LIGHT
FOR THE WORLD

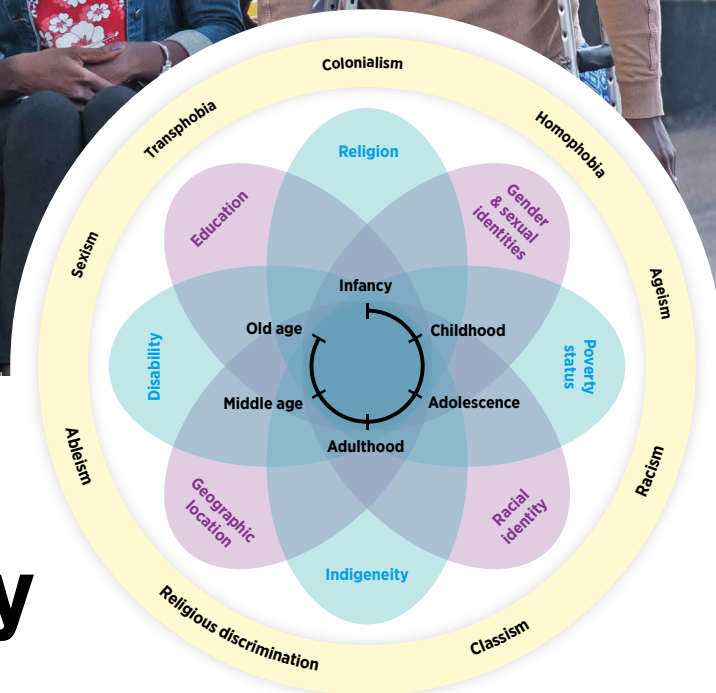# Fact Sheet on Intersectionality

The original design is adapted from The Equality Institute's version of the Intersectionality wheel and UN Women's Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit (2022).

Unveiling intersecting discrimination

Over 1 billion people live with some form of disability. That is 15% of the world's population. And persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Disability intersects with other identity factors such as gender, age, poverty, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, and area of living. People face multiple forms of discrimination which often intersect and compound each other.

Policies and programmes need to include an intersectional approach which responds to the complexities of people's situations rather than to just one aspect of their lives.

This fact sheet provides examples of intersecting discrimination in various areas by focussing on three characteristics:

▶ **Disability:** People are being disabled and discriminated by barriers in society, not by their impairment.

▶ **Gender***: Gender roles and conceptions shape and reinforce power relations, experiences of discrimination, underrepresentation and poverty. Worldwide, there are more women and girls with disabilities than men and boys.[1,2] In addition, there is a lack of recognition of the situation of gender-neutral and intersex persons with disabilities.

▶ **Other affiliations and characteristics**, such as age, area of living, and ethnicity.

* Gender refers to the social (rather than biological) attributes, norms, roles and attitudes considered appropriate for groups of women, men, girls and boys, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. (See f.e.: Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women 2001 and WHO Gender and Health)

Eye Health

Visual impairment
55% women
45% men
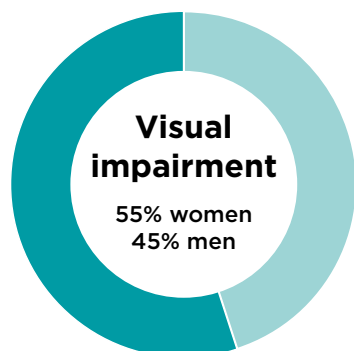
Disability: Persons with disabilities are amongst the most excluded from eye care services. Inaccessible information or equipment and stigmatisation and ableism increase the burden of visual impairment for persons with disabilities.[3,4]

Gender: Women are 1.8 times more likely to have trachoma compared to men. Ocular chlamydia is spread through direct personal contact, shared textiles and nasal discharge. While both adults and children can be a source of this eye disease, children tend to be more infectious. At the same time, women spend more time with children than men. This results in gender-specific exposure to trachoma risk factors, followed by a higher risk of trachoma infections and subsequent blindness.[5]

Area of living: Where and how one lives can determine the prevalence of eye conditions. Although eye care needs tend to be higher in rural settings, there are fewer specialised health workers available in these regions. Inadequate access to water and long distances to health centres are additional barriers faced by rural, poor communities.[6]

Barriers to eye care for women with disabilities in rural areas
Individual characteristics influence the availability, accessibility, affordability, and acceptability of eye care services. Rural communities are often faced with limited quality health centres and long distances. Persons with disabilities might be further discriminated due to inaccessible transport and stigma. Women with disabilities may face additional barriers due to limited financial decision-making power and risks while travelling.[7]

Inclusive Education

Disability: Children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than learners without disabilities. In many cases, education is only available in segregated settings. Barriers to education include stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate and inaccessible learning materials and facilities.[8]

Gender: Sex and gender can play a role in determining access to education. Girls and young women with disabilities are, for example, more likely to drop out of school during menstruation due to social stigma and lack of accessible hygiene facilities. They are also less likely to have access to vocational training as families tend to invest more in boys' education than girls' education. At the same time, experiences of physical violence towards boys with disabilities are often overlooked due to stereotypes of masculinity.[9]

Ethnicity: People around the world experience discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, race, skin colour, or origin. Racism systematically denies people their full human rights. At school, children may experience disproportionate rates of suspension based on their ethnicity.[10]

Ableism, racism and sexism at school
Children with disabilities might only have access to segregated early childhood learning settings. Girls with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school earlier and more often than boys with disabilities. In some countries and contexts, girls of a specific ethnicity with disabilities may face multiple marginalisation by being exposed to ableist, racist and sexist representations. Curricula and classroom materials often reinforce stereotypes and norms of ability, gender roles and ethnicity.[11]

Economic Empowerment

Disability: Globally 64% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, compared with just 40% of their peers without disabilities.[12] Additionally, employees with disabilities are more likely to be lower-paid.[13]
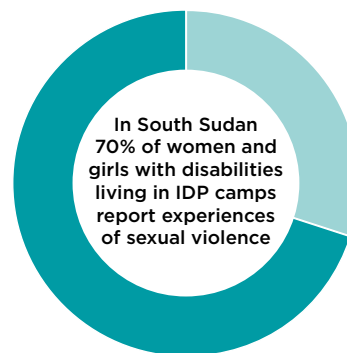
Gender: Gender-discriminatory laws were still prevalent in 104 out of 189 economies in 2018. Women are thus more likely to be unemployed, in informal and/or part-time employment, and paid less than men.[14] Compared to men without disabilities, women with disabilities are two times less likely to be employed.[15] As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, gender inequality has further increased.[16]

Type of disability: Studies have shown that the type of disability affects a person's employment opportunity. Deafblind persons, for example, often face even more barriers to employment than a wheelchair user.[17]

Gender-Disability Pay Gap
Barriers to employment for persons with disabilities include stigma, inaccessible workplaces and discriminatory policies. Women with disabilities experience the disparity of remuneration between people of different genders ("Gender Pay Gap") as an additional form of discrimination. Women with psychosocial disabilities are in particular more likely to report workplace discrimination. Ableist perceptions, internalised stigma, gender roles and a lack of reasonable accommodation intersect each other.[18,19]

Humanitarian Action

In South Sudan 70% of women and girls with disabilities living in IDP camps report experiences of sexual violence

Disability: Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalised in crisis-affected communities. They often experience higher rates of morbidity and violence, lack of access to services, and social exclusion and discrimination.[20]

Gender: During humanitarian crises, such as armed conflict, women with disabilities are at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including human trafficking. As girls are often not registered at birth, they are less likely to have access to recovery and rehabilitation services in times of crisis.[21]

Age: Children are disproportionately affected by refugee crises, with children representing 51% of the global refugee population. At the same time, refugee and Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps often lack child protection mechanisms.[22]

Girl-child refugees' exposure in times of crisis
Children are often not sufficiently protected during humanitarian crises. Children with disabilities face further discrimination through social exclusion and lack of access to vital services, such as school-based nutrition sites. Gender-based violence increases in times of conflict and insecurity. Girls and young women with disabilities are at higher risk of neglect, abuse and malnutrition in humanitarian crises than their peers without disabilities and boys with disabilities.[23,24]

Climate Crisis

Disability: Persons with disabilities are particularly affected by and vulnerable to climate change. Yet, they are largely excluded from in climate debates and action.[25] Severe health impacts and higher mortality rates are some of the impacts of the climate crisis particularly faced by persons with disabilities.[26,27]

Gender: Women are increasingly recognised as being more vulnerable to climate change hazards than men, mainly because they represent the majority of the worlds poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources.[28] For example, the risk of gender-based violence can increase when water scarcity forces women to travel long distances to find a water supply.[29]

Ethnicity: Indigenous people are amongst the most affected by the impacts of the climate crisis and play a vital role in protecting forests. At the same time, indigenous human rights activists face major legal and institutional barriers and serious threats to their lives.[30,31,32]

Indigenous environmental activists at the forefront
In the context of environmental justice, indigenous women with disabilities face multi-layered and unique risks as they are discriminated against as environmental activists, as persons with disabilities, as women, and as part of an ethnic minority group. Forms of discrimination range from exclusion from land ownership and decision-making processes, defamation campaigns to gender-based violence and murder.[33]

Rights & Advocacy

Disability: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted on 13 December 2006. So far, 184 states have ratified this Human Rights Treaty.[34] In January 2022, out of the 18 independent experts in the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities none identifies as Deaf.[35] 70 million Deaf people worldwide are excluded from this important body.[36]

Gender: Globally, women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making. Although women's political representation has doubled in the last 25 years, there is still only around 1 in 4 parliamentary seats held by women. The higher the political or professional position, the bigger the gender gap.[37]

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Around the globe, LGBTQIA+** persons face legal barriers and stigma.[38] At Uganda's Universal Periodic Review 2022, numerous states and civil society actors shared concerns about persistent discrimination and violence against LGBTQIA+ persons in the country.[39] This includes underrepresentation of women and men in all their diversity in civil society.[40,41]

Joining forces to transform politics
The Philippine organisation Pinoy Deaf Rainbow exemplifies the power of intersectional collaboration: Inviting representatives with diverse disabilities and gender identities allows the organisation to enable two-way capacity building, engage in joint advocacy and create strong partnerships.[42] At a regional level, the Queer African Manifesto 2010 aims to transform the politics of sexuality in African countries.

** LGBTQIA+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other gender and sexual identities

Recommendations

Inclusion requires working in an intersectional way. Development and humanitarian actors urgently need to adopt intersectionality as an overarching approach in their action plans, strategies and programmes to create an inclusive, transformative, gender-specific and power-sensitive framework.

▶ **Participation:** Representatives of women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity need to meaningfully participate in all phases of development cooperation and humanitarian action, including policy dialogues.

▶ **Data:** Collect, disaggregate and analyse data based on gender, age, disability and other identity characteristics.

▶ **Twin track approach:** Apply a twin-track approach in all programmes and policies, with disability mainstreaming throughout as well as specific activities taking into account multiple characteristics of persons with disabilities.

▶ **Act, don't generalise:** Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and invest in detailed needs assessments instead.

▶ **Adapt and learn:** Apply an intersectional approach in the implementation and monitoring of programmes, policies and treaties – even if intersectionality was not recognised from the start.

▶ **Language:** Use accessible, gender-transformative and inclusive communication and support staff and partners by developing a language guideline.

Further Reading and Listening

Background Information and Tools:

▶ **Podcast:** Kimberlé Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum: Intersectionality Matters!

▶ **Approach:** International Disability Alliance: Intersectionalities

▶ **Guideline and Toolkit:** UNPRPD & UN Women (2022): Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit

▶ **Organisational Development:** Light for the World (2019): Walking the Talk: Good Practises in Gender Equality

▶ **Political Participation:** International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES): Intersectionality Assessment Framework

▶ **Data:** Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data: Inclusive Data Charter

Resources focussing on Disability, Gender and [...]

▶ **Development Cooperation:** Gender & Development Network (2020): The intersection of gender and disability: A primer for international development practitioners on women and girls with disabilities

▶ **Climate:** United Nations Environment Programme, UN Women, UNDP and UNDPPA/PBSO (2020): Gender, Climate & Security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change

▶ **Violence:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2021): Webinar on Women and Girls with Disabilities: Intersectional Approach for Eliminating Violence and Discrimination

▶ **Employment and Education:** UN Women (2020): Sexual Harassment against Women with Disabilities in the World of Work and on Campus

▶ **Age:** Humanity Inclusion (2020): Towards more inclusive practices: A Disability, Gender and Age Intersectional Resource

▶ **Humanitarian Action:** UN Women, CARE International & UN OCHA (2020): Good Practices Brochure: Intersection of Gender and Disability in Humanitarian Responses

About Light for the World

Light for the World is a global disability and development organisation, breaking down barriers to enrich society and unlock the potential in all of us. Our vision is an inclusive society for all where no one is left behind. We enable eye health services and empower people with disabilities in some of the poorest regions of the world.

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Publishing Information

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