

Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as a model for inclusion

Connect.Reflect.Act Talk by Helga Stevens, Member of the European Parliament

Abstract

How can we solve the European Disability Crisis? Whilst the CRPD marks a significant step forward in the reconstruction of disability from a matter of social welfare to a matter of human rights, transforming people with disabilities from recipients of charity to holders of rights, the concept of discrimination is still rarely associated with the barriers faced by people with disabilities. These barriers are constructed by the societies surrounding us, are different for each individual due to the heterogenous nature of individual disabilities and needs, and go beyond physical environmental factors. We must work together to afford people with disabilities more autonomy and better access to information, highlight environmental barriers and the intersectionality of discrimination, in order to create a truly equal and inclusive society.

People with disabilities in the media: Where are we?

If we talk about the word discrimination, we think of discrimination of black people, etc. Many of you believe that people with disabilities have good lives in Europe. But do we even hear about the discrimination of people with disabilities? Do we see people with disabilities in the media, other than in stories of abuse or discrimination? What is the problem with the media?

The attitude of the media is that only 'sexy' people with disabilities are covered. We have all heard of Steven Hawking and we all remember him as a famous scientist but not as a wheelchair user. Imagine the daily struggles he faces. So only exceptional people make it to the media. But what about the average person with a disability?

Look at me who do you see? A deaf woman? Some of you will say hearing impaired. Is that all I am? Are you all sign language impaired? These are

just labels and let us not forget we are all humans. Period. It is not just about language and labels.

The environment impeding us

People with disabilities are diverse. They are diverse group with diverse needs. People with disabilities have different roles – Jewish, gay, black. This means we are also faced with intersectional discrimination. It is reality for us.

One thing we have in common even if we are diverse is that the environment that is a barrier for us. We are not disabled as such. For instance, living in a world where you can't speak sign language to me is an environment that is challenging.

When we speak about access, it is not only access to the environment but also information – deaf people will be able to see my presentation but not others. Why are only parts of the forum available to deaf people? What does inclusive society mean? It means that everyone in society can participate. For me – inclusion means that people can make their own decisions and do what they want. Also, inclusion means that people with disabilities can achieve what they want to achieve.

UN Disability Convention and independent right holders

People with disabilities are seen as independent right holders and no longer objects of pity. The UN disability rights convention and many other human rights conventions on people with disabilities show that their rights have been upgraded to international human rights. Disability rights Conventions are special not because it give them additional rights but because it shows which general human rights can be implemented. Very often people with disabilities were left out of decision making because we were seen as unable to. This is false. Who is it that knows best what we need?

What you can do

You can help us by paying attention to disability rights. If you see a school that is not accessible, complain. I see implementation as a puzzle. Only with



your help we can complete the puzzle. Only together can we end exclusion and discrimination.