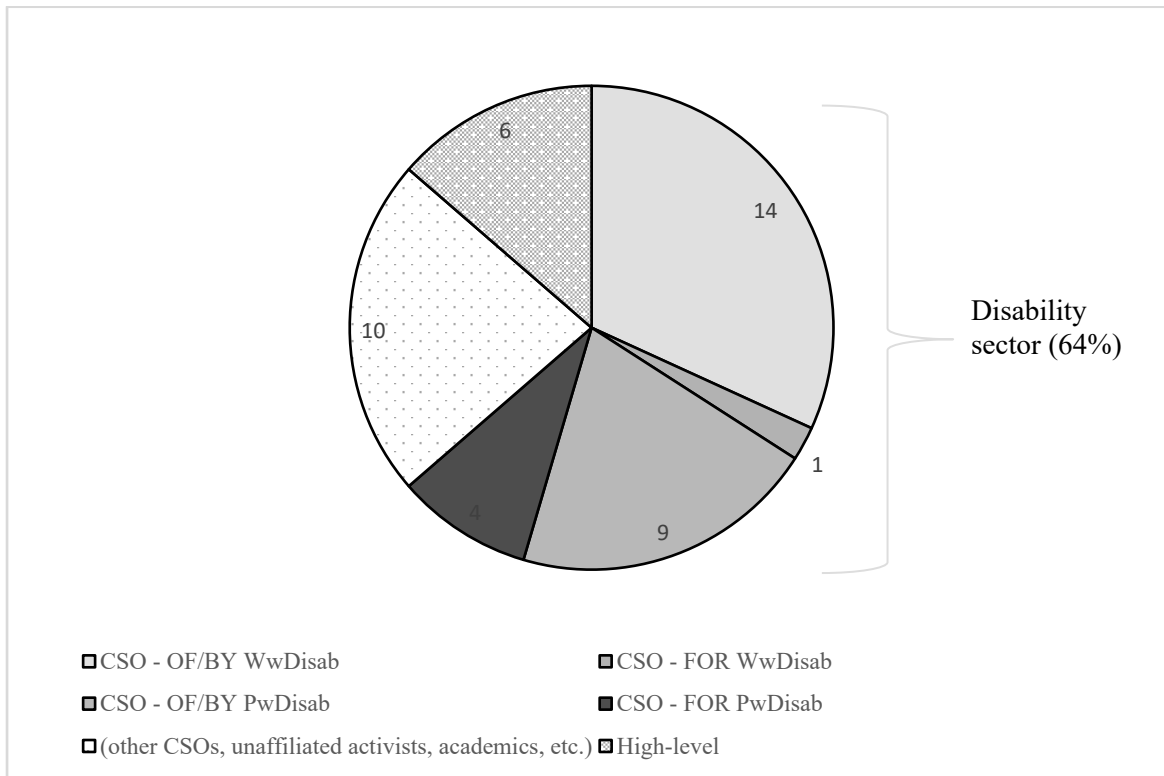
the overall theme and centred around women and girls with disability inclusion and activism (sessions 3, 4, 5, and 6). One (1) parallel event was not directly related to the priority and review themes of the Commission (session 2).

Table 18: Distribution of all speakers at UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities by category of actors, number, and %

Type of speakers	Number	Proportion in % (/44)
CSO - OF/BY WwDisab	14	32%
CSO - FOR WwDisab	1	2%
CSO - OF/BY PwDisab	9	20%
CSO - FOR PwDisab	4	9%
CSOs - Disability – OF/FOR/to clarify	28	64%
CSO Women’s and Feminist (general)	5	11%
CSO - LGBTQ or Queer	1	2%
CSO Democracy	1	2%
CSO HR	1	2%
CSO Charity/Foundation	0	0%
Activists	1	2%
Practitioners	0	0%
Academia	1	2%
Multilateral Institution	1	2%
Government	5	11%
Total	44	100%

Table 18 provides a first lens to inquire into the variety of political actors involved in representing women and girls with disabilities, that is, in doing the work of producing, circulating and exchanging meanings—that is, representations—about women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW side events.

Chart 3: Distribution of all speakers by category of actors at UN-CSW65 side events on women and girls with disabilities (Total of speakers: 44)



Who—that is, here, speakers from which categories of political actors—spoke about women and girls with disabilities at UN-CSW65’s side events focusing on them?

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers by categories at the side events of UN-CSW65:

- **Almost two thirds (28/44 = 64%) of the people who spoke** about women and girls with disabilities in these side events and parallel events **were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector**, that is, CSOs OF or FOR women with disabilities or people with disabilities. As well, the speaker categorized as “activist” is also from the disability sector.
- **Fifteen (15) of the 28 speakers (= 54%) presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector are from the “Women with disabilities” sector.** They account for 34% of the total (44) of speakers. All these speakers but one are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
- **Over four times as many speakers (23) were from organizations BY women or BY people with disabilities** compared to speakers (5) from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities.
- **The other third of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in the side events and parallel events is composed mainly of CSOs**, which provided 8 speakers (18% of the total). Among these there were 5 speakers from CSOs—Women’s and Feminist (general)—and one each from CSOs LGBT or Queer, Democracy, Human Rights. Academia provided only one speaker.
- **High-level speakers** that is, representatives of multilateral institutions (1 = 2%) and of governments (5 = 11%) **accounted for 13% of the total**. At CSW65, all the high-level speakers were to be **found in only one side event of our selection of 6**, entitled “Barriers to the full and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities.” There, high-level

speakers were in the company of two speakers from CSOs OF PwDs, one speaker from a CSO of WwDs, two other CSOs working in the fields of Democracy and of Human Rights, and an activist from the “women and youth with disabilities” sector. **The 5 parallel events of our selection had no speaker from a multilateral institution or government.**

Table 19: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY WwDisab at UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Nidhi Goyal	Rising Flame	2
Pratima Gurung	National Indigenous Disabled Women (NIDWAN)	2
Laxmi Devkota	Nepal Disabled Women Association	1
Abia Akram	National Forum for Women with Disabilities	2
Amanda McRae + Anastasia Holoboff	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1
Maryangel Garcia-Ramos	Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad	1
Ashrafunnahar Misti	Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)	1
Agness Chindimba	Deaf Women Included	1
Mushimiyimana Gaudence	Rwandan Organization of Women with Disabilities (UNABU)	2
Amanda McRae	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1

Table 20: Speakers from CSOs – FOR WwDisab at UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Philys Ndolo	Women Spaces Africa	1

Table 21: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY PwDisab at UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Yeni Rosa Damayanti	Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) / Perhimpunan Jiwa Sehat	2
Naomi Tai	People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI)	1
Emily Ladau	Disability Rights Washington	1
Ana Pelaez Narvaez	European Disability Forum	1
Pirkko Mahlamaki	Finnish Disability Forum	1
Betty Cheptoek	Show Abilities Uganda	1
Daniela Gordon	Movimiento estamos tod@s en Acción	1
Luciana Sosa & Natalia Farías	Movimiento estamos tod@s en Acción	1

Table 22: Speakers from CSOs – FOR PwDisab at UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Adrika Zara Sengupta	Anjali	1
Sophie Pecourt	Humanity & Inclusion	2
Diana Samarasan, Stephanie Thermora, Alice Phynizy	Disability Rights Fund (DRF / DRAF)	1

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector at UN-CSW65, which spoke more than once in the side events/parallel events on women and girls with disabilities?

- Nidhi Goyal—Rising Flame (India) (**2 sessions**)
- Pratima Gurung—National Indigenous Disabled Women Association (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (**2 sessions**)
- Abia Akram—National Forum for Women with Disabilities (Pakistan) (**2 sessions**)
- Mushimiyimana Gaudence—Rwandan Organization of Women with Disabilities (UNABU) (Rwanda) (**2 sessions**)

- Yeni Rosa Damayanti—Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) / Perhimpunan Jiwa Sehat (Indonesia) (2 sessions)
- Sophie Pecourt—Humanity & Inclusion (France/Belgium-International)(2 sessions)
- Amanda McRae-Women Enabled International (WEI) (US-International) (2 sessions)

Social differences - collective and individual identifications of the speakers

- a) What are the collective political identifications of movement actors (CSOs OF) from the disability sector—that is, the categories of social difference around which these CSOs are organized?
At CSW65, 14 speakers were affiliated with organizations of **women with disabilities**. Among these, 12 were from CSOs of women with disabilities “in general,” one was from an organization of **Indigenous women with disabilities** and another from a **deaf women association**. Also invited to speak to the specific differences of women with disabilities in these events were seven speakers affiliated with organizations of people with disabilities. Among these, six were from CSOs of people with disabilities “in general” and one focused on **psychosocial disabilities** (mental health).
- b) What are the individual political identifications of movement actors from the disability sector, if different from that of their organizations, OR if individual activists—that is, the specific differences with which they publicly self-identify in these arenas?
There were none.
- c) What is the gender of the speakers? Researchers’ identifications of the gender of the speakers as “women” or “men.”
Out of a total of 44 speakers at these side events, four were identified by the researchers as men. Of these, two were from high-level institutions or government, and two from Other CSOs. There were no public non-conforming gender self-identifications at CSW65. Thus, 40 out of the 44 speakers—including all 21 speakers from disability-led CSOs—can be classified as belonging to the gender category “women.”

Table 23: Spatial geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, UN-CSW65, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(World Bank)														
1- East Asia & Pacific	0	0%	0	0%	3	33%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%	3	11%
2-Europe & Central Asia	0	0%	0	0%	2	22%	2	50%	2	9%	2	40%	4	14%
3- Latin America & the Caribbean	1	7%	0	0%	2	22%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%	3	11%
4- Middle East and North Africa	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
5- North America	2	14%	0	0%	1	11%	1	25%	3	13%	1	20%	4	14%
6- South Asia	8	57%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	8	35%	1	20%	9	32%
7- Sub-Saharan Africa	3	21%	1	100%	1	11%	0	0%	4	17%	1	20%	5	18%
8- Transnational Networks	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	14	100%	1	100%	9	100%	4	100%	23	100%	5	100%	28	100%
GLOBAL SOUTH	12	86%	0	0%	6	67%	1	25%	18	78%	1	20%	19	68%
GLOBAL NORTH	2	14%	1	100%	3	33%	3	75%	5	22%	4	80%	9	32%
WORLD	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	14	100%	1	100%	9	100%	4	100%	23	100%	5	100%	28	100%

Table 23 provides an overview of the spatial locations of the speakers from the disability sector in the side events and parallel events focusing on women and girls with disabilities at the UN-CSW65. It shows the distribution of all speakers from CSOs from the disability sector (i.e., OF/BY Women with Disabilities, FOR Women with Disabilities, OF/BY People with Disabilities, FOR People with Disabilities) according to their spatial geographies: each speaker is classified according to the world region where the speaker's organization is headquartered. If speaking in two different side events, speakers are counted twice. World regions categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4.) Global South and Global North categories have also been discussed in this report, in Section 3.4.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by spatial geographies categories at the UN-CSW65 side events and parallel events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented region** is South Asia (9/28 speakers). This region is significantly over-represented among the speakers (32%) compared to the number of countries in this region (8 countries, 3.7% of all countries in the world).
2. North America is also over-represented among the speakers (14%) compared to the number of countries in this region (3 countries, 1.4% of all countries in the world).
3. **The least represented world regions** are: Middle East and North Africa (0/28 speakers = 0%), East Asia and Pacific (3/28 speakers = 10.7%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (3/28 speakers = 10.7%). These regions are under-represented as they account for, respectively, 9.6%, 14.4% and 19.3% of all world's countries.
4. **Europe and Central Asia is also under-represented** among the speakers (4/28 speakers = 14.2%) compared to the number of countries in this region (58 countries, 26.6% of all countries in the world).
5. **Under-represented, but to a lesser extent, is Sub-Saharan Africa** (18% of the speakers vs. 22% of the world's countries).
6. **There are significantly more speakers from the Global South (19/28 = 68%) than speakers from the Global North (9/18 = 32%).** As an indication, these proportions are very close to that of the number of world countries, territories, and overseas departments in each category.

Table 24: Economic geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, UN-CSW65, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF /BY WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF/BY PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1- Low income	2	14%	0	0%	1	11%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%	3	11%
2- Lower-middle income	10	71%	1	100%	3	33%	1	25%	13	57%	2	40%	15	54%

CATEGORIES	OF /BY WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF/BY PwDs		FOR PwDs		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
3- Upper-middle income	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
4- High income	2	14%	0	0%	2	22%	3	75%	4	17%	3	60%	7	25%
5- Not Applicable*	0	0%	0	0%	3	33%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%	3	11%
TOTAL	14	100%	1	100%	9	100%	4	100%	23	100%	5	100%	28	100%

*Three CSOs OF/BY PwDs are not applicable because these CSOs are transnational networks (in Table 24, these are European Disability Forum and Movimiento tod@s en acción (META) (2))

Table 24 provides an overview of the economic geographies of the countries in which the speakers' CSOs from the disability sector are headquartered. Economic categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4). In the category "Not applicable" we find CSOs whose status as OF or FOR people with disabilities remain to be clarified and CSOs that are networks.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by economic geographies at the UN-CSW65 side events and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented income category** is "Lower-middle income economies" (15 speakers out of 28 = 54%), while countries in this category make up 25% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, lower-middle economies are considerably over-represented at the CSW65.
2. **The least represented income category** is "Upper-middle income economies," as there are no speakers from any countries in this income category.
3. "Low-income economies" (3 speakers out of 28 = 10.7%) and "High-income economies" (7 speakers out of 28 = 25%) **are both under-represented** among the speakers, as they account for, respectively, 12.9% and 37.3% of all world countries.

List 5: List of high-level speakers (representatives of multilateral institutions and governments) at UN-CSW65 side/parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Which multilateral institutions is the one speaker from?

- UN-Women

Which governmental institutions are these 5 speakers from?

- Poland—Commission on the status of women
- Egypt—National Council for Women and National Council for Disability
- Kenya—National Gender Equality Commission
- Guatemala—Representative of Guatemala to the UN
- USA—USA Ambassador to the UN

List 6: List of speakers from other CSOs at UN-CSW65 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which CSOs are these 8 speakers from?

- CSO - Democracy
 - Virginia Atkinson—International Foundation for Electoral Systems (US-International)
- CSO - Human Rights
 - Carlos Rios-Espinosa—Human Rights Watch (HRW) (US-International)
- CSO - Women’s and/or Feminist (general)
 - Agnieszka Krol and colleagues—Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (India-Southern)
 - Mike Verawati—Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy (Indonesia)
 - Rosa Bransky—Purposeful (Sierra Leone)
 - Easter Okech—Kenya Female Advisory Organization (KEFEADO) (Kenya)
 - Mwanahamisi SinganO—African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) (Kenya-African Network)
- CSO - LGBTQ or Queer
 - Daniel Onyango—Nyarwek LGBTI Network (Kenya)

Table 25: Organizers and sponsors at the UN-CSW65 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
No information available	No information available	No information available	<i>Side Event: Barriers to the full and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities</i>

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
Women Enabled International (WEI) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>Parallel Event A - Is the way you think about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) ableist? Good practices for disability inclusive SRHR programmes and advocacy</i>
Women Enabled International (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>B - Visibility of Women with Disabilities in the Gender Equality Fight</i>
Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY WwD	Mexico	<i>B</i>
Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA) (organizer)	CSO - Women's and/or Feminist (general)	India-Southern	<i>C - Practicing Feminist Disability Rights Organizing: Strategies for Collective Action</i>
Deaf Women Included (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY WwD	Zimbabwe	<i>C</i>
Women Spaces Africa (sponsor)	CSO – FOR WwD	Kenya	<i>C</i>
Show Abilities Uganda (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Uganda	<i>C</i>
Anjali (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	India	<i>C</i>
Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (sponsor)	CSO – OF/BY WwD	Bangladesh	<i>C</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>D - Build back safer, inclusively: Women with</i>

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
			<i>disabilities addressing violence</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>E - Diversity and inclusion: intersectionality is key to building back better</i>
African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) (organizer)	CSO - Women's and/or Feminist (general)	Kenya-African Network	<i>E</i>
Syracuse University College of Law (organizer)	Academia	US	<i>E</i>

Table 25 provides an overview of who organized and/or sponsored the side events and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities at the UN-CSW65. Some organizations are involved in organizing more than one side event.

Table 25 is based on the information we found in the official description of the events (concept notes and flyers). The distinction between organizers and sponsors was usually clear, but not always—an organization can be listed as an organizer on one document and as a sponsor on another. Sometimes, only the logo of organizations is provided without specifying if they are sponsors or organizers. Therefore, the information on Table 25 might not be an accurate representation of all organizers and sponsors.

Organizers and sponsors of side events have distinct roles. Organizers are responsible for planning and coordinating the event, while sponsors provide financial or in-kind support to help cover the costs of the event, for example paying for CART captioning, or bringing in a speaker (personal communication, 2024).

1. No information is available about the organizers of the one (1) official side event focusing on women and girls with disabilities.
2. **Three (3) of the five (5) parallel events were organized solely by CSOs of the disability sector.** These are:
 - a. Is the way you think about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) ableist? Good practices for disability inclusive SRHR programmes and advocacy
 - b. Visibility of Women with Disabilities in the Gender Equality Fight
 - c. Build back safer, inclusively: Women with disabilities addressing violence
3. **No high-level organizations organized or sponsored any of the five (5) parallel events at CSW65.**
4. Out of the five (5) organizers of the parallel events, two (2) are CSOs from the disability sector and both organized two events each. One of them is a CSO led by women with disabilities, namely Women Enabled international (WEI). Two (2) out of the five (5) organizers are CSOs Women's and/or Feminist (general) and one (1) is from academia.
5. **Two (2) organizers of the parallel events are based in the Global South:** one is a CSO and the other is a regional network. They are both classified as Women's and/or Feminist (general). Three (3) organizers are based in the Global North. Given that a vast majority of

countries, territories, and overseas departments are in the Global South, there is an under-representation of the Global South and an over-representation of the Global North among organizers of the parallel events.

6. Two (2) out of the five (5) parallel events were supported by at least one sponsor. In total, there were six (6) sponsors, all of them CSOs from the disability sector. Three (3) out of the six (6) sponsors are CSOs led by women with disabilities. These are Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad, Deaf Women Included, and Women with Disabilities Development Foundation. No information is available on the sponsors of the one side event on women and girls with disabilities.

5.3 The 66th Commission on the Status of Women (2022)

5.3.1 Overview

Context

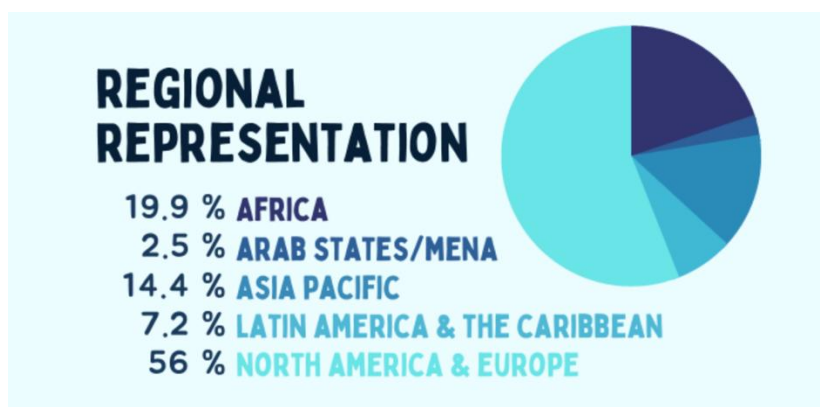
The 2022 edition of the UN-CSW took place from March 14 to March 25, 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference adopted a hybrid format, with both online and in-person attendance. However, all side events and parallel events had to be virtual.

NGO CSW Forum

In 2022, the NGO CSW Forum celebrated its 50th anniversary (see the official report of the NGO CSW66 Forum, NGO CSW/NY, 2022).

The official report states that more than 27,000 individuals participated in one or more of the 750 parallel events organized during the UN-CSW. More than 5,000 organizations were represented. According to the same report, youth participation (under 40 years old) was approximately 23%, participation from the Global South was 44%, and 40% of the participants were new to the forum. On the pie graph below is the regional representation of participants to the Forum.

Chart 4: Regional representation of participants at the NGO CSW66 Forum



Source: NGO CSW/NY, 2022

In the 57-page official report of the NGO CSW66 Forum, there is no mention of women and girls with disabilities and only one mention of “persons with disabilities.”

Themes

The priority theme of the 66th edition of the UN-CSW was “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.” The review theme was “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work (agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session)” (UN CSW/NY, 2022).

Main Event

Access is available to the [program of the Main event](#) of the two-week session of the 66th edition of the UN-CSW.

[Recordings of some of the 66th edition main events/workshops](#) are available (36 videos).

- **Conversation circles** (NGO CWS/NY, 2022, p. 35) on various topics, including youth, anti-racism, migration, Indigenous women, and LGBTQI+, but nothing on women and girls with disabilities
- **Regional Consultation Days** by NGO CSWs (p. 22)
 - Asia Pacific: Watch [Asia Pacific video on climate crisis](#)
 - Geneva and Vienna: Watch [Geneva and Vienna video on sustainable environments](#)
 - Latin America and the Caribbean: Watch [Latin America and the Caribbean video](#)
- **Virtual Regional Caucuses**
 - Watch [nine videos from Virtual Regional Caucuses](#)

Agreed Conclusions

Read the [UN-CSW66 Agreed Conclusion document](#)

5.3.2 Preliminary syntheses for our analysis of side events

Side events and parallels events

There were 212 side events at UN-CSW66. See the [list of all UN-CSW66 side events](#). Only three (3) included our keywords in their official description (see details of the keywords in Section 2 - Methodology of data collection). Out of these three (3) events, two (2) focused squarely on women and girls with disabilities. That means that less than 1% of side events at the 66th edition of the UN-CSW were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

There were over 750 parallel events at UN-CSW66 (NGO UN-CSW Geneva, 2022). Only ten (10) parallel events mentioned women and/or girls with disabilities in their abstract. Among these, only three (3) sessions focused squarely on women and girls with disabilities. It means that less than 1% of parallel events were truly focused on women and girls with disabilities.

List of side events and parallel events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

SIDE EVENTS

1. Equity and Inclusion for Adolescent Girls Everywhere: Policy and advocacy approaches to promote disability inclusion
2. Key Intersections: Gender, Disability and Climate Change

PARALLEL EVENTS

3. Our Site: Empowering women and girls with disability through co-design
4. Women with disabilities engage: Successful practices for economic empowerment
5. Climate change advocacy at the intersection of gender and disability

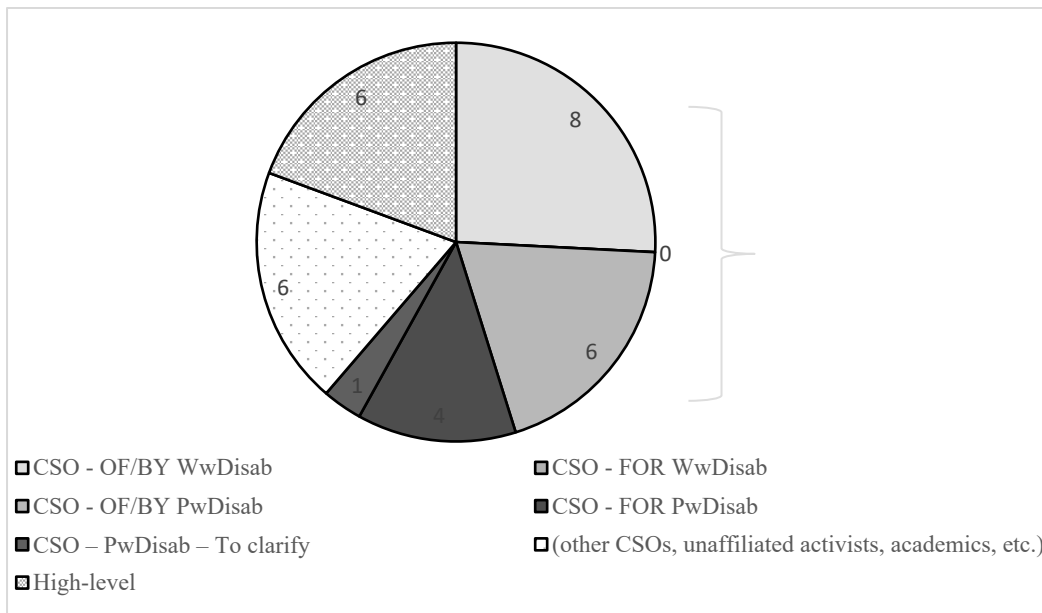
On these five (5) side/parallel events, two (2) events were focused on the priority theme, “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes” (sessions 2 and 5). One (1) event was clearly focused on the review theme, “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work” (session 4). Two (2) events were not closely related to either of the priority or the review themes (sessions 1 and 3).

Table 26: Distribution of all speakers at UN-CSW66 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities by category of actors, number, and %

Type of speakers	Number	Proportion in % (/31)
CSO - OF/BY WwDisab	8	26%
CSO - FOR WwDisab	0	0%
CSO - OF/BY PwDisab	6	19%
CSO - FOR PwDisab	4	13%
CSO – PwDisab- To clarify	1	3%
CSOs - Disability – OF/FOR to clarify	19	61%
CSO Women’s and Feminist (general)	2	6%
CSO - LGBTQ or Queer	0	0%
CSO Democracy	0	0%
CSO HR	0	0%
CSO Charity/Foundation	1	3%
Activists	1	3%
Practitioners	1	3%
Academia	1	3%
Multilateral Institution	2	6%
Government	4	13%
Total	31	100%

Table 26 provides a first lens to inquire into the variety of political actors involved in representing women and girls with disabilities, that is, in doing the work of producing, circulating and exchanging meanings—that is, representations—about women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW side events.

Chart 5: Distribution of all speakers by category of actors at UN-CSW66 side events on women and girls with disabilities (Total of speakers: 31)



Who—that is, here, speakers from which categories of political actors—spoke about women and girls with disabilities at UN-CSW66’s side events focusing on them?

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers by categories at the side events of UN-CSW66:

1. **A little less than two thirds (19/31 = 61%) of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in the side events and parallel events were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector**, that is CSOs OF or FOR women with disabilities or people with disabilities. As well, the speaker categorized as “activist” is also from the disability sector.
2. **Eight (8) of these 19 speakers** presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector **are from the “Women with disability sectors”**—that’s a little less than half of the speakers from this sector. **They account for 26% of the total (31) of speakers.** All these speakers are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
3. **Speakers from disability-led organizations, be it BY women or BY people with disabilities (14) largely outnumber speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities (4).**
4. **The other third of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in these side events and parallel events is comprised largely of high-level speakers (19%),** that is, representatives of multilateral institutions (2 = 6%) and of governments (4 = 13%). **At the UN-CSW66, all the high-level speakers but one were to be found in the two side events of our selection of five.** These were entitled, respectively, “Equity and Inclusion for Adolescent Girls Everywhere: Policy and advocacy approaches to promote disability inclusion” and “Key Intersections: Gender, Disability and Climate Change.” There, high-

level speakers found themselves in the company of speakers from various CSOs OF WwDs and PwDs, one CSO FOR PwDs, one academic and one practitioner. Only one high-level speaker, the one from UNFPA, spoke at a parallel event, meaning the two other parallel events had no speaker from a multilateral institution or government.

5. Other CSOs provided three speakers (10% of the total), two from CSOs – Women’s and Feminist (general) and one from CSO - Charity/Foundation. Academia provided one speaker, and one speaker was categorized as “practitioner.”

Table 27: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY WwDisab at UN-CSW66 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Mary Musa	Network of Women with Disabilities	1
Pratima Gurung	National Indigenous Disabled Women Association – Nepal (NIDWAN)	1
Maria Un	Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities	1
Heidi La Paglia	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	1
Vanamali Hermans	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	1
Tess Moodie	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	1
Nadia Uwimana	Les Vaillantes Association des femmes handicapées du Burundi	1
Sofia Minieri	Women Enabled International (WEI)	1

There was no speaker from a CSO – FOR Women with disabilities at the UN-CSW66 side and parallel events.

Table 28: Speakers from CSOs – OF/BY PwDisab at UN-CSW66 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Elham Youssefian	International Disability Alliance (IDA)	1
Adelaide Nyigina	Union of people living with disabilities Burundi (UPHB)	1
Noella Ndayizeka	Union of people living with disabilities Burundi (UPHB)	1
Naomi Tai	People With Disability Solomon Islands (PWDSI)	1
Nelly Caleb	Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA)	1

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Anapela Talakai	Lavame'a Ta'e'iloa Disabled People Association Inc (LATA)	1

Table 29: Speakers from CSOs – FOR PwDisab at UN-CSW66 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Name of speaker	Name of CSO	Number of side/parallel events
Andrea Pregel	International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)	1
Alessandra Aresu	Humanity & Inclusion	1
Sophie Pecourt	Humanity & Inclusion	1
Jen Bokoff	Disability Rights Fund (DRF/ DRAF)	1

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector at UN-CSW66, which spoke more than once in the side events/parallel events on women and girls with disabilities?

Out of a total of 19 speakers representing a CSO from the disability sector at UN-CSW66, **NO** speaker spoke more than once.

Social differences - collective and individual identifications of the speakers

- a) What are the collective political identifications of movement actors (CSOs OF) from the disability sector—that is, the categories of social difference around which these CSOs are organized?**

At CSW66, eight speakers were affiliated with organizations of **women with disabilities**. Among these, seven were from CSOs of women with disabilities “in general” and one was from an organization of **Indigenous women with disabilities**. Also invited to speak to the specific differences of women with disabilities in these events were six speakers affiliated with organizations of people with disabilities “in general.”

- b) What are the individual political identifications of movement actors from the disability sector, if different from that of their organizations, OR if individual activists—that is, the specific differences with which they publicly self-identify in these arenas?**

One individual activist speaker from the disability sector self-identified used the pronouns “them/their” on their Zoom ID.

- c) What is the gender of the speakers? Researchers’ identifications of the gender of the speakers as “women” or “men.”**

Out of a total of 31 speakers at these side events, three were identified by the researchers as men. Of these, two were from high-level institutions or government, and one from a CSO FOR people with disabilities. Thus—and taking into account the one speaker using non-conforming gender identification—27 out of the 31 speakers, including all 14 speakers from disability-led CSOs, can be classified as belonging to the gender category “women.”

Table 30: Spatial geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, UN-CSW66, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF PwDs		FOR PwDs		TO CLARIFY*		TOTAL CSO "OF"		TOTAL CSO "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(World Bank)																
1- East Asia & Pacific	4	50%	0	0%	3	50%	0	0%	0	0%	7	50%	0	0%	7	37%
2-Europe & Central Asia	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	2	11%
3- Latin America & the Caribbean	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%
4- Middle East and North Africa	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
5- North America	1	13%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	1	7%	1	25%	2	11%
6- South Asia	1	13%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	5%
7- Sub-Saharan Africa	2	25%	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%	0	0%	4	29%	0	0%	4	21%
8- Transnational Networks**	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	1	25%	0	0%	1	7%	1	25%	2	11%
TOTAL	8	100%	0	0%	6	100%	4	100%	1	100%	14	100%	4	100%	19	100%
GLOBAL SOUTH	4	50%	0	0%	5	83%	0	0%	1	100%	9	64%	0	0%	10	53%
GLOBAL NORTH	4	50%	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%	4	29%	4	100%	8	42%
WORLD	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	1	25%	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	5%
TOTAL	8	100%	0	0%	6	100%	4	100%	1	100%	14	100%	4	100%	19	100%

* 1 CSO OF or FOR? In need of clarification: Encuentra tu lugar

** 2 CSOs are transnational networks whose membership goes beyond one world region or more (in Table 30, these are International Disability Alliance (IDA) and International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)).

Table 30 provides an overview of the spatial locations of the speakers from the disability sector in the side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities at the UN-CSW66. It shows the distribution of all speakers from CSOs from the disability sector (i.e., OF/BY Women with Disabilities, FOR Women with Disabilities, OF/BY People with Disabilities, FOR People with Disabilities) according to their spatial geographies: each speaker is classified according to the world region where the speaker's organization is headquartered. If speaking in two different side events, speakers are counted twice. World regions categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4). For Global South and Global North categories, see the discussion in this report, in Section 3.4.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by spatial geographies categories at the UN-CSW66 side events and parallel events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented world region is East Asia and Pacific** (7 speakers out of 19). This region is over-represented among the speakers (37%) compared to the number of countries in this region, 38 countries, 17.4% of all countries in the world. This over-representation of East Asia among speakers at UN-CSW66 could potentially be explained by the overarching theme of the 2022 edition of the Conference, which is "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes." In fact, we noted a higher presence of countries that are more vulnerable to climate change and environmental and disasters risks from the Pacific region at the UN-CSW66. North America is also over-represented with 11% of the speakers for 1.4% of the countries of the world
2. Sub-Saharan Africa is fairly represented with 21% of the total of speakers, which corresponds to the proportion of the number of countries of this region in the world (22% of the world's countries)
3. Europe and Central Asia (11% of the speakers), Latin American and the Caribbean (5%), and South Asia (5%) are under-represented.
4. Middle East and North Africa are not represented at all (no speakers from these world regions)
5. The Global South and the Global North have about the same number of speakers with 10 speakers out of 19 (53%) from the Global South and eight speakers out of 19 (42%) from the Global North. However, this is unbalanced in favour of the Global North, as a large majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world are in the Global South.

Table 31: Economic geographies, speakers from CSOs – Disability, UN-CSW66, number, and %

CATEGORIES	OF /BY WwDs		FOR WwDs		OF/BY PwDs		FOR PwDs		TO CLARIFY*		TOTAL CSOs "OF"		TOTAL CSOs "FOR"		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
(World Bank)																
1- Low income	1	13%	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%	0	0%	3	21%	0	0%	3	16%
2- Lower-middle income	3	38%	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%	0	0%	5	36%	0	0%	5	26%
3- Upper-middle income	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	1	5%
4- High income	4	50%	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%	4	29%	3	75%	7	37%
5- Not Applicable**	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	1	25%	1	100%	1	7%	1	25%	3	16%
TOTAL	8	100%	0	0%	6	100%	4	100%	1	100%	14	100%	4	100%	19	100%

*1 CSO OF or FOR? In need of clarification: Encuentra tu lugar

**1 CSO OF/BY PwDs and 1 CSO FOR PwDs income categories by country are not applicable because these CSOs are transnational networks (in Table 31, these are International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) and International Disability Alliance (IDA)).

Table 31 provides an overview of the economic geographies of the countries in which the speakers' CSOs from the disability sector are headquartered. Economic categories are those of the World Bank (see this report, Section 3.4). In the category "Not applicable" we find CSOs whose status as OF or FOR people with disabilities remain to be clarified and CSOs that are networks.

Following are the highlights of the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector by economic geographies at the UN-CSW66 side events and parallel events focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

1. **The most represented income category** is "High income economies" (7 speakers out of 19 = 37%), while countries in this category make up 37.3% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, high income economies are proportionally well-represented at UN-CSW66.

2. **The least represented income category** is “Upper-middle income economies” (1 speaker out of 19 = 5%), while countries in this category make up 25% of all world economies according to the World Bank. Therefore, upper-middle income economies are significantly under-represented at the UN-CSW66.
3. Speakers from “Lower-middle income economies” (5 speakers out of 19) account for 26% of the total of speakers from the disability sector, which corresponds to the proportion of these economies in the world.
4. There is a slight over-representation of speakers from low-income economies (16% of speakers vs 12.9% of the world’s economies).

List 7: List of high-level speakers (representatives of multilateral institutions and governments) at UN-CSW66 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which multilateral institutions are these 2 speakers from?

- UN-Women
- UNFPA

Which governmental institutions are these 4 speakers from?

- UK—From Commonwealth Development Office
- Bangladesh—Clinical Contraceptive Service Delivery Program
- Canada—Global Affairs Canada (GAC)
- Finland—Ministry of Foreign Affairs

List 8: List of speakers from other CSOs at UN-CSW66 side events on women and girls with disabilities

Which CSOs are these 3 speakers from?

- CSO - Charity—Global health and sexual health and right
 - Melissa Cockroft—International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) (UK-International)
- CSO - Women’s and/or Feminist (general)
 - Dieynaba Diallo—Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) Senegal (Senegal)
 - Wairimy Munyinyi—Wahome - Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) (Kenya)

Table 32: Organizers and sponsors at UN-CSW66 side and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) (organizer)	CSO – Global health	Switzerland-International Network	<i>Side Event 1: Equity and Inclusion for Adolescent Girls Everywhere: Policy and advocacy approaches to promote disability inclusion</i>
International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	Belgium-Transnational Network	<i>Side Event 1</i>
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the UK (FCDO) (organizer)_	Government	UK	<i>Side Event 1</i>

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare – Bangladesh (organizer)	Government	Bangladesh	<i>Side Event 1</i>
US Mission at the UN/USAID (sponsor)	Government	US	<i>Side Event 1</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/ DRAF) (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>Side Event 2: Key Intersections: Gender, Disability and Climate Change</i>
International Disability Alliance (IDA) (organizer)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-Transnational Network	<i>Side Event 2</i>
Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (organizer)	Government	Canada	<i>Side Event 2</i>
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (organizer)	Government	Finland	<i>Side Event 2</i>
Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	Netherlands-International Network	<i>Side Event 2</i>
UN-PRPD (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>Side Event 2</i>
UN-Women (sponsor)	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	<i>Side Event 2</i>
Ford Foundation (sponsor)	Funder	US-International	<i>Side Event 2</i>
Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	Australia	<i>Parallel Event 3: Our Site: Empowering women and girls with disability through co-design</i>
Humanity and Inclusion (organizer)	CSO – FOR PwD	France/Belgium-International	<i>Parallel Event 4: Women with disabilities engage:</i>

Organizers/Sponsors	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	Side and Parallel events
			<i>successful practices for economic empowerment</i>
Women Enabled International (WEI) (organizer)	CSO - OF/BY Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	<i>Parallel Event 5: Climate change advocacy at the intersection of gender and disability</i>
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (sponsor)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	<i>Parallel Event 5</i>

Table 32 provides an overview of who organized and/or sponsored the side events and the parallel events on women and girls with disabilities at the UN-CSW66. Some organizations are involved in the organization of more than one side event.

Table 32 is based on the information we found in the official description of the events (concept notes and flyers). The distinction between organizers and sponsors was usually clear, but not always—an organization can be listed as an organizer on a document and as a sponsor on another. Sometimes, only the logo of organizations is provided without specifying if they are sponsors or organizers. Therefore, the information on Table 32 might not be an accurate representation of all organizers and sponsors.

Organizers and sponsors of side events have distinct roles. Organizers are responsible for planning and coordinating the event, while sponsors provide financial or in-kind support to help cover the costs of the event, for example paying for CART captioning, or bringing in a speaker (personal communication, 2024).

Side events:

1. Both side events were organized by various combinations of multilateral institutions, governments, CSOs from the disability sector, and Other CSOs.
2. Out of the eight (8) organizers, three (3) are CSOs from the disability sector. Among these, there are no CSOs led BY or FOR women with disabilities. Four (4) are governments, namely: United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Finland, and Canada; and one is Other CSO.
3. Only one (1) organizer is based in the Global South, four (4) are based in the Global North, two (2) are transnational networks of CSOs (IDA and IDDC), and two (2) are international networks (GLAD and PMNCH). Therefore, the Global North is over-represented among organizers of side events, and the Global South is under-represented, as a vast majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments are in the Global South.
4. Both side events were supported by a total of five (5) sponsors. Among these, only one (1) is a CSO from the disability sector, one is a government, two are multilateral institutions, and one is Other CSO.

Parallel events:

1. **All three (3) parallel events were organized solely by CSOs of the disability sector.**
Two (2) of these three (3) organizers are CSOs led by women with disabilities, namely Women Enabled International (WEI) and Women with Disabilities (Australia), and one is a CSO for people with disabilities: Humanity and Inclusion.
2. All three (3) organizers of these three parallel events are based in the Global North.
3. One of the three (3) parallel events was supported by one sponsor, the CSO for people with disabilities DRF/DRAF.

5.4 Comparing UN-CSW65 and UN-CSW66

Comparing the number and % of sessions focusing on women and girls with disabilities:

Whether it was at the UN-CSW65 (1 out of 148 side events; 5 out of over 700 parallel events) or the UN-CSW66 (2 out of 212 side events; 3 out of over 750 parallel events), less than 1% of these events were squarely focused on women and girls with disabilities.

The distribution of the categories of speakers in the side and parallel events focused on women and girls with disabilities at the UN-CSW65 (Table 18) and UN-CSW66 (Table 26) is roughly similar in both meetings:

1. About two-thirds of the people who spoke about women and girls with disabilities in the side events and parallel events of the two UN-CSW meetings were presented as affiliated with the disability sector. In both cases, all were from CSOs but one (individual activist).
2. Among all the speakers presented as affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector at these two UN-CSW meetings, about half were presented as affiliated with CSOs from the “women with disabilities” sector, and all the remaining but one (CSW65) were affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.
3. Speakers from disability-led organizations, be it BY women or BY people with disabilities, largely outnumbered speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities.
4. After speakers from the disability sector, other CSOs and High-level speakers (from multilateral institutions and governments) alternated as the secondmost broad category of actors most represented in the side events and parallel events of the UN-CSWs. Of note, High-level speakers were to be found almost exclusively in the “side events” focusing on women and girls with disabilities and were almost absent from the parallel events. This seems to be related to the differing natures of these events at the UN-CSW: as we have already mentioned in this report, side events “are considered to be more high-level meetings than parallel events.”
5. Speakers from Other CSOs were drawn from the categories CSO - Women’s and Feminist (general), LGBTQ or Queer, Human Rights, Democracy, and Charity/Foundation. There was only one speaker from Academia each year.

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector, who spoke at UN-CSW65 AND ALSO at the UN-CSW66 in the side events/parallel events on women and girls with disabilities?

- Sophie Pecourt—Humanity and Inclusion (France/Belgium-International) (3 sessions)
- Pratima Gurung—National Indigenous Disabled Women Association (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (3 sessions)

- Naomi Tai—People with Disability Solomon Islands (PWDSI) (Solomon Islands) (2 sessions)

Together, these three frequent speakers have spoken eight times at the two editions of the UN-CSW. As speakers from CSOs of the disability sector spoke 47 times in total at UN-CSW65 and UN-CSW66, these frequent speakers represent 17% of the disability sector's voices at both editions of the UN-CSW.

The spatial geographies of CSOs of the disability sector were roughly similar in both meetings except for the representation of South Asia, East Asia and Pacific, and the Global North/Global South:

1. **Sub-Saharan Africa was the most well-represented** world region among speakers at both UN-CSWs in comparison to the number of countries this world region represents in the world.
2. **Middle East and North Africa was the least represented** world region at both editions of the UN-CSW, as there were NO speakers representing CSOs from this world region.
3. **North America was an over-represented** world region among the speakers at both editions of the UN-CSW.
4. **Europe and Central Asia was an under-represented** world region among the speakers at both editions of the UN-CSW.
5. **Latin America and the Caribbean was an under-represented** world region among the speakers at both editions of the UN-CSW.
6. There were significantly fewer speakers from South Asia at the 66th edition of the UN-CSW (1 speaker out of the 19 = 5%) compared to the 65th edition (9 speakers out of the 28 = 32%).
7. There were significantly more speakers from East Asia and Pacific at the 66th edition of the UN-CSW (7 speakers out of 19 = 37%) compared to the 65th edition (3 speakers out of the 28 = 10.7%).
8. **The Global South was more represented among speakers at the UN-CSW65** (68% of all speakers) than at the UN-CSW66 (53% of all speakers). As a large majority of countries, territories, and overseas departments in the world is located in the Global South, the latter was quite well represented among speakers at the UN-CSW65, but slightly under-represented at CSW66. The Global North was over-represented only at the UN-CSW66.

The economic geographies of CSOs of the disability sector were roughly similar in both meetings except for the representation of lower-middle income economies.

1. **Upper-middle income economies was the least represented** income category among speakers at both editions of the UN-CSW.
2. High-income economies were under-represented among speakers at UN-CSW65 and fairly well-represented at UN-CSW66.
3. Lower-middle income economies were over-represented among speakers at UN-CSW65 but well-represented at UN-CSW66.
4. Low economies were slightly under-represented among speakers at UN-CSW65 and over-represented at UN-CSW66.

6. Analysis

This section of the report further analyzes **Who represents** women and girls with disabilities in the annual meetings of the COSP and the UN-CSW and the political dynamics of presence, absence, and under-representation with an eye for the diversity of women and girls with disabilities and for how their engagement in these spaces compare between the two settings.

In the first section of the analysis, we draw attention to the variety of political actors doing the work of representation on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in the side and parallel events of the COSP and UN-CSW. We highlight the proportion of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector, paying attention to the extent to which these are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities and OF people with disabilities. We further dwell into the question of which women and girls with disabilities are engaged in these arenas by highlighting the social differences that are mobilized in processes of self-representation and those that are not, as well as the geographies of representation—that is, the overrepresentation, under-representation, and absences with regard to the spatial and economic locations of the CSOs from the disability sector with which the speakers are affiliated.

In the second section of the analysis, we highlight the key role played by organizers in structuring the side and parallel events on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at COSP and UN-CSW, including in determining who will speak—that is, who will be invited to do the work of representation in these arenas. We further inquire into who these organizers are, starting with a critical appraisal of the limits posed by the constraints of obtaining ECOSOC status on who can organize. We trace the portrait of the organizers of the events we studied and inquire into the place of CSOs of and for women with disabilities among them. We also identify which political actors act as “frequent organizers.” Finally, we discuss a series of other barriers to speakers’ in-person and online participation in UN meetings, including financial capacity, visa requirements, accessibility, access to technology and related skills, networks, and language.

In the third section of the analysis, we inquire into the possibilities and limits to the representation of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW. First, using past programs of the COSP and UN-CSW in addition to our 2021 and 2022 data, we ask to what extent the meetings’ priority themes constrain and/or facilitate the organization of side events and parallel events focused on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. We underscore the recurring topics and the array of other topics opened for discussion in these events. Second, we ask to what extent the COSP and UN-CSW meetings provide spaces for CSOs of women and people with disabilities to engage with disability rights implementation and monitoring in relation to the situation of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. We identify the spaces offered by both meetings and assess their potential and limits.

6.1. Who is doing the work of representation

As laid out in our theoretical section, our analysis rests on a theoretical understanding of representation as “a practice, a kind of ‘work’” (Hall, 1997, p. 25) through which meanings about things, people, groups, and their relations are “produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (p. 15). Thus, in the international arenas we have observed, a variety of political actors are engaged in producing, circulating and exchanging meanings—that is, representations (in the plural)—about women and girls with disabilities.

In this first part of our analysis, we ascertain “who” is doing the work of representation—that is, who is producing, circulating, and exchanging meaning by speaking about women and girls or

gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-CSW, and how the “who” of representation compares in these two arenas.

6.1.1 A variety of political actors

In our theoretical section, we have chosen to follow the spirit and the letter of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in identifying as the main actors of the representation in these arenas the organizations and institutions with which the speakers are presented as being affiliated in the description of the event and/or the introduction to the event by its Chair or Moderator. We also write that different organizational locations come with differential access to resources, power, and privilege in these settings, and outside of them. Identifying which organizational actors are there or not there and discerning relations of power and privilege in these politics of presence and absence is part of an analysis of “Who represents.”

Building on a classical understanding of the concept of civil society in political science, we have defined five main categories for classifying organizational/institutional actors: Government, Multilateral Institution, Business, Academia, and Civil Society Organization (CSO). Within the latter category, we distinguished between CSOs from the disability sector and Other CSOs. To further analyze the former, we aligned with the distinction made in the sector and codified by the UN Committee of the CRPD, between organizations OF and organizations FOR person with disabilities. Given the topic of our research, we have further distinguished between organizations whose self-definition centres the political identities of women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, and organizations centring, rather, that of “people” with disabilities. We also created two small categories to accommodate other types of speakers: those presented as unaffiliated “activists” and as “practitioners” in the descriptions of the events.

In the next sub-sections, we delve deeper into the question of “who speaks?” in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-CSW focusing on women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.

6.1.2 CSOs from the disability sector

a) Speakers from CSOs of the disability sector

What is the proportion of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector in the two arenas?

Similarities: At both COSPs and UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022, speakers from CSOs of the disability sector form the main category of speakers doing the work of representation in the side and/or parallel events focusing on women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. **Differences:** The proportion of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector is higher at the UN-CSW than at the COSP.

At COSP14, about half (almost 50%) of the 70 speakers of these side events were affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector. At COSP15 (58 speakers in total), they counted for a little less than 40%. **To understand the significance of these 2021 and 2022 numbers, it is worth contrasting them with those of earlier editions of the COSP meetings.**¹⁹ At COSP5, in 2012, which is the earliest COSP for which the program of side events is available, 9 side events included

¹⁹ Historical data on the representation of women and girls at the COSP is found in Abdelmoumeni et al. (2022).

our keywords in their title or description.²⁰ Of these descriptions, eight featured the list of speakers and, out of a total of 40 speakers, one third (33%) were from CSOs of the disability sector. At COSP10, in 2017, which is the latest COSP for which a complete program of side events including descriptions and lists of speakers is available, 10 side events included our keywords in their title or description for a total of 64 speakers. Of these, one quarter (25%) were from CSOs of the disability sector.

Percentages for COSP5 and COSP10 are not totally comparable to those of our analysis of COSP14 and COSP15. The former two COSPs potentially include some side events that would not have made it onto our final list if we had been able to attend (based on our criteria of focusing significantly on women and girls with disabilities). However, the important proportion of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector in the 2021 and 2022 side events on women and girls or gender and sexual minorities testifies to an increased presence of CSOs from the disability sector in these panels. That both annual meetings were held online may also have enabled such levels of participation.

It is interesting to note that, at both UN-CSWs, the proportion of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector among the total number of speakers at the side and/or parallel events on women and girls or gender and sexual minorities was significantly higher than at the COSP. Altogether, about three quarters of the speakers (38/44 at CSW65 + 19/31 at CSW66) were affiliated with CSOs from the disability sector. At both UN-CSWs, speakers from the disability sector tended to dominate the lists of speakers in these events, especially in the more numerous “parallel events.”²¹

Which categories of CSOs with disabilities are these speakers from?

Similarities: In our selection of events at both COSPs and both UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022, about half the speakers affiliated with CSOs of the disability sector were from CSOs OF women with disabilities. Overall, in both arenas, speakers from disability-led organizations largely outnumbered speakers from organizations FOR women or people with disabilities. Only one speaker was affiliated with a CSO we categorized as FOR women with disabilities at COSP14, none at COSP15, one at CSW65, and none at CSW66. In both arenas, the other half of the speakers affiliated with CSOs of the disability sector belonged 2/3 to organizations OF people with disabilities, and 1/3 to organizations FOR people with disabilities.

That half the speakers of the disability sector were from CSOs OF women and girls with disabilities at COSP14 (15 in 2021) and COSP15 (12 in 2022) is particularly significant considering the history of the presence of these organizations in these side events. At COSP5, in 2012, out of a total of 40 speakers²² from all categories in the relevant side events, there were NO speakers from an organization OF women with disabilities and only one from a CSO OF

²⁰ Note: these numbers correspond to our ‘preliminary list’ of side events in the present report—that is, side events that, because they feature our keywords, *may* offer substantive discussions of women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities and their issues. Our analysis of COSP14 and COSP15 focuses on the ones that *did*.

²¹ As no archive exists of UN-CSW parallel events prior to our study, historical data is too incomplete for us to attempt an analysis similar to that of the COSP.

²² This number includes all speakers from the eight side events for which we had a list of speakers out of nine side events that included our keywords in their title or description.

people with disabilities. Most other speakers were affiliated with CSOs FOR people with disabilities (11 speakers) and one with an organization FOR women with disabilities.²³ COSP10, in 2017, marked some progress, as three speakers were from CSOs OF women with disabilities and seven from CSOs OF people with disabilities out of a total of 64 speakers (all categories). In comparison, 15 of the 70 speakers at COSP14 (21% of all speakers) and 12 of the 58 speakers at COSP15 (21%) were affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities.

Although the numbers for COSP5 and COSP10 are not totally comparable to those for COSP14 and COSP15, for reasons explained above, **the overall trend has thus been for a growing presence of speakers from CSOs OF women with disabilities and OF people with disabilities** in the side events centring women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.

Our data thus shows a **changing balance** among the different political actors doing the work of representation—that is, elaborating, exchanging, and circulating meanings about women and girls with disabilities and their issues—in dedicated side events since the first years of the COSP. Importantly, there has been an important reduction in the initial majority of speakers being affiliated with multilateral institutions, governments, CSOs and academia at these events, and an increase in the number of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector and especially of organizations OF women with disabilities at these panels. There has also been a reduction in the proportions of speakers from CSOs FOR women and people with disabilities to the benefit of speakers from CSOs OF women and people with disabilities.

As no archive exists of the UN-CSW Forum parallel events prior to our study, historical data is too incomplete for us to attempt a similar analysis to that of the COSP.

b) Social differences, political identities, and self-representation

Our theoretical framework suggests that “Who the speakers are” in terms of the social positioning from which they speak in these representational processes should be approached through the political identities made salient by the movement organizations with which they are affiliated at the event, or, in the case of unaffiliated individual activists, those to which they identify publicly in the side events in which they participate. Our questions thus become: What are the categories of social difference grounding the claims to self-representation of movement actors (disability-led CSOs and individual activists) from the disability sector in the side events focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities? Or, in other words, what social differences are taken up as a basis for self-representation—that is, are collectively organized around and self-identified with—and which are not: what dynamics of presence and absence are at work?

²³ Women Enabled International appears in our historical accounts as an organization “FOR” women with disabilities. Changes in the membership of its Board have altered our categorization to “OF” for COSP14 and COSP15.

Presences

How movement organizations name themselves or, more largely, the collective identities they elaborate for themselves centres certain social differences and not others as salient for their work of self-representation. The intersectional difference of gender and disability that grounds the claims to self-representation of most of the disability-led CSOs providing speakers in our side events is that of **women with disabilities**: a total of 48 speakers in the four meetings are affiliated with organizations OF women with disabilities). A second group of speakers making this constituency visible and elaborating on its circumstances are speakers from organizations OF people with disabilities (total = 30 speakers). We hope the transcripts will tell us more about these speakers' claims to the self-representation of this political identity from within CSOs of "people" with disabilities.

Regarding further intersectional differences of gender and disability, the most often and most systematically mobilized at both COSP and CSW is that of **Indigenous women with disabilities**. At COSP14, for the first time women speakers from both the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) and the Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN) represented these constituencies in the side events "The situation of Indigenous Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Recovery Efforts from the Pandemic of Covid 19" and "Nothing About Us Without Us: Amplifying the Priorities of Women and Girls With Disabilities at The CRPD And CEDAW Committees in the Post-Covid Recovery Process." At COSP15, NIDWAN provided speakers for two side events entitled "An intersectional approach to disability inclusion" and "Women with Disabilities Leading Climate Action." At the CSW meetings, it provided speakers for the parallel events "Diversity and Inclusion: Intersectionality is Key to Building Back Better," to a parallel event on sexual and reproductive health and rights (CSW65), and to the side event "Key Intersections: Gender, Disability and Climate Change."

It is worth noting that Pratima Gurung, "a founding member and currently General Secretary of Indigenous Person with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN) and National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NIDWAN)" (Women Enabled International [WEI], n.d.) is the voice most often heard on issues relative to Indigenous women with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW. She was very active in these arenas in 2021 and 2022, often speaking at two different events in each yearly meeting. She was also invited to speak at the COSP15 main event. Sajana Gurung from NIDWAN, as well as Anne Siodi and Denisse Taya from the Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN), also acted as speakers at the side event on Indigenous women and girls with disabilities at COSP14.

The other intersectional difference of gender/sexuality and disability with which movement actors self-identify is that of **gender and sexual minorities with disabilities**. This subcategory of gender/sexuality and disability has been politicized through the presence of speakers from organizations centring these political identities: the US Alliance of Women, Non-Binary Persons and Gender Minorities with Disabilities, and the self-defined "disabled queer collective" Revival Disability India, as well as through a cluster of individual and organizational speakers self-identifying publicly as gay, queer, or non-binary persons with disabilities in these events. These speakers were heard mostly at two separate side events at COSP15: "Using Technology to Bring Together Women and Gender Minorities with Disabilities during the Covid 19 Pandemic" and "LGBTIQ Youth with Disabilities Re-Envisioning the Road to Equality." It is worth mentioning that there have been five side events centring sexual and gender minorities with disabilities since COSP11, including a side event entitled "Queering the COSP" at COSP13.

Among all the speakers at the COSP and UN-CSW side and parallel events in 2021 and 2022, only two were from CSOs OF women with specific types of disabilities: the Visually Impaired Women's Commission of Peru (Comisión de Damas Invidentes Del Peru (CODIP)) at COSP15 and Deaf Women Included at CSW65. In addition, the experiences and realities of women with psychosocial disabilities were represented at three out of four of our annual meetings by one speaker, Yeni Rosa Damayanti from the CSO OF people with disabilities Indonesian Mental Health Association. The political self-representation of constituencies of women with specific types of disabilities is thus uncommon in our side events, and cross-disability representation is the norm.

Absences

A surprise was the quasi-absence of the political identity **“girls with disabilities”** at our four meetings. Although the words “women and girls with disabilities” appears in the titles and in the description of many of our selected events at the COSP and UN-CSW, and although we observed a widespread use of the formula “women and girls with disabilities” in the interventions of speakers, the specific ways girls with disabilities are affected by the issues discussed were seldom elaborated on. Among our side events, only one focused specifically on girls with disabilities (“Equity and inclusion for adolescent girls everywhere: policy and advocacy approaches to promote disability inclusion,” at CSW66). However, there were no speakers from organizations OF girls with disabilities at that event, nor at the side events and parallel events focusing on “women and girls” with disabilities. Among all the side events focusing on women and girls with disabilities at the four annual meetings observed, only one speaker self-identified as “a girl” (at COSP15). As well, attending side events on “youth with disabilities” where “girls” were named in the description of the event revealed no speakers from organizations OF girls with disabilities and no speaker self-identifying as “girl”; rather, self-identification was as “youth with a disability” (or youth + name of a specific disability), or in one case “young woman with a disability.” Similarly, attending the side events on children with disabilities where “girls” were named in the description of the event revealed no speakers from organizations OF girls with disabilities, no individual activist identified as a “girl” in the description of the event, and no speaker self-identifying as “girl” during the event.

An inquiry into the online archives of the COSP and UN-CSW similarly shows a similar use of the formula “women and girls with disabilities” and, more rarely, “young women and girls” or “boys and girls” with disabilities in the titles and descriptions of the events. However, the available lists of speakers for these events do not include speakers from organizations OF girls with disabilities. Rather, speakers are overwhelmingly from governments and multilateral institutions; CSOs of women with disabilities started being invited to provide speakers in the mid-2010s. Admittedly, there are no archives of past NGO-CSW Forum parallel events, and information on the speakers at the COSP11 side event is missing. **But it seems safe to say that “girls with disabilities” are very seldom invited to be the actors of their own representation(s)—that is, to speak about their experiences and the issues that affect them—in the arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW. Thus, “girls with disabilities” are most of the time represented by others rather than by themselves in these events—that is, if their specific realities are talked about at all.**

Another notable absence in our side events is that of **rural women with disabilities**. There were no side events on this topic, no speakers from CSOs of rural women with disabilities were present, and their realities were rarely talked about in the four meetings. However, our scan of online archives revealed three past side events on rural women with disabilities at previous UN-CSW meetings (one at CSW56 in 2012 and two at CSW62 in 2018), as well as one at COSP11 in 2018. As mentioned before, there are no archives of past NGO-CSW Forum parallel events, and information on the speakers at the COSP11 side event is missing. But the available lists of speakers for the UN-CSW events show no speaker from a CSO of rural women with disabilities, and no rural women

being identified as activist or leader with disabilities in the description of the events. Thus, it seems fair to state that, when they are the object of sustained discussion, “rural women with disabilities” are **most of the time represented by others** rather than by themselves at these meetings.

As well, none of the 2021 and 2022 side events and parallel events at COSP and UN-CSW focused squarely on **refugee women with disabilities**. Online archives show only one side event with refugee women in its title, “Ensuring the CRPD is working for refugee women and children” at COSP5 in 2012. Given the presence of the Women’s Refugee Commission among organizers and on the list of speakers, several side events on women with disabilities in humanitarian action at COSP9 (2016), COSP10 (2017) and COSP11 (2018), or at CSW61 (2017) may have been the occasion to discuss the situation or leadership of refugee women with disabilities. Yet the available lists of speakers for these events show no speaker from a CSO OF refugee women with disabilities, and no individual identified as a refugee women activist or leader in the event descriptions. As with “girls” and “rural women with disabilities,” when they are represented in these events, “refugee women with disabilities” **are spoken about by others** rather than by themselves.

The specific difference for “racialized women with disabilities” was not taken up by movement actors in our side events, nor in any prior ones according to our scan of the archives of both meetings.²⁴ The very first side event to offer substantive discussions on the intersections of race and disability, although outside the purview of our study, was an in-person event held at COSP16 in 2023, “Reaching Indigenous and Minority Persons with Disabilities: Tackling Ableism and Racism through Intersectional Advocacy.” According to the concept note, speakers from three disability-led movement organizations self-identifying with these specific differences participated. These were Luciana Viegas from the Brazilian CSO of Black people with disabilities, *Vidas Negras com Deficiência Importam* (VNDI) (translation: Black Lives with Disabilities Matter), Pratima Gurung from the National Indigenous Disabled Women’s Association Nepal (NIDWAN), and a speaker (TBC) from the Indigenous People with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN). Although we do not know whether and to what extent these speakers chose to (also) speak from the social location of “Indigenous women with disabilities,” this pioneering event may prefigure future ones making space for movement actors organized around collective identities centring racialized women with disabilities, thus making the latter and their issues visible in these meetings.

Finally, no side event in 2021 and 2022 mentioned “**migrant women with disabilities**,” and none were found in the online archives. This despite the fact that international migration is a pressing, contemporary issue, and that immigration laws in many host countries have been known to institutionalize obstacles to the immigration of people with disabilities, for instance with rulings of medical inadmissibility on the grounds of “excessive demand” on health and social services.

Brief remarks on “women” and “men” (researchers’ identifications) and non-conforming gender and sexual identities among speakers from disability-led CSOs

Our data makes clear that doing the work of representation of women and girls with disabilities and their issues as speakers from disability-led CSOs at the COSP and UN-CSW is mostly a women’s affair. Women make up the overwhelming majority of speakers from disability-led CSO at the events focusing on women and girls with disabilities, be they from organizations OF or FOR women with disabilities, or OF or FOR people with disabilities. This may

²⁴ “Race” and “racism” appear in the description of two side events at COSP13 (2020), but only as part of an enumeration of “structures of power” or axes of domination.

be an expression of the lack of interest by men for these issues or of a successful claim to self-representation and to epistemic privilege from women with disabilities in CSOs of people with disabilities... or both. Transcripts and interviews may tell us more.

Very few speakers self-identified using nonconforming gender or sexual categories in these arenas: 1 out of 70 at COSP14, 4 out of 58 at COSP15, 0 out of 44 at CSW65, and 1 out of 31 at CSW66. The most significant variations in nonconforming gender and sexual self-identifications are associated with the programming at COSP15 of two side events focusing on gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.

c) Geographies of representation: speakers from the disability sector

As explained at the beginning of this report, who is doing the work of representing people with disabilities in policy making and decision-making arenas matters, as it potentially has implications for the substance of what is represented at these conferences. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of who is discussing women and girls with disabilities in the arenas of the COSP and the UN-CSW, **we analyze the spatial geographies and the economic geographies of the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector**, as these spatial locations impact the production of local knowledge and cultural understandings of disability. Place-based specificities, such as political, social, and economic realities, contribute to shaping the lives of women and girls with disabilities and how their issues are being addressed by local authorities and civil society.

Spatial geographies

Regarding the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector in terms of spatial geographies at both COSPs and UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022, we mapped where these CSOs were headquartered by world regions (World Bank categories). Then we asked: “Whose voices,” that is, the voices of speakers from which world regions are present in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-CSW focusing on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities? Which are over-represented or, conversely, under-represented, or absent?

Voices from South Asia were significantly over-represented in our selection of events at the COSP and the UN-CSW. Speakers from this world region accounted for 22.8% of all speakers from the disability sector, while the eight countries of this region account for 3.4% of all countries in the world. Only at CSW66 do we see a weaker presence of South Asia among speakers (only one speaker). This very strong presence of speakers from South Asia suggests that the experiences of women and girls with disabilities situated in this sociopolitical context are widely shared at these events. This level of presence is partly explained by the participation in more than one event of four CSOs from the region’s disability sector: the National Forum for Women with Disabilities (Pakistan), the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) (Nepal), Rising Flame (India) and the Indigenous People with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN). As well, South Asia counts two frequent speakers. The first frequent speaker is Pratima Gurung from Nepal (National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) and Indigenous People with Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN)). Pratima Gurung is the only speaker who was invited to speak at both COSPs and UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022. She was also the sole representative of a CSO led by women with disabilities who was invited to speak during one of the main events at the COSP15. The second frequent speaker is Abia Akram from Pakistan (National Forum for Women with Disabilities) who is also one of the first-ever women disability activist to have been invited to speak at a side event at the COSP (5th edition in 2013). Their presence at numerous COSP and UN-CSW events, and more generally the presence of speakers from a small number of organizations, however, potentially overshadows other voices within South Asia.

North America was the second most-represented world region among speakers at the COSP and the UN-CSW. Speakers from CSOs of the disability sector based in North America made up 20% of all speakers at our events. **Therefore, this region is considerably and consistently over-represented**, given that its three countries (Bermuda, Canada, and the United States) account only for 1.4% of all world's countries. However, it is worth mentioning that the presence of North America was exceptionally high at COSP14 in 2021 (31% of all speakers). The over-representation of North America among speakers can be explained, in part, by the presence of three organizations providing frequent speakers: Women Enabled International (WEI) (speaking at 8 events at the COSP and UN-CSW); DAWN Canada (3 events), and the Disability Rights Fund (4 events).

Voices from North America are not diverse, as they come primarily from these three CSOs. Two of these organizations, Women Enabled International and the Disability Rights Fund, are also frequent organizers, having organized six and five events respectively. Representatives of these organizations usually act as speakers in these events. Given their access to more resources and their proximity to the UN headquarters, CSOs from North America have a significant advantage in comparison to CSOs from other world regions. This privileged position allows them to participate actively, as organizers and as speakers. It suggests that, at these events, the ideas and discourses about women, girls, and non-conforming gender and sexual minorities with disabilities from this region are being widely disseminated.

Overall, the East Asia and Pacific region was fairly well-represented among speakers from CSOs from the disability sector at our selection of events. The region was over-represented at COSP15 and CSW66 (both in 2022) but underrepresented in both 2021 events. There was also a greater representation of this region at the UN-CSW than at the COSP. The fairer representation of voices from the disability sector of this region means that CSOs from the disability sector in East Asia and the Pacific are relatively well involved and participate in discussions about gender and disability in these arenas. Among speakers from this region, however, we noted the strong presence of Indonesia (7 speakers out of 17), which could potentially indicate an over-representation of perspectives and discourses related to the Indonesian socio-political context.

Surprisingly, the Europe and Central Asia region was under-represented among speakers at both editions of the COSP and the UN-CSW. Even though Europe and Central Asia is the largest region in the world in terms of the number of countries it represents (58 countries, 26.6% of the world's total), only 13.3% of all speakers were affiliated with CSOs based in this region. This is surprising, as we would have surmised that CSOs from this region have access to more resources for participating in transnational spaces such as the COSP and the UN-CSW (as is the case for North America). As a result, voices from Europe and Central Asia in these arenas are less dominant than what we might have expected. It is important to mention that no speaker from Central Asia was present at any of the four events we analyzed. This significant absence of speakers from post-Soviet countries requires further reflection.

Latin America and the Caribbean was an under-represented world region among speakers of all meetings save for COSP15. No further trend could be found in the representation of voices from CSOs of the disability sector based in this region at the COSP in comparison to those at the UN-CSW, as their representation varied considerably from conference to conference. It is therefore impossible to determine whether voices from Latin America and the Caribbean are more represented at the COSP or the UN-CSW. **However, voices from this region are also less diverse**, as most of the speakers from Latin American and the Caribbean at all our selected events were from a handful of CSOs—especially META and IDII—which act as a frequent source of speakers. A closer look shows that there were no speakers from the Caribbean at these events in 2021 or 2022. This is also a significant absence that warrants further research.

Overall, Sub-Saharan Africa was also under-represented, as the region itself accounts for 22% of all world countries. Yet, if voices from Sub-Saharan Africa were under-represented at the COSP (there were only two speakers from this region at COSP14 and none at COSP15), they were almost fairly (2021) or fairly represented (2022) at the UN-CSW. Overall, the low representation of Sub-Saharan Africa among speakers at COSP means that the discourses of CSOs of the disability sector on gender and disability and the specific experiences of women and girls with disabilities in this region do not get enough occasions to be voiced in this arena. Furthermore, the profile of the speakers from this region raises the issue of the use of languages other than English (which probably also applies to other regions). Thus, only 4 out of the 11 speakers (total) from Sub-Saharan Africa at the COSP and UN-CSW were from CSOs based in French-speaking countries (about 20 countries), and none from the six Portuguese-speaking countries. There is thus **an over-representation of English-speaking countries among speakers** (7 out of 11). In our selection of events, three (3) of the four (4) speakers from CSOs of the disability sector in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa were from Burundi, and all spoke in French at the same event. The organizer provided simultaneous translation, which is rare, given the high costs associated with this service.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was the least-represented world region among speakers at the COSP and the UN-CSW. This under-representation was even greater at UN-CSW given that there were no speakers from MENA in 2021 and 2022. At the COSP, there were only two speakers, one in 2021 and one in 2022. The very low number of speakers from MENA at the COSP and their absence at the UN-CSW means a significant under-representation of voices and experiences of women, girls, and gender and sexual non-conforming people with disabilities from CSOs of the disability sector based in this region. Further investigation needs to be done to understand better why these voices are largely absent at the COSP and the UN-CSW.

To sum up, although our analysis shows that the **speakers from CSOs of the disability sector engaged in the COSP and the UN-CSW side/parallel events come from a wide variety of contexts, some of these are marginalized compared to others.** In particular, the under-representation of certain world regions means that less knowledge is shared and discussed regarding the experiences and issues faced by women and girls with disabilities in the MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and the Caribbean. On the other hand, our analysis shows that perspectives from South Asia and North America largely dominate in these arenas. CSOs from these two regions are therefore in a better position to influence discussion, debates, and eventually policy making concerning women and girls with disabilities within the COSP and the UN-CSW. Moreover, being present in these arenas is not only important for the substance of what is represented, but speakers and their organizations also benefit in terms of networking opportunities, relationship and capacity building, lobbying, and acquiring greater visibility and legitimacy.²⁵

Economic geographies

Regarding the distribution of speakers from CSOs of the disability sector in terms of economic geographies at both COSPs and UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022, we mapped where these CSOs were headquartered in relation to the World Bank's classification of countries by income categories. Then we asked: "Whose voices," that is, the voices of speakers from which income categories of world economies are present in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-

²⁵ Source: Bonnie Brayton from DAWN Canada and Steven Estey, disability rights advocate, members of the EDID project team, personal communication.

CSW focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities? Which are over-represented or, conversely, under-represented, or absent?

Lower-middle-income economies were the most represented category among speakers (36% of all speakers). At both COSPs and UN-CSWs, the voices from lower-middle-income economies **were over-represented** in comparison to the number of countries in this category (24.9%). This strong presence of speakers from lower-middle-income economies means that the experiences of women and girls with disabilities from these economies are quite visible at the COSP and even more so at the UN-CSW, as the proportion of speakers from lower-middle-income economies was greater.

High-income economies were either the most represented or the second most represented income category among speakers, both at the COSP and the UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022 (35.2%). Given that high-income economies represent 37.38% of all economies, we can say they were well represented. At the COSP, voices from high-income economies were fairly represented among speakers, but they were slightly under-represented at the UN-CSW. This is surprising as we surmised that voices from high-income economies would have been more present, given that CSOs headquartered in these economies are most likely to face fewer barriers to accessing international conferences.

In numbers, there were as many voices from lower-middle-income economies (38 speakers) as there were from high-income economies (37 speakers). This could potentially indicate that the COSP and the UN-CSW are spaces where perspectives and ideas on disability from a range of economic contexts are shared. However, there are significant differences in terms of position in global power relations, access to resources, and past and present experiences of colonialism and neocolonialism between lower-middle-income and high-income economies. Content analysis will help us to understand whether there are indeed significant differences in the substance of what is disseminated by speakers from these economic geographies.

Low-income economies were the second least represented category with only 7.6% of the speakers. However, there were more speakers from CSOs located in these countries at the UN-CSW and considerably less at the COSP. The under-representation of low-income economies at the COSP means fewer representations of the status of women and girls with disabilities elaborated in these contexts circulate at the COSP than at the UN-CSW. Such under-representation—especially at the COSP—is significant given the lesser involvement of low-income economies' national authorities in disability issues and in the implementation of the CRPD on these national territories, in comparison to other national income categories (Mitra, 2018). The very weak presence of voices from these economies means that less knowledge is shared about the status and experiences of women and girls with disabilities living in these socio-economic contexts.

Surprisingly, voices from upper-middle-income economies were rarely present at both the COSPs and the UN-CSWs in 2021 and 2022 (5.7%). This income category is the least represented among all speakers from CSOs of the disability sector, which is a notable absence as upper-middle-income economies make up a quarter (25%) of all world economies. Upper-middle-income economies were especially under-represented in the case of the UN-CSW (no speaker at CSW65 and only one at CSW66). Further investigation is needed to understand their weak presence in these international conferences, especially since CSOs located in these economies are most likely to face fewer obstacles than their counterparts located in low-income and lower-middle-income economies.

Global North-Global South balance

Speakers from the Global South far outnumbered those from the Global North at COSP15 and CSW65. At CSW66, there were two more speakers from the Global South than those from the Global North. Speakers from the Global North outnumbered those of the Global South only on one occasion, at COSP14. Given that the challenges and barriers to participation in these arenas are significantly greater for participants located in the Global South, it could have been reasonable to anticipate a much lesser presence of speakers from the Global South; however, that was not the case. **These numbers, however, do not translate into an overall over-representation of the Global South**, as most countries, territories, and overseas departments are located in the Global South. As well, given that 80% of people with disabilities are in the Global South (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 64), there is still room to foster a more balanced representation in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW. Furthermore, the legacies of colonialism and the existence of neocolonial power relations between the Global North and the Global South suggest that critical voices from the Global South can be constrained in transnational spaces like the COSP and UN-CSW. Even when present, these voices can be limited in their ability to generate differentiated knowledge and to challenge the universalized and conventional disability discourse elaborated in the Global North. We count on the content analysis of these events to deepen our understanding of what is represented and by whom.

d) What overlap between COSP and UN-CSW speakers?

Looking more closely at who is doing the work of representation at the COSP and UN-CSW, we wanted to identify speakers and CSOs from the disability sector who were present in both arenas. In this section, we first look at the overlap between speakers at the COSP and UN-CSW and then look at the overlap between CSOs. (*For a breakdown of the overlap between speakers at the COSP and the UN-CSW, see Appendix C – Table 33.*)

Among the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector, which spoke at the COSP and also at the UN-CSW in the side events and parallel events on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in 2021 and 2022—that is, which are present in both arenas?

These are:

- Pratima Gurung—National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (6 events)
- Abia Akram—National Forum for Women with disabilities/ Global Forum on Leadership of Women with Disabilities Pakistan (Pakistan) (5 events)
- Amanda McRae—Women Enabled International (WEI) (US-International) (5 events)
- Yeni Rosa Damayanti—Indonesia Mental Health Association (IMHA) (4 events)
- Nidhi Goyal—Rising Flame (India) (3 events)
- Natalia Farias—Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META) (2 events)
- Maryangel Garcia Ramos—Mujeres con discapacidad (Mexico) (2 events)
- Daniela Gordon—Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META) (2 events)
- Diana Samarasan—Disability Rights Fund (DR/DRAF) (2 events)
- Maria Un—Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities (Indonesia) (2 events)

Other highlights:

- Out of these ten (10) speakers, six (6) are from CSOs OF Women with disabilities and all but one of the remaining are from CSOs based in the Global South.
- Pratima Gurung was the only speaker invited to speak at all four events (COSP14, COSP15, CSW65, and CSW66).
- At the COSP and UN-CSW, these frequent speakers counted for about a third of all voices from CSOs from the disability sector (33/105).
- The geographical distribution of frequent speakers is similar to the overall geographical representation of all speakers from the disability sector.

Among the CSOs from the disability sector providing speakers to our selection of COSP and UN-CSW side events and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities in 2021 and 2022, which ones are present in both arenas?

These are:

- Women Enabled International (WEI) (US-International) (8 events)
- Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (US-International) (4 events)
- National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) (Nepal) (7 events)
- Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META) (Latin American Transnational Network) (6 events)
- Humanity and Inclusion (France/Belgium – International) (5 events)
- Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (Australia) (5 events)
- Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA) (Indonesia) (4 events)
- National Forum for Women with Disabilities (Pakistan) (4 events)
- Rising Flame (India) (3 events)
- European Disability Forum (European Transnational network) (2 events)
- Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities (Indonesia) (2 events)
- International Disability Alliance (IDA) (International Transnational network) (2 events)
- Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad (Mexico) (2 events)

Of these 13 CSOs from the disability sector, seven are CSOs led by women with disabilities, namely:

- Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities
- Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad
- National Forum for Women with Disabilities
- National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal
- Rising Flame
- Women Enabled International (WEI)
- Women with Disabilities Australia

Women Enabled International (WEI) is the CSO OF Women with disabilities which provided the most speakers at the 2021 and 2022 editions of the COSP and the UN-CSW (8 speakers in total), followed by the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN) (7 speakers in total). These are the only two (2) CSOs OF Women with disabilities which provided speakers in all four (4) events.

6.1.3 Who else is doing the work of representation?

a) High-level political actors: Multilateral institutions and governments

Similarities: Regarding their relative proportion among the total of speakers, those from multilateral institutions and governments **form the second most important category of speakers** doing the work of representation in the side and/or parallel events focusing on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at both COSPs and at CSW66. **Differences:** High-level political actors were more present in these side events at both COSPs, where speakers from multilateral institutions and governments accounted for about a third (30% at COSP14 and 37% at COSP15) of the speakers. A large majority of these events featured one or more of these speakers on their panels. By comparison, this category of speakers counted only for 13% and 19% of the speakers at CSW65 and CSW66.

The lesser proportion of speakers from multilateral institutions and governments at the UN-CSW relevant side events is part of the difference between the make-up of the official side events and that of the off-site, parallel events of the NGO CSW Forum. All high-level speakers but one were speaking at the official side events, which were also less numerous than the parallel events (1 out of 6 at CSW65, 2 out of 5 at CSW66). The more numerous **parallel events at the UN-CSW**—for which organizers do not need ECOSOC accreditation—thus appear to be structured as **”movement spaces”** where, in panels focusing on women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, speakers from the disability sector tend to dominate the list of speakers, with other panelists being mostly from other CSOs. Such co-participation is susceptible to foster networking and nurture dialogue, collaboration, and alliances among CSOs of the disability sector and between them and other CSOs.

By contrast, the majority of relevant COSP side events are constructed as spaces where two to six speakers from CSOs of the disability sector who are leaders on issues of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities participate side-by-side with one or more high-level speakers from multilateral institutions and governments. This co-participation makes these speakers and their organizations, analyses, and recommendations more visible to these high-level political actors and, at best, more susceptible to have some measure of influence on their orientations and programs. Official side events at the UN-CSW offer the same opportunities. We suggest, however, that the more speakers from CSOs of the disability sector there are on the same panel at the COSP, the more the side event will function as a movement space.

Who are the high-level political actors, and how does it vary between COSP and UN-CSW?

Because there were more relevant side events at the COSPs than at the UN-CSWs, and because the profile of the events favours the participation of representatives of multilateral institutions and governments at COSP more than it does in the combination of parallel and side events at the UN-CSW, high-level political actors are more numerous at the COSP than at the UN-CSW.

Speakers from multilateral institutions largely outnumber those from governments at COSP (15:6 at COSP14 and 16:5 at COSP15). The reverse is true at the UN-CSW, specifically in the official side events, where speakers from governments largely outnumber those from multilateral institutions (5:1 at CSW65 and 4:2 at CSW66).

At COSP, many different multilateral institutions provide speakers for the side events on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. Frequent speakers at both COSPs (and sometimes at more than one side event) were representatives of UN-Women (2 speakers at

COSP14; 4 speakers at COSP15), followed by UN-FPA, UN-DESA, members of the CRPD committee and of the CEDAW Committee, UNICEF, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and the World Bank. Other multilateral institutions also provided the occasional speaker. **At the UN-CSW, in contrast**, only UN-Women had a speaker at both annual meetings, and the only other representative of a multilateral institution was from UNFPA.

Among representatives from national governments, the most frequently encountered speakers in the two arenas were those from Canada (one speaker at each of COSP14, COSP15, and CSW66), Finland (two speakers at COSP15 and one at CSW66), Kenya (2 speakers at COSP14 and one at CSW65), and the USA (one speaker at COSP14 and one at CSW65). The government of Haiti provided one speaker at COSP14, while governments of Egypt, Guatemala, and Bangladesh each provided one speaker at either CSW65 or CSW66.

b) Other CSOs

Speakers from our category “Other CSOs” also engaged in producing, circulating and/or exchanging meanings about women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-CSW, although they were usually marginal in numbers and in proportion relative to the other categories of speakers. Only at CSW65 were there more speakers from Other CSOs than from High-level political actors.

Who are these Other CSOs?

In both arenas, speakers from “CSOs – Women’s and Feminist (general)” were present at all four meetings, where they usually outnumbered speakers from other types of Other CSOs. They were more numerous at the UN-CSWs (7 speakers in total) than at the COSPs (4 speakers). The feminist organization CREA provided a speaker at three of the four annual meetings, which can be explained by its frequent role as organizer. At the UN-CSWs, speakers from “Women’s and Feminist (general)” CSOs were all from the Global South (India, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Senegal), whereas at the COSPs they were equally from the Global North and Global South.

At the four meetings, one, or sometimes two, speakers were drawn from CSOs centring the experiences of LGBT or Queer people; or from CSOs working in the domains of Human Rights and Democracy; or operating as a Charity or Funder (mainly for Youth or Women’s equality).

c) Academia and other categories of speakers

Speakers from Academia also engaged in the work of representation about women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, in the side events and/or parallel events of the COSP and the UN-CSW. Yet the weak presence of speakers from Academia in both arenas surprised us, given the feminist literature on the “velvet triangle” and what it suggests about the role of researchers from academia in supporting equality and inclusion for women and girls or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in international arenas. As well, it contrasts with the findings of Hjerpe et al. (2008, p. 28) about the side events of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on Climate Change, where researchers from academia were the most numerous among all presenters.

Other categories of speakers were individual activists and practitioners, both of which were present in very small numbers. There were no presenters from the category “Business.”

6.2. Why these speakers and not others

6.2.1 *The role of organizers*

Organizers are the ones who structure the side events and the parallel events at the COSP and UN-CSW. They play a key role in the representation of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities in terms of what is discussed, who gets invited to speak and, consequently, in what gets said in these events.

Organizers choose the topic and elaborate the proposed content of their side events, within the frame set by the annual priority themes of the COSP and UN-CSW meetings, as these proposals are vetted by the meetings' Organizing Committees.

Organizers are also the ones who choose who the speakers are, within a number of organizational and financial constraints. For instance, COSP criteria for the selection of the proposals favour “multi-stakeholder events [that] include the Member States, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders as well as side events with gender balance and cross-regional representation.” (UN-DESA, 2022b). UN-CSW official side events seem to follow this model. As well, organizers must raise the funds, through enrolling co-organizers, sponsors and funders, to ensure the participation of speakers (and, in some cases, audiences) requiring accessibility measures—for instance, CART captioning, closed captioning, and international sign language interpretation—as no funding is provided by the UN to support accessibility at side and parallel events. The same can be said of the costs involved in setting up simultaneous translation for non-English speakers. As well, organizers are responsible for covering expenses related to travel and stay when international events are held in-person at UN headquarters in New York. Thus, organizing side events and parallel events at the COSP and UN-CSW **is costly, which favours high-level actors, namely multilateral institutions and governments. Especially affected is the capacity of CSOs to host side events.** More pointedly, large CSOs with considerable financial capacity or with strong and established ties with sponsors and funders have an advantage over smaller, less resourced, and less well-connected CSOs, with potential consequences on the topics that get discussed and the roster of speakers that gets to participate.

Who gets invited to speak about women, girls, and gender or sexual minorities with disabilities—and, accordingly, the portrait of the speakers detailed above—is thus the direct consequence of who the organizers are and of their political capacity to muster the financial resources to ensure accessibility, simultaneous translation, and the physical presence of speakers when events are held in-person. It is also most certainly tied to the organizers' own networks, that is, on “who the organizers know” that can speak to this or that topic while adopting the desired angle. Thus again, CSOs that are less visible and less connected to potential organizers risk not being solicited to provide speakers.

Finally, organizers have specific goals in organizing their side event: they want to accomplish something with their event, be it in relation to the Organizing Committee of the meeting, funders, other organizers, some or all of the speakers, or the events' audiences. What their goals are has a definite influence on which speakers they decide to invite. Interviews with organizers will tell us more.

6.2.2 *Who CAN organize: ECOSOC status and its constraints*

As mentioned earlier in this report, only multilateral institutions, governments, and accredited CSOs can organize side events at COSP and UN-CSW. During the UN-CSW, non-accredited CSOs

can organize parallel events at the NGO Forum. Accredited CSOs are “non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council” (ECOSOC). At the COSP, they can also be “non-governmental organizations previously accredited to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention” or “other non-governmental organizations subject to the approval of the Conference by consensus.” (UN-DESA, 2019). Notwithstanding these last provisions, the main route to organizing side events remains that of obtaining ECOSOC status.

To be granted consultative status with the ECOSOC, multiple conditions must be met by organizations. First, CSOs must submit online an application form to UN-DESA which includes their answers to 22 questions and provide the following required documents:

- Copy of constitution/charter and/or statutes/by-laws and amendments to those documents;
- Copy of certificate of registration – attesting that it has been in existence for at least two years as at the date of receipt of the application;
- Copy of the most recent financial statements (UN-DESA, 2019)

All these documents must be presented in French or in English. In addition, CSOs are required to prove that:

- Applying organization’s activities must be relevant to the work of ECOSOC;
- The NGO must have been in existence (officially registered) for at least 2 years in order to apply;
- The NGO must have a democratic decision making mechanism;
- The major portion of the organization’s funds should be derived from contributions from national affiliates, individual members, or other non-governmental components. (UN-DESA, n.d.-b)

Twice a year, a subsidiary body of the ECOSOC made up of 19 Member States, called the Committee on NGOs (NGO Committee), reviews and selects which applications will be formally recommended to the ECOSOC for approval or, in some cases, for refusal. Members of the NGO Committee are elected based on the principle of equitable geographic distribution, and they serve four-year terms (UN, n.d.)

Once the ECOSOC gives its final approval, the accreditation is granted. To remain accredited, organizations must submit a report (in English or in French) every four years (NGO Branch, n.d.). As of April 2022, more than 6000 NGOs are accredited and in good standing with the ECOSOC (NGO Branch, n.d.).

The application process to obtain this status has been described by many **as outdated and time- and energy-consuming** (Rincker et al., 2019). For instance, although the UN has six official languages, the process accepts applications only in French or in English, inclusive of all required documents. Translation costs may prevent some CSOs from requesting ECOSOC status. (Rincker et al., 2019, p. 11; NGO Branch, n.d.). Rincker et al. (2019) suggest that ECOSOC requirements “might limit the diversity” of CSOs “that can attend, and either impact each other” or impact the UN arenas—such as the UN-CSW or the COSP—in which their participation could be beneficial (p. 8).

Besides bureaucratic and financial burdens associated with the application process (Mowell, 2022), other barriers to obtaining ECOSOC status are more political (International Service for Human Rights [ISHR], 2022). In particular, the NGO Committee has been “frequently accused of

arbitrarily deferring requests from NGOs, particularly human rights groups, that are critical of its members and their allies.” (ISHR, 2022). CSOs working on other controversial issues, particularly those representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people, cause debates within the NGO Committee, and some Member States are reluctant to grant them consultative status (Boström, 2011). Therefore, CSOs with consultative status are often ***not*** the ones who can challenge the mainstream discourse or criticize “too harshly” Members States, and **contestation is filtered out** (Boström, 2011).

According to Eleanor Openshaw, a human rights officer at the ISHR, due to the review procedure and the composition of the committee responsible to oversee the process of granting consultative status to CSOs: “[m]any well-qualified NGOs are being prevented from sharing their expertise with the UN” (ISHR, 2018). Regarding the UN-CSW more specifically, Rincker and her colleagues (2019) note that, in the first annual meetings, any organization could participate and there was no need to obtain accreditation from the ECOSOC. However, “[b]ecause women’s NGOs are often critical of the UN-CSW, over time, the UN-CSW has modified women’s NGOs ‘modalities of work,’ allowing only the participation of ECOSOC-approved groups and moving [non-accredited NGOs] offsite to the NGO Forum” (p. 3).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that very few CSOs of women with disabilities—a handful—are ECOSOC-accredited and thus, very few are authorized to organize side events.²⁶

6.2.3 Who are the organizers?

a) Who are the organizers at COSP and UN-CSW?

For a breakdown of the distribution of all organizers of side events and parallel events at the COSPs and the UN-CSWs (2021 and 2022), see Appendix C.

Our information on “Who are the organizers” is based on the information we found in the official descriptions of our selection of events (concept notes and flyers). Guidelines for organizers at the COSP specify that “[t]o promote broad stakeholder participation, **ONLY** one event can be accommodated per main sponsor” (in this sentence, sponsor = organizer) (UN-DESA, 2022b). Despite this rule, the official description of about half the side events at the COSP in 2021 and 2022 indicates a combination of organizers, among them multilateral institutions, governments, and CSOs (UN-DESA, 2022b). “Do co-organizers have an equal say in the selection of the topic of the event and of the speakers, or do some co-organizers have more of a say than others?” are questions for future interviews. At the UN-CSW, the few official side events of our selection were also organized by a combination of actors. In contrast, all but one of the parallel events at the UN-NGO-CSW Forum were organized in solo by civil society organizations.

High-level political actors as organizers

High-level political actors were the organizers of about half the side events at the COSP in 2021 and 2022, usually involving other high-level actors and one or more CSO alongside them

²⁶ The list of all NGOs accredited through ECOSOC mechanisms can be found in UN-ECOSOC (2022).

as co-organizers or sponsors.²⁷ At the UN-CSW, high-level organizers are to be found only in the official side events and are absent from the parallel events of the UN-NGO-CSW Forum.

Six (6) multilateral institution acted as organizer of side events at the COSP. These are:

- UNFPA (3 events)
- UN WOMEN (3 events)
- Office of the United Nations Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth (1 event)
- UNICEF (1 event)
- UNITAR (1 event)
- UN-PRPD (1 event)

Frequent organizers are UN-FPA and UN-WOMEN, who were both involved in the organization of three (3) events each, including one together.

No multilateral institution acted as organizer of a side event or parallel events at the UN-CSW.

Six (6) governments also organized side events at the COSP and the UN-CSW. These are:

- Government of Canada (4 events)
- Government of Finland (2 events)
- Government of Australia (1 event)
- Government of Bangladesh (1 event)
- Government of Ireland (1 event)
- Government of United Kingdom (1 event)

All these organizers but one (Bangladesh) are based in the Global North. The governments of Canada and Finland were the only two organizers present at least at one COSP and one UN-CSW, and Canada is the most frequent organizer among governments.

CSOs of people with disabilities as organizers

Six (6) CSOs OF people with disabilities were involved as organizers of side events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP and UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022. These CSOs are:

- International Disability Alliance (IDA) (5 events)
- Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) (2 events)
- African Disability Forum (1 event)
- Red Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Personas con Discapacidad y sus Familias (RIADIS) (1 event)
- Indigenous Persons With Disabilities Global Network (IPWDGN) (1 event)
- Mobility International USA (MIUSA) (1 event)

However, at UN-CSW, the presence of CSOs OF people with disabilities among organizers was much weaker than at the COSP—only IDA organized an event. Plus, no CSO OF people with disabilities was involved in the organization of parallel events at the UN-CSW. At COSP, STEP

²⁷ While organizers are in charge of the overall coordination and structure of events, sponsors provide financial or in-kind support to help cover the costs of the event (personal communication, 2024).

was the only CSO which organized an event alone. Other CSOs of people with disabilities either organized events with CSOs from the disability sector or in the company of other types of organizers.

In terms of overlap between COSP and UN-CSW, only the International Disability Alliance (IDA) was present among organizers in both arenas. IDA is also the most frequent organizer, appearing in 5 events in total. IDA stands out among other CSOs of/by people with disabilities who organize events in these arenas and clearly plays a significant role. Out of the six CSOs OF people with disabilities involved as organizers at both the COSP and UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022, four are based in the Global South, one is based in the Global North, and one is a transnational network that is planetary in scope (IDA). Unlike organizers from CSOs led by women with disabilities, which are all based in the Global North, there is thus a more diverse geographical representation among CSOs of people with disabilities acting as organizers. Finally, worth mentioning is the presence of the Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF), a CSO FOR people with disabilities, as this organization was involved in the organization of a total of five (5) events on women and girls with disabilities in 2021 and 2022, including one solo.

The place of CSOs of or for women with disabilities among organizers

Historically,²⁸ most events about women and girls with disabilities at COSP have been organized by combinations of high-level political actors (multilateral institutions and governments), and organizations FOR or OF “persons” with disabilities. Before 2017, CSOs FOR or OF women with disabilities appear solely as sponsors, and in very low numbers. Since then, **the dominance of high-level political actors and, to a lesser degree, of CSOs of or for people with disabilities among organizers of such events has persisted, although organizations for or of women and girls with disabilities have started to appear as organizers.** For instance, between 2017 and 2020, WEI (a CSO “FOR” until 2021) has been among the organizers of at least one event per edition of the COSP, for a total of 8 events from 2017 to 2020). Only two CSOs OF women and girls with disabilities appear among organizers: Women with Disabilities Australia (in 2016) and Disabled Women in Africa (in 2020). At the UN-CSW side events, the portrait is quite similar. Although CSOs FOR or OF women and girls with disabilities first appear as organizers of an event in 2012, they remain rare among organizers between then and 2020. These are WEI (5 events) and Women with Disabilities Australia (1 event). In the absence of an archive for the parallel events of the UN-CSW meetings, a similar analysis cannot be undertaken for this arena.

In 2021 and 2022, at the COSP and UN-CSW, **only three CSOs of women with disabilities** organized side events or parallel events. DAWN Canada organized one event (solo), WEI was among the organizers of six events (including four solo), and Women with Disabilities Australia organized two events solo. All except DAWN were present at both the COSP and the UN-CSW. Of note, despite ECOSOC status not being necessary to organize parallel events at UN-CSW, no non-ECOSOC-accredited CSO of women with disabilities organized a parallel event on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities and their issues at these meetings.

As organizers have the power to determine who speaks and on what topics, the relatively rare presence, still, of CSOs of women with disabilities among organizers certainly has consequences for what gets discussed by whom. And those who have been able so far to muster the networked resources necessary to organize or co-organize side or parallel events at COSP and

²⁸ See Abdelmoumeni (2023).

UN-CSW can be counted on the fingers of one hand. As well, all CSOs of women with disabilities that acted as organizers in 2021 and 2022 are based in the Global North, which points to a significant imbalance in favour of the latter. The strong presence of WEI as an organizer (6 events) and as a sponsor (3 events), and its presence as an organizer at all four conferences makes this CSO the most active actor in these arenas and the one with the most power in terms of agenda setting. This power has been used, notably, to organize events centring discussions on gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, thus making these categories visible along with their issues. Yet not all activists agree with WEI taking such a prominent role (personal communication – issue to be pursued).

b) Frequent organizers and overlaps

List of frequent organizers (involved in more than 2 events in 2021 and 2022)

- Women Enabled International (WEI) (US-International) (6 events)
- Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF) (US-International) (5 events)
- International Disability Alliance (Switzerland/US-International Network) (5 events)
- Government of Canada (4 events)
- UN-Women (3 events)
- UNFPA (3 events)

The top 3 organizers/sponsors of events focusing on women and girls with disabilities are all CSOs from the disability sector—WEI, a CSO led by women with disabilities in 2021 and 2022, is the CSO that organized the most events (6 events). Others are high-level political actors. A few organizers organized at least one side/parallel events at BOTH the COSP and the UN-CSW (both editions). These are Women Enabled International (WEI), Women with Disabilities Australia, Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF), International Disability Alliance (IDA), and the government of Canada.

All frequent organizers that are not UN agencies are based in the Global North, and one is an international network which is planetary in scope (IDA). The over-representation of the Global North among frequent organizers has potential implications for the topics that are discussed and how, and for who is invited to speak about women and girls with disabilities in these arenas.

6.2.4 Other barriers to speakers' participation

In addition to the obstacles encountered by would-be organizers described in Section 2.1, there are other significant barriers limiting the effective and meaningful participation of speakers and other participants at the COSP and the UN-CSW. These challenges are not faced equally by all CSOs and can exacerbate inequalities among them. This section aims to provide an overview of the specific obstacles speakers may encounter before and during these conferences, as well as to highlight their impacts on who represents women and girls with disabilities in these settings.

a) Barriers to in-person events:

Financial capacities

When the events are organized in person, participants must travel to the United States for at least a few days, if not for the duration of the meetings. Considerable financial resources are required to cover transportation, accommodations, and living costs (see Rincker et al., 2019), and New York is known as one of the most expensive cities in the world (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018, p. 23). Unlike

the World Conferences on Women which took place in different parts of the world (Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, and Beijing), the COSP and UN-CSW are always held in New York at the UN headquarters. This has important implications for who can attend in person, which reveals inequalities between those participants located in North America and those who are not, and who therefore must travel from farther away to attend. According to a survey conducted by Cogburn and Trevisan (2018), high costs and lack of adequate funding were the main reasons why CSOs did not participate in UN events. This is particularly significant as a report by WEI highlighted "the relatively low budgets of organizations working on the rights of women and girls with disabilities" (WEI, 2016, p. 8).

Visa requirements and immigration procedures:

Holding conferences in New York also perpetuates inequalities in other ways, as speakers and participants do not have the same mobility privileges. Many participants are required to obtain a visa for travelling to the US—a process that can be not only costly, but also complex, depending on the country of origin, the personal socioeconomic situation of the applicants, and their travel history. Persons from countries located in the Global South, who have not travelled extensively and who do not meet certain financial criteria, will undoubtedly encounter more difficulties than others to obtain a visa. As was reported in the case of the UN-CSW: “Many young African women and girls are facing challenges in getting US visas. ... The Trust is aware of four girls from three different countries who have been denied visas despite having UN-CSW accreditation and sponsorship letters” (ISHR, 2018). In 2017, participation in the UN-CSW was impacted by the United States’ policy changes regarding immigration and visa regulations. After the Trump administration introduced a travel ban for several countries, many participants who were supposed to attend the UN-CSW could not do so. Women from the Middle East were denied their visa request and were forced to cancel their participation (Lloyd, 2017). As voices from the Middle East are among the least present in these spaces, as demonstrated in our analysis, we can appreciate the extent to which the issue of obtaining visas has real consequences for the representation of marginalized voices.

Beside the risk of being denied a visa for the US, visa application processes can represent significant administrative burdens, especially for those who do not speak English and do not have access to a computer or the Internet. Moreover, as there can be delays in obtaining mandatory supporting documents such as formal invitation letters from the UN-CSW and the COSP, some applicants are unable to obtain their visa on time (Tekuchova, 2022).

For practical reasons, organizers who are aware of the uncertainty of the visa application process may give priority to speakers who do not need visas, or to those who already hold a valid visa for the US, such as leaders of the disability sector and frequent speakers who are used to travelling. **As a result, visa restrictions can impact which voices are represented at these events, as speakers from marginalized backgrounds and located in the Global South are more likely to face additional barriers and to be excluded for reasons related to restrictive immigration systems.**

Accessibility for people with disabilities

Travelling to the United States to attend a conference can be a major challenge for people with disabilities, especially those who need to travel long distances (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018, p. 23). As well, through their experience at the COSP and UN-CSW, participants with disabilities will be confronted with the “notorious” inaccessibility of UN headquarters (Vasquez, 2021). Linda Ochiel who attended the 62nd session of the UN-CSW in 2018 as a member of a disabled women activists’ delegation, writes

It turned out that even UN Women, the body responsible for UN-CSW, did not have a strategy for including people with disabilities. And not all UN facilities are accessible for people with disabilities. So, it was not a surprise that very few discussions at UN-CSW focused on disability issues. Clearly, these issues are not under regular consideration, and without the presence of people with disabilities (made much more difficult by a lack of accommodations), organizations and companies of all kinds feel less urgency to address them. (2018, para. 11)

This observation was confirmed by a disability activist member of the EDID-GHDI project, who recalled facing many accessibility issues at the UN headquarters, including the distance between rooms and the lack of availability of wheelchairs to lend to people with various mobility impairments who might need them for such distances. Furthermore, “the hallways are also very narrow in New York, and the space between seats is very limited, making it difficult for a wheelchair user or mobility-impaired person to access the meeting.” (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018, pp. 30–31). In addition to physical barriers posed by the inaccessibility of the UN headquarters, people with disabilities may encounter difficulties when speaking at these events, such as with pressing the microphone or, for those with speech impairments, keeping their speech within the allotted time (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018).

b) Barriers to online events

Holding sessions online instead of in-person can help alleviate many obstacles, such as physical accessibility to buildings or immigration requirements, and can improve the participation of people with disabilities. However, online sessions can also create significant barriers for other reasons.

One of the biggest issues associated with online sessions is the unequal access to reliable electricity and Internet connection or to computers by potential speakers, especially those located in the Global South (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018). During a side event at COSP15 focused on the issue of technologies and people with disabilities, speaker Yeni Rosa Damayanti from the Indonesian Mental Health Association—a CSO led by people with disabilities based in Indonesia—explained that accessing online platforms such as Zoom or Teams requires relevant technological skills and access to a computer, something that “most Indonesians do not have.”

As mentioned in Section 2.1, providing accessibility features for people with disabilities can be expensive for organizers. Options like automatic captioning services can be seen as a less costly alternative to human-generated captions, but are usually less accurate and, thus, have consequences for the equal participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Also, materials shared during events, such as PowerPoint presentations, are often inaccessible for blind participants (Vasquez, 2021).

c) Barriers to both in-person and online events

Whether participating in online or in-person events, CSOs must first be invited to provide speakers by the organizers. In this respect, CSOs that are part of the organizers’ networks have an advantage over CSOs that are not. Given that participation in these events is also an opportunity to network and make oneself known (Hjerpe et al., 2008), not being invited to provide speakers reduces the possibilities for smaller/newer CSOs to establish links with other CSOs and funders, which could enable them to be invited to future conferences.

Finally, in terms of capacity, it can be particularly difficult for CSOs with no prior experience of such conferences to navigate the UN system (Maduekeh, 2023). As well, most events require speakers to communicate in English, which can prevent the participation of many. The domination

of English in these arenas poses issues as it “is not the language of the majority of disability rights advocates and many have not had access to education to learn a second language” (Alana Carvalho speaking at the side event “Using technology to bring together women and gender minorities with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic,” COSP15, 2022).

6.3. Representing women, girls, and non-conforming gender and sexual categories with disabilities at COSP and UN-CSW – Possibilities and limits

6.3.1 *The priority themes and the topics*

Together, the side events at COSP, and the side and parallel events at CSW, shape in an ongoing manner “the universe of political discourse” (Jenson, 1989). Thus, we first interrogate how these political arenas themselves, in the ways they are structured, facilitate and constrain in various ways political discourse—that is, what is said about women and girls, as well as non-conforming gender and sexual categories of people with disabilities, in these international arenas. One of these is the effect of the yearly meetings’ priority themes on the topics of the side events. **To what extent do priority themes both facilitate and constrain the choice of topics to be discussed in the side and parallel events?** Then, we inquire into the topics put forward for discussion by the organizers of the side and parallel events in each arena. What are the recurring topics, those that get frequently discussed, what are others or emergent ones, how have they evolved, and how do they compare?

For this analysis, we use the information collected in our internal report (Abdelmoumeni et al., 2022), as well as our material from the COSP and UN-CSW 2021 and 2022 meetings.

a) *The COSP*

The COSP Bureau, in which CSOs from the disability sector do not have a voice, chooses each yearly meetings’ priority themes. From COSP1 to COSP8,²⁹ the meetings have privileged the choice of targeted priority themes. COSP6, however, experimented with a format featuring a large overarching theme, accompanied by targeted subthemes and the occasional crosscutting theme. This is the format adopted from COSP9 onwards. Rules for the acceptance of proposals for side events by the COSP Bureau state that these “**should be closely related**” to the overarching theme and sub-themes of the Conference. (UN-DESA, 2022b). None of the priority themes from COSP1 to COSP4 directly target women with disabilities. As no information is available on the side events held from COSP1 to COSP4, our analysis starts with COSP5, in 2012.

COSP5 data clearly shows **the effect that choosing “Women with disabilities” among yearly priority themes** has on the organizing of side events on women and girls with disabilities. This meeting was the first where “Women with disabilities” was one of the priority themes, **which called for** proposals for side events either focusing on women with disabilities or, alternately, making a place for them and their issues within the discussions of other topics of interests. Six out of the 33 side events at COSP5 had women with disabilities in their title, although two compounded women’s issues with that of children (in the titles of these side events were the expression “women and children with disabilities”). Three more proposed to consider women, or “women and children,” in the context of larger topics, such as education, justice, or sports. The facilitating effect of subthemes dedicated to women and/or girls with disabilities continues to be apparent between COSP9 and COSP13. Yearly meetings featuring the subthemes of “multiple

²⁹ An exception is COSP6, which experimented with the format adopted since COSP9.

discrimination” (COSP10 in 2017) or “women and girls with disabilities” (COSP11 in 2018) or “addressing Beijing +25” as a cross-cutting theme (COSP13 in 2020) yielded 10 to 12 side events each focusing on or including women and girls with disabilities in their proposed discussions. **Thus, choosing women and/or girls with disabilities, multiple discrimination, Beijing+25 as priority themes invited and facilitated the organizing of side events on this topic.**

In the intervening years, only a small number of side events (2 to 5) were organized on women and girls with disabilities and their issues. Meetings featuring other priority themes did not facilitate the organizing of side events on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities to the same extent as did the presence of yearly priorities focusing on women and girls with disabilities, multiple discrimination, and/or gender equality and disability. Nevertheless, each year other targeted priorities provided organizers with the opportunity to articulate the relation of women and girls with disabilities to long-standing disability issues, as well as to emergent ones, such as humanitarian action (COSP 10 in 2017), armed conflict (COSP 14 in 2021), the use of technology (COSP 15 in 2022), or climate action and disaster risk reduction (COSP 15 in 2022). **Thus, if targeted priority themes on other disability issues certainly are constraining, they may also offer possibilities to innovate and enlarge the range of topics relevant to discussions of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities.**

Also offering possibilities for organizing side events on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities is the presence of **broader, overarching priority themes** at COSP meetings since 2009. For instance, the 2018 overarching theme “*Leaving no one behind through the full implementation of the CRPD*” has offered opportunities for organizing side events on “women and girls with disabilities in rural and remote settings,” “the experience of women and refugees with disabilities of the global South,” and “LGBTI people with disability and implementation of the CRPD.”

Our observations at COSP14 and 15 show that the wider the overarching themes, the easier it is to articulate creatively a variety of topics of interest to women and girls, or gender and sexual minorities, into a successful proposal for a side event. For instance, among the 11 side events we selected for our study at COSP14, six were directly linked to the overarching theme of the 14th edition of the COSP: “Building back better: COVID-19 response and recovery - Meeting the needs, Realizing the rights, and Addressing the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities.” They are easily identified as they have words like “COVID-19” or “pandemic” in their titles. Two other side events were not especially focused on the overarching theme but mentioned in their description the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the issues addressed in these side events. Examining the concept notes of these eight side events **shows that the relating of the topics of side events to the COVID context appeared to be a discursive strategy deployed by organizers aiming to discuss the present and futures of more long-standing issues** such as, for instance, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health, amplifying the priorities and supporting the leadership of women and girls with disabilities, **or even aiming to put new issues on the agenda**, such as the situation of Indigenous women and girls with disabilities. An analysis of our selection of side events at COSP15 in relation to the overarching theme of “Building disability inclusive and participatory societies in the COVID context and beyond” yields similar conclusions.

Interestingly, one of the side events at COSP14—“Rise up 2.0: Reuniting the International Feminist Disability Coalition,” organized by DAWN Canada—was not related to the overarching theme or any of the targeted subthemes, but was specifically focused on the activism and organizing of women and girls with disabilities. As we have also been able to appreciate when looking at the whole roster of side events from previous COSP meetings, there is always a small number of side

events not fitting closely the yearly priority themes. Thus, a certain margin of manoeuvre seems to exist for organizers in their choice of topics for side events.³⁰

More largely, a vast array of topics is offered for discussion in the side events on women and girls, or gender and sexual minorities at the COSP meetings. **Recurring topics** from COSP5 to COSP15 have been issues of sexual and reproductive health (9 side events) and gender-based violence (8 side events). The representation of women and girls with disabilities in UN convention mechanisms, notably the CRPD and CEDAW, as well as in other instruments, such as the SDGs and the Beijing +25 Plan of Action, have also been frequently discussed (9 side events in total). **Other topics** featured in the side events centring women and girls with disabilities are numerous—for instance, access to justice, employment and education; women and girls with disabilities in humanitarian action, emergencies, and armed conflicts; data collection and statistics; leadership of women with disabilities, funding for their activities, and their use of technology, climate change and action. **Finally, specific categories of women and girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities are sometimes the topic of side events.** There was a side event on refugee women with disabilities at COSP5; on young women and girls with disabilities at COSP9; on rural women and girls with disabilities and on “women with disabilities from the global South” at COSP11. The topic of “Indigenous women and girls with disabilities” appears for the first time as the focus of a side event at COSP14. Five side events centring sexual and gender minorities with disabilities were held since COSP11.

It is worth recalling that these topics reflect the interests of the organizers who put forward proposals for side events, among which very few are organizations of women with disabilities. Content analysis of the transcripts of the COSP14 and 15 meetings will enable us to appreciate how the topics of these side events have been appropriated and treated by speakers from CSOs of women with disabilities, as well as by speakers from other locations.

b) The UN-CSW

The CSW meetings’ annual priorities and review themes are chosen by the UN-CSW in a top-down manner, that is, without formal input from women’s and feminist CSOs (Rincker et al., 2019). UN-CSW meetings are organized around a priority theme, a review theme, and sometimes an “emerging issue.” All these themes are targeted toward specific issues, rather than offering broader, umbrella terms suitable for a variety of topics. Exceptions have been the themes of Beijing +15 at CSW54 in 2010 and Beijing +20 at CSW59 in 2015. **In a stark contrast with the COSP, none of the yearly themes of the UN-CSW since its inception in 1947 has mentioned women and/or girls with disabilities.** The first official side event on gender and disabilities was held at CSW54 (2010). It was entitled “Cross-sectional entities of gender and disability: towards equality for women and girls with disabilities” and was presented in relation to that year’s priority theme, Beijing +15.

Despite this first example, **the fact that UN-CSW meetings are structured only around targeted themes has had the overall effect of narrowing the yearly possibilities** for the organization of side events on women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities and their concerns

³⁰ Such margin of manoeuvre may become more important with meetings moving online in the COVID-19 context, or being delivered in hybrid mode, such as at COSP16 in 2023, given that in the past the number of side events has been closely bound to the physical setting of the UN—i.e., the number of rooms available. (Steve Estey, disability rights advocate, member of the EDID project team, personal communication).

at the UN-CSW. Nevertheless, some targeted themes have also fostered the organization of side events discussing less-attended issues of gender and disability. For instance, rural women and girls with disabilities have been the topic of four side events at the CSW56 and CSW62, all related to rurality as a yearly theme.

Other official side events on women and girls with disabilities, organized by member states and multilateral institutions, sometimes accompanied by accredited NGOs, have mostly responded to targeted themes in direct relation to the UN-CSW's yearly priority themes, such as:

- Gender-based violence (2 side events, CSW57, CSW60)
- Education, employment, and economic empowerment (2 side events, CSW55, CSW61)
- Development goals and the MDGs (CSW61)
- Social protection and access to public services (CSW63)
- Barriers to full and effective participation (CSW65)
- Climate change (CSW66)

Yet the presence in 2017, 2018, and 2022 of some side events that do not seem to fit the yearly themes testifies to the existence of a margin of manoeuvre for side event organizers.

Regarding parallel events, the rule is that they should address the UN-CSW priority and/or review theme “in some way” (NGO-CSW/NY, 2025, para. 1). Our selection of 2021 and 2022 parallel events appears, for the most part, only loosely or even unrelated to the UN-CSW priority and/or review theme for these years. Hence, organizers of **parallel events at the NGO CSW Forum seem to enjoy more freedom in the choice of topics and content for discussion.**³¹ No archive exists of parallel events prior to our study.

6.3.2 Participating in disability rights implementation and monitoring at COSP and UN-CSW—spaces of engagement on gender/sexuality and disability

One of the questions this report aimed at providing answers to was “To what extent are women and girls with disabilities engaged in the process of disability rights implementation and monitoring in international settings” such as the COSP and the UN-CSW? Our data and analysis of the speakers from CSOs of the disability sector involved in the side and parallel events focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities at the 2021 and 2022 annual meetings of the COSP and UN-CSW provides a partial answer. Another way to approach this question is to ask “to what extent can they engage,” that is, **to what extent do these meetings provide opportunities** for speakers from CSOs of the disability sector **to engage** with disability rights implementation and monitoring in relation to the situation of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. Or, more precisely, **what are the spaces for such engagement offered by these meetings, what is their potential, and what are their limits?**

³¹ The existence of such margin of manoeuvre in the choice of side events' topics at the UN-CSW and a relative freedom in the organizing of parallel events are encapsulated in the following quote from the CSW67 (2023) webpage: “The programme of side events and parallel events, or activities organized outside the formal programme of the session of the Commission, provides an excellent opportunity for Member States, UN entities and NGOs to discuss themes of the Commission **and other critical gender equality issues** [emphasis added]” (UN Women, 2023, para. 1).

To start, the United Nations and its Member States “have recognized the benefits of civil society engagement in global governance” as the latter’s “expertise and knowledge are seen as critically valuable to informing this process” (Cogburn & Trevisan, 2018, pp. 13-14). As we have seen in the sections of this report on the role of civil society at the COSP and UN-CSW, the UN stresses the importance of the participation of civil society organizations in these international arenas. For instance, we saw that “the effective and meaningful participation of people with disabilities, through their representative organizations, is thus at the heart of the Convention (UN, 2018, article 1). It follows that the COSP, which meets “to consider any matter with regard to the implementation” of the CRPD (UN, 2006, article 40), “must include persons with disabilities and their DPOs in order to meet the commitments laid out in the CRPD” (NDA, 2021, p. 73). At the UN-CSW, the official stance is that “[t]he active participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a critical element in the work of the Commission” (UN Women, n.d.-c). Women’s and feminist NGOs’ input on the lives, needs, and challenges of women and girls is deemed crucial to policy making at the UN-CSW (Rincker et al., 2019).

Furthermore, following the launch of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy in 2019, new guidelines have been produced to ensure the meaningful participation of people with disabilities as a condition for implementing the CRPD in UN institutions. In particular, the *Guidelines* recommends “making the UN responsive to persons with disabilities,” with the rationale that “persons with disabilities are best placed to know what is needed to be fully included and the best courses of action to achieve it. Their participation ensures good governance and accountability, as well as greater relevance, efficiency and improved outcomes of interventions for them and their communities” (UN, 2021, p. 14). People with disabilities and their representative organizations, it is argued, “represent an array of perspectives and experiences offering a unique contribution to decision-making. ... They can provide quality input to the work of UN entities” (UN, 2021, p. 14). Because they “have first-hand knowledge of the challenges they face and know better what can be done to enhance their rights and well-being,” their participation “provides strong support towards ensuring that policies, strategies, programmes and operations [are] more effective in addressing barriers to inclusion and more relevant in supporting their full and equal participation” (UN, 2021, p. 6).

The presence of civil society at the COSP and UN-CSW gives legitimacy to these meetings, as well as to the policy processes associated with these arenas. But in practice, what is the place for meaningful and effective engagement they offer to CSOs of the disability sector involved in disability rights implementation and monitoring in relation to the situation of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities? What are the different spaces of engagement in these meetings, and what are both their potential and limits?

a) The COSP

COSP is the annual occasion to discuss any matter related to the implementation of the CRPD (UN, 2006, article 40). At the COSP meetings, there are four distinct spaces of engagement with disability rights implementation and monitoring: (a) the main event; (b) the Civil Society Forum; (c) the side events; and (d) the informal spaces of face-to-face advocacy and organizing.

Main Event

The Main event is the main site where disability issues are visible and discussed in the presence of delegations from all state parties and UN entities. **However, the space for meaningful and effective engagement of CSOs from the gender and disability sector at the Main event is very restricted.** The few select speakers from CSOs that speak at the items Organization of work (opening of the session), Roundtables, and Interactive dialogue do so at the invitation of the organizers of the Main event. Participation in the General Debate occurs on advance request but is limited to ECOSOC-accredited CSOs—and, as we have seen, there are only a handful of CSOs of women with disabilities with accreditation. Although there is a larger number of organizations of people with disabilities that could speak to these issues, our observation of the 2022 main event reveals that they did not. Statements at the item Organization of work are brief, and those at the Roundtables and at the General Debate are limited to three minutes. At COSP15, only Women Enabled International and Women with Disabilities Australia made statements in the General Debate, in the presence of representatives of State Parties and other officials.

However, interventions made in the General Debate are not summarized in the final report of the meeting, which lessens their potential impact. Only one speaker from an organization of women with disabilities, Pratima Gurung from NIDWAN, was invited to speak at the main event (Roundtable #3), yet she could not deliver her speech due to problems of connectivity. No other actor intervened on issues of gender and disability or even mentioned “women with disabilities” in other ways than in passing, except for the Chair of the CRPD Committee, Rosemary Kayess, and the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, at the opening of the session and in the Interactive dialogue. Furthermore, as we observed, the tenor of the Main event is, more often than not, non-confrontational and “self-congratulatory” (Lord and Stein 2022: 353). In addition and most importantly, **contrary to** the structure of the annual meetings of the UN-CSW or the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Hjerpe et al. 2008), **the COSP meetings do not include substantive work or negotiations “to adopt pragmatic guidance for implementation in a given area”** (Lord & Stein, 2022, p. 353).

Civil Society Forum

As a reminder, the Civil Society Forum (CSF) is a one-day event facilitated by the International Disability Alliance (IDA) and organized by a Civil Society Coordination Mechanism (CSCM) (see this Report), held the day before the official opening of the COSP. It is not bound to the COSP’s priority theme or sub-themes and features two to four panel discussions, organized by the CSCM on issues related to the implementation of the CRPD or to disability in general, with a mix of speakers from organizations of people with disabilities (DPOs), multilateral institutions, other CSOs and, sometimes, governments.

The Civil Society Forum (CSF) *has the potential* to function as a space where organizations of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities *could* make their issues visible to high-level political actors and DPOs alike and encourage the latter to take issues of gender/sexuality and disability into national and international policy processes. **However, this does not seem to have been the case in the last decade.** Admittedly, information on the CSF’s program and speakers is missing for 2014 and 2015. However, available data on six forums since 2013 shows no panel discussion focusing on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities and no speaker from organizations of women with disabilities until 2022, at the Panel Dialogue on “Intersectionality and sexual and reproductive health and rights for people with disabilities” of the COSP15 CSF. Although it is possible that speakers from some DPOs or multilateral institutions,

such as the CRPD Committee or UN Women, for instance, have occasionally spoken to gender issues at previous CSFs, the CSF has **provided so far very little space for the visibility of gender/sexuality and disability issues, let alone engagement and intra-movement alliance building** by organizations of women with disabilities and other feminist disability activists from the disability sector.

Side events

COSP side events are spaces in which CSOs from the gender/sexuality disability sector **do take it upon themselves to play a role in monitoring the implementation of the CRPD and various other international instruments**, such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding the situation of women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities with disabilities, as well as other constituencies of women with disabilities. First, we have observed that side events provide the occasion for presenting public testimonies and airing interventions on the achievements and limits to the implementation of these instruments in various national and international settings. Second, these events provide spaces to discuss desired actions, possible strategies, and proposed solutions regarding implementation. Third, side events also function as spaces for advocacy when high-level actors or donors are present as speakers, or in the audience—they give visibility to women with disabilities as a social group deserving of attention in processes of implementation, as well as to their issues and claims as they are articulated by the speakers affiliated with CSOs of women or people with disabilities. **However, there is no direct mechanism for the substance of the side events’ discussions to feed into policy processes**, besides organizers arranging for and counting on the presence of representatives of multilateral agencies and governments as speakers or in the audience.

Yet COSP side events are also important spaces for movement-building and alliance-building. Programming side events focused on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities gives visibility to these constituencies and their issues within the disability sector as a whole, as well as to other CSOs participating in or attending these events at the COSP. They also enable speakers and their organizations to make a name for themselves in the ongoing conversations on gender and disability. Online or hybrid sessions amplify such visibility as they expand possible audience attendance—at least among movement actors and activists with the necessary equipment, connectivity, and technological and language skills. Participating in side events as speakers has the potential to enable meetings between like-minded leaders and organizations, and to facilitate networking and learning among them, which contribute to strengthening advocacy work and collective action at various scales on implementation and policy change, within and across movements.

Informal spaces

Finally, the informal spaces of face-to-face organizing and advocacy **have been described as very important** to disability rights activists and advocates. **They offer one of the few real opportunities for women with disabilities leaders to get together and organize strategically.** For instance, at COSP11 in 2018, “Women and Girls with Disabilities” was a priority theme. Feminist disability activists organized in the informal spaces of the corridors and the UN cafeterias to prepare a declaration, or manifesto. Excited by the initiative, the Special Rapporteur eventually

read this declaration in lieu of his final remarks at the Main event.³² Meeting in person in unofficial spaces—for instance, lounge areas and cafes—is where a lot of networking, organizing, and strategizing is done, we were told.³³ Unofficial spaces on- or off-site are also used to initiate or nurture existing relationships with official representatives of countries or donors. Moments stolen from the official conference or meeting for coffee or dinner enable disability rights advocates to sustain the relations that are essential to advocacy work.³⁴ For many, “the activities outside the organized sessions are the most important of the conference. CSO representatives and UN personnel [and governments] can speak at length and directly about particular issues and projects they are working on. I witnessed many conversations among CSO representatives about how to move forward on project ideas” (Carroll, 2014). **These informal spaces are the ones that could not be put to fruition during COVID, when most of the COSP meetings went online.**

b) The UN-CSW

The UN-CSW is the annual meeting “devoted to the review and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action” within the broader human rights framework of CEDAW, and to intervene on other instruments such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (NGO CSW, 2019, p. 32). At the UN-CSW meetings, the spaces of engagement for CSOs of the disability sector involved in disability rights implementation and monitoring in relation to the situation of women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities are the following: (a) the main event; (b) the official side events; (c) the parallel events at the NGO CSW Forum; and (d) the informal spaces of face-to-face advocacy and organizing.

Main Event

The main difference between the structure of the Main event at the UN-CSW and the COSP meetings is that the former includes a process of consultations and negotiations between Member States to produce an outcome document, the Agreed Conclusions, whose goal is to “articulate general principles of policy and action for the global community” on a chosen theme (Engle Merry, 2006, p. 68). This process starts months before the UN-CSW meeting and culminates during it. According to the NGO Committee on the Status of Women/New York, there is space for civil society organizations to influence this policy process (NGO CSW/NY, 2019). To this effect, the NGO CSW offers advocacy guidance to CSOs. Proposed strategies include preparing a written statement to be “published on the website of the CSW and distributed to the Missions to the United Nations”; and applying to present an oral statement at the General Discussion or to participate in Interactive Panels during the main event (NGO CSW/NY, 2019, p. 40). However, only ECOSOC-accredited CSOs can do so, and time restrictions for the engagement of collective actors representing women and girls with disabilities in that space are similar to that of the COSP.

The ECOSOC-accredited CSO Women with Disability Australia credits the work of “sister colleagues” and its own efforts to be visible at the UN-CSW (through the organization of official

³² Bonnie Brayton, DAWN Canada, member of EDID project team, personal communication, February 23, 2022.

³³ Bonnie Brayton, DAWN Canada, member of EDID project team, personal communication, February 23, 2022.

³⁴ Steve Estey, Canadian disability rights advocate, member of EDID project team, personal communication, April 6, 2022.

side events and high-level panels, which necessitate ECOSOC status) for resulting in “more emphasis given to women with disabilities in the Agreed Conclusions” of the UN-CSW meetings (Frohman & Swift, 2016, p. 11). CSOs of women with disabilities, Frohman and Swift argue, can influence the policy process at the UN-CSW. Indeed, “the Agreed Conclusions document from the 57th session make [*sic*] strong reference to the multiple forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls with disability, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive rights violations” and the Agreed Conclusions “call on states to condemn and take action” (Frohman & Swift, 2016, p. 12).

Side events, parallel events, and informal spaces

The advocacy toolkit for NGOs also highlights strategies to be deployed by non-accredited CSOs in these other spaces of engagement that are the side and parallel events and informal face-to-face meetings. For instance, it advises reaching out to receptive governments prior to the UN-CSW meeting to obtain agreement that they will champion their recommendations; going to the side events organized by these countries and setting up face-to-face meetings with Member States (NGO CSW67, 2022); “host[ing] a side event or an NGO CSW parallel event” to give visibility to their issues, as well as “work[ing] with coalitions, caucuses and forums” (NGO CSW/NY, 2019, pp. 46, 41).

However, it remains hard for women with disabilities and their issues to be visible at the UN-CSW meetings, given the very small number of CSOs of women with disabilities benefiting from ECOSOC status as well as the sheer number of official side events and parallel events at the UN-CSW in which the voices of women with disabilities risk being drowned. As a reminder, whether at the CSW65 (1 out of 148 side events and 5 out of 700 parallel events) or CSW66 (2 out of 212 side events and 3 out of 750 parallel events), less than 1% of these events focused on women, girls, or gender and sexual minorities with disabilities. Comparable numbers at the COSP in 2021 and 2022 were 13.3% (COSP14) and 10.5% (COSP15).

Furthermore, our data show only one high-level speaker in the off-site, parallel events of the NGO CSW Forum in 2021 and 2022. Thus, as a rule, in these parallel events, speakers from CSOs of the disability sector and other CSOs prefer meeting among themselves rather than trying to reach out to high-level political actors. This raises the question of why parallel events on women and girls with disabilities are organized at the UN-CSW. What are organizers and speakers trying to achieve in these “movement spaces”? What do they gain? These are questions for interviews.

c) COSP and UN-CSW as spaces of engagement?

To sum up, the main events at COSP and UN-CSW have so far offered few possibilities for meaningful engagement to CSOs from the disability sector whose work centres on gender/sexuality. As well, and despite its potential for alliance-building, the COSP Civil Society Forum has provided very little space to date for engaging with disability and gender/sexuality issues and ensuring their visibility in the disability movement. Although side events and parallel events at the COSP and UN-CSW are spaces where CSOs are in a position to inform various audiences about the challenges of implementation of the CRPD and other international instruments in a diversity of countries around the world, there is no clear and direct mechanism for such information to feed into policy processes. And while CSOs from the disability sector may try to influence the content of the *Agreed Conclusions* at the UN-CSW, which guides the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by Member States, no substantive work of this sort occurs at the COSP.

Even though COSP and UN-CSW meetings provide useful and much appreciated informal spaces for advocacy, networking, and organizing, a number of women with disability leaders are wary of the tension between their investments in these meetings—in time, resources, lobbying, and strategy-making—and the paucity of results in terms of changes for women and girls with disabilities. The goal of the Global Forum on the Leadership of Women with Disabilities (GFLWD), which aims to make women with disabilities leaders into advisors of UN Women and educators at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), is to redirect activists’ energies into what its leaders and participants hope will become more significant and effective forms of engagement.³⁵

³⁵ Bonnie Brayton, DAWN Canada, member of EDID project team, personal communication, October 31, 2023. For more information on the Global Forum on the Leadership of Women with Disabilities, see DAWN Canada et al. (2023, pp. 5–6).

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8. Appendices

Appendix A – Collaborative analysis questions

Collaborative Analysis Meeting, held on February 24, 2022

What is on the Excel sheets:

- *Title of event*
- *Names of speakers*
- *Names of organization represented by speakers*
- *Type of organization (WwDisab, PwDisab, UN, feminist, government, youth, human rights, etc.)*
- *Country of origin of organization/World regions*
- *Name of event's organizers*
- *Some additional notes about speakers (gender, disability type) and organizations when available*

QUESTIONS

What knowledge, values, and experiences do we bring to examining these side events?

What strikes you as important in the document “Highlights of side events (COSP14 or UN-CSW65)”?

Who is there: Beside their country/world region of origin, what other social or bodily characteristic of our speakers (those doing the representing) should we be interested in and why are these characteristics important to the analysis?

Who is not there (or is under-represented) and why do think this is happening?

Who CAN be there:

- Do you have comments to share on who (which organization(s) or institution(s) is/are organizing the side events and insights on what difference does it make?
- Do you have insights on who is choosing/inviting the speakers and what difference does it make?
 - What does it take to be invited to speak at these side event?
 - What does it take to participate effectively in these side events and what are the barriers (technical, structural, systemic, etc.) to participation as speakers? What are the impacts of these barriers?
- Do you have comments or insights about the themes (see titles) of the side events?
- Any contextual clues about why these particular topics at this venue, in 2021, and not others? (the reason for the pandemic theme is obvious, but how about the rest?)

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else that we can learn from these Excel sheets in terms of understanding better: who is there (and not there) at these events (i.e., who represents/talks about women with disabilities and their issues) and the themes that are discussed (and not discussed)?
- What did we learn by examining these side events?
- What surprised us? Confused us? Which emotions did we feel?

Appendix B – Methodological note on the classification of CSOs “OF” or “FOR” people with disabilities

Classifying CSOs as “OF” or “FOR” Women with disabilities and “OF” or “FOR” People with disabilities using indicators operationalizing the UN CRPD Committee’s definition **proved difficult, as information was often not available for both the main elements** of the definition of being an organization OF people with disabilities, that is, being disability-led **AND** with people with disabilities making up “a clear majority of their membership” (UN, 2018, article 11).

In particular, information on the composition of the membership, number/percentage of people/women with disabilities, or criteria for membership was not often mentioned on organizational websites, which may reflect the predominance of small, advocacy-oriented organizations over organizations with mass-membership of women/people with disabilities. With an eye to the spirit of the definition, we thus decided to treat the two elements separately: a CSO would be considered “OF” women/people with disabilities if it showed either a majority (50%+) of people/women with disabilities among its leadership (Board and/or Staff) OR a majority of people/women with disabilities among its membership.

Also significant was how the organization defined itself—for instance, as suggested by the literature: as a DPO, or as a self-help, self-advocacy, or grassroots organization of people with disabilities, or through statements such as “we are disability-led or “we are the voice of people with disabilities in [country X]” to classify it as an organization OF people or women with disabilities.

Finally, we took notes on the number and percentage of people with disabilities among staff, as revealed in the biographies of staff available on organizational websites.

We used the following table to collect the relevant information available on each organization’s website or Facebook page. For instance:

ORGANIZATION OF or FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

<u>This organization defines itself as:</u>	
<u>% of PwDisabilities in the membership</u>	
<u>% of PwDisabilities board members</u>	
<u>% of PwDisabilities staff</u>	
<u>CLASSIFICATION</u>	

To classify CSOs as “OF” Women or People with disabilities, an organization had to qualify robustly on one or more of the first three criteria. Criteria #4 was an additional indicator we collected data on, but which ended up never being a deciding factor.

Although an organization had to qualify robustly on only one of our three first criteria to enable our classification, among the additional difficulties we encountered were the following:

- There were instances where the self-definition of the organization (Who we are) was inconclusive for our classification or was focused on the organization’s mandate rather than on the key discursive expressions we were looking for. In such instances, we looked for “definitions by others,” by going on the Internet to find how the organization was described by credible outsiders. These instances are clearly identified on the classification tables.
- There were also instances when women or people **without** disabilities were **also** members of the organization and no information was available on the percentage of women or people with disabilities: these cases we listed as “to clarify.” This is the case of META and La Luz de Frida. An interview with a representative of META, in the winter of 2024, enabled us to finally classify these organizations as OF People with disabilities (META) and OF Women with disabilities (La Luz de Frida).
- There were instances where biographies of Board members or staff were missing, as well as instances where biographies made no reference to disabilities—even biographies of speakers we know to be women or people with disabilities from having heard them introduced as such in international arenas. There are a number of reasons for which Board members and staff may not identify/be identified as “with disabilities” in their online biographies—for instance, they may consider it obvious given the nature of their organization; they may want to protect their professional life from disclosure in contexts where discrimination is feared; or other reasons.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that when the self-definition of the organization is focused on its mandate, when there is no information on the membership, and when the organization seems to be composed of a small number of Board members, classification as a CSO “OF” of “FOR” women or people with disabilities ended up resting on a small majority of women/people “with” or “without” disabilities. This happened only in a few cases, but maybe the most contentious on our list is that of Women Enabled International. WEI’s self-definition centres its mandate. Although founded by a woman with disabilities, it has not been historically considered as an organization OF women with disabilities according to our research team’s key informants. However, the composition of its board has been changing in recent years, with now 7 out of 9 being women with disabilities. Thus, WEI does meet one of the two fundamental criteria to distinguish organizations OF and organizations FOR people/women with disabilities—that is, is being led by women with disabilities. To be thoroughly consistent with the application of our criteria, we classified WEI as an organization OF women with disabilities for our observation period (2021 and 2022), and as an organization FOR women with disabilities for the previous years.

Nevertheless, one out of 33 organizations OF or FOR people with disabilities, Encuentra tu lugar, could not be robustly classified.

Appendix C – Speakers and CSOs overlap in both arenas

Table 33: Overlap between speakers from CSOs of the disability sector at the COSP and at the UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022

Name of speaker/ Name of organization	World Regions	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65	UN-CSW66	Total
Pratima Gurung, National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN)	Nepal	1	2	2	1	6
Amanda McRae, Women Enabled International (WEI)	US-International	2	1	2	0	5
Abia Akram, National Forum for Women with disabilities/ Global Forum on Leadership of Women with Disabilities Pakistan	Pakistan	2	1	2	0	5
Yeni Rosa Damayanti, Indonesia Mental Health Association (IMHA)	Indonesia	1	1	2	0	4
Nidhi Goyal, Rising Flame	India	1	0	2	0	3
Maryangel Garcia Ramos, Mujeres con discapacidad	Mexico	1	0	1	0	2
Diana Samarasan, Disability Rights Fund (DR/DRAF)	US-International	1	0	1	0	2
Natalia Farias, Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META)	Uruguay-Latin American Network	1	0	1	0	2
Daniela Gordon, Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META)	Uruguay-Latin American Network	0	1	1	0	2

Name of speaker/ Name of organization	World Regions	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65	UN-CSW66	Total
Maria Un, Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities	Indonesia	0	1	0	1	2

Table 33 provides an overview of **all speakers from CSOs of the disability sector who spoke at both the COSP and the UN-CSW**. The numbers in the table represent the number of side or parallel events each speaker was invited to.

Table 34: Overlap between CSOs of the disability sector at the COSP and at the UN-CSW in 2021 and 2022

CSOs – Disability Sector	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65	UN-CSW66	Total
Women Enabled International (WEI)	4	1	2	1	8
National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal (NIDWAN)	2	2	2	1	7
Movimiento Estamos Tod@s En Acción (META)	2	2	2	0	6
Humanity and Inclusion	0	1	2	2	5
Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA)	0	2	0	3	5
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF)	1	1	1	1	4
National Forum for Women with Disabilities	2	0	2	0	4
Indonesian Mental Health Association (IMHA)	1	1	2	0	4
Rising Flame	1	0	2	0	3

CSOs – Disability Sector	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65	UN-CSW66	Total
International Disability Alliance (IDA)	1	0	0	1	2
Indonesia Association of Women with Disabilities	0	1	0	1	2
European Disability Forum	0	1	1	0	2
Mujeres Mexicanas con Discapacidad	1	0	1	0	2
Total	15	12	17	10	54

Table 34 provides an overview of **all CSOs of the disability sector which provided speakers at both the COSP and the UN-CSW**. The numbers in the table represent the number of speakers who spoke at each event.

Appendix D – Distribution of all organizers

Table 35: Distribution of all organizers of events on women and girls with disabilities at the COSP14, COSP15, UN-CSW65, and UN-CSW66

Name of organizers	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65 Side events	UN-CSW65 Parallel events	UN-CSW66 Side events	UN-CSW66 Parallel events	Total
Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership	To clarify	International	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Office of the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
UNFPA	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
UN Women	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
UNICEF	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
UNITAR	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
UN-PRPD	Multilateral Institution	UN-International	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Gov. Australia	Government	Australia	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gov. Bangladesh	Government	Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Name of organizers	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65 Side events	UN-CSW65 Parallel events	UN-CSW66 Side events	UN-CSW66 Parallel events	Total
Gov. Canada	Government	Canada	2	1	0	0	1	0	4
Gov. Finland	Government	Finland	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Gov. Ireland	Government	Ireland	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gov. United Kingdom	Government	UK	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
African Disability Forum	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Ethiopia-African Network	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
DAWN Canada	CSO – OF/BY WwD	Canada	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Disability Rights Fund (DRF/DRAF)	CSO – FOR PwD	US-International	1	1	0	2	1	0	5
International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)	CSO – FOR PwD	Belgium-International Network	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network (IPWGN)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Asia/Latin America-International Network	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
International Disability Alliance (IDA)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Switzerland/US-International Network	2	2	0	0	1	0	5

Name of organizers	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65 Side events	UN-CSW65 Parallel events	UN-CSW66 Side events	UN-CSW66 Parallel events	Total
Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network	CSO – FOR PwD	Switzerland-International network	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Humanity and Inclusion	CSO – FOR PwD	Franc/Belgium - International	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Leonard Cheshire Disability	CSO – FOR PwD	UK-International	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mobility International USA (MIUSA)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	US	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Movimiento estamos tod@s en acción (META)	CSO – DISAB to clarify	Uruguay-Latin American Network	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Red Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Personas con Discapacidad y sus Familias (RIADIS)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Ecuador-Latin American Network	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC)	CSO – FOR PwD	India	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP)	CSO – OF/BY PwD	Pakistan	1	1	0	0	0	0	2

Name of organizers	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65 Side events	UN-CSW65 Parallel events	UN-CSW66 Side events	UN-CSW66 Parallel events	Total
Women Enabled International (WEI)	CSO OF and by Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	US-International	2	1	0	2	0	1	6
Women with Disabilities Australia	CSO OF and by Women, feminine-identifying or non-binary person and/or other gender minorities with disabilities	Australia	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)	CSO – Women's and/or Feminist (general)	Kenya-African Network	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Center for Reproductive Rights	CSO - Health	US-International	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Name of organizers	Type of organization	Geographies of place and scale	COSP14	COSP15	UN-CSW65 Side events	UN-CSW65 Parallel events	UN-CSW66 Side events	UN-CSW66 Parallel events	Total
Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA)	CSO – Women’s and/or Feminist (general)	India-Southern	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Fordham Research Consortium on Disability	Academia	US	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)	CSO - Health	Switzerland-International Network	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Syracuse University College of Law	Academia	US	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
University of Tokyo	Academia	Japan	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

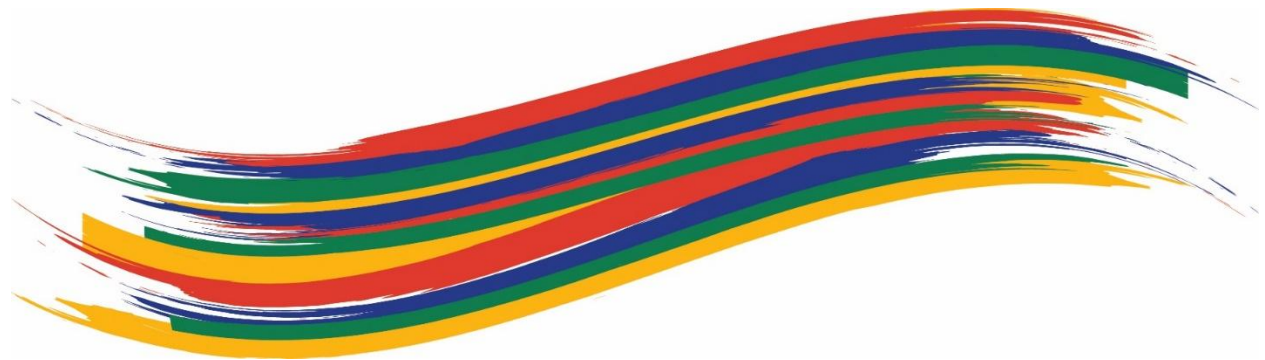
Table 35 provides an overview of the variety of political actors involved in organizing side events and parallel events on women and girls with disabilities in the international arenas of the COSP and UN-CSW.



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We acknowledge our presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the persistent and unequal effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples and all Canadians.

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