



## **WHEN SOCIETY DOES NOT SEE, HEAR OR UNDERSTAND**

Gender-related violence and disability



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Nordic Centre for  
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## INTRODUCTION

**THE UNITED NATIONS, THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE EU** have, in conventions, action plans and various activities, drawn attention to the existence of multiple discrimination. That is to say that people are made vulnerable to violence and abuse by many aspects, such as gender and disability. Violence is an extreme form of the exercise of power. The situation for girls and women with various forms of disability is alarming (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, 2012).

When it comes to protecting people with disabilities from violence and abuse, there are major issues with regard to access to justice. Far too low levels of knowledge and other aspects of a lack of accessibility among key actors such as the police and judicial system are hindering processes that should lead to the administration of justice (Gundersen 2014).

Both knowledge and measures will be needed to bring about change. The Nordic countries, as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland, wish to cooperate so as to, as powerfully as possible, prevent gender-related violence and discrimination against girls, boys, women and men with disabilities.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has ordered a report with proposals for areas of Nordic cooperation with regard to gender-related violence

and disability. This work is financed with funding from the Council of Ministers' strategy for sustainable development.

This report describes the topic of gender-related violence and disability from a Nordic perspective, based on research, official reports and contributions from a Nordic expert group. The group's members come from all over the Nordic region. They complement each other in terms of expertise and personal experience in related areas. The group also includes representatives of organisations for the disabled and persons with experience of various types of disability and special accessibility needs. During the project period, the group members have contributed to the gathering of information and participated in study visits and two meetings.

The report is aimed primarily at decision makers at Nordic level, but may also be of interest to people who work at national, regional and local level on equal opportunity, disability and violence in close relationships.

The purpose is to provide an analytical insight into a topic in which the level of knowledge is still relatively low. The project will also highlight good examples of solutions and proposed improvements, based on the recommendations of the expert group. The purpose is also to describe the added value to be obtained from

continued Nordic cooperation in issues of gender-related violence and disability.

The report describes the differences in the circumstances for participation and protection from violence that exist between women, men, girls and boys, as well as their different functional abilities. During the course of the project, the questions of ethnicity, language, culture, age, gender identity, sexual orientation and faith have also been raised, but are not covered to any great extent in the report. This prioritising has been made with regard to available resources.

The project and the work of the expert group have been coordinated by the secretariat of the Council for Nordic Cooperation on Disability at the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues.

## **TERMINOLOGY**

According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a disability is permanent and may be physical, mental, intellectual or sensory (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). Various obstacles in the immediate environment may prevent people with disabilities from participating on the same terms as others. Terms such as disability and functional impairment are in a state of development. This report uses terminology as understood by the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden. This is described below on the basis of the descriptions of the Swedish authorities, which are similar to those of other Nordic countries.

A disability is a reduction in physical, mental or intellectual functional ability. It may arise as the result of illness or another condition or it may be the result of congenital or acquired injury.

Such illnesses, conditions or injuries may be of a permanent or temporary nature. Examples of disability include limitation of movement, impaired sight or hearing, deafness and blindness, reduced cognitive abilities, asthma and allergies and physical functional impairment.

Disabilities are defined on the basis of the limitations they cause individuals in relation to their surroundings. Lack of accessibility in the immediate environment makes it difficult to cope with daily life. The lack of accessibility weakens the opportunities for participation in employment, education, social relations, leisure and cultural activities and democratic processes.

Violence in close relationships is often a pattern of actions that can be anything from hardly noticeable to serious crimes. In more concrete terms, it covers everything from being ridiculed to rape and serious threats. There are also often combinations of physical, sexual and mental violence. In close relationships, violence may also be ridiculing or physical, direct or indirect threats. Even violence or threatened violence against domestic animals can be counted into a person's psychological vulnerability.

Physical violence may take the form of being shoved, grasped, pulled by the hair, struck or kicked. Sexual violence may be rape or other forced sexual acts. When a vulnerable person does not dare to say no to a sexual act, then this is counted as sexual assault. Disability may also lead to social vulnerability in the form of restriction of freedom. People become isolated by being prevented from meeting family and friends or participating in social activities.

Material or financial vulnerability may mean that personal belongings are broken up or greatly damaged or that people with disabilities are prevailed upon to sign documents that have negative consequences.

In close relationships, those who depend on other people for day-to-day care may also be vulnerable to abuse or negligence. Two examples of this are withholding medicine and not receiving a sufficiently nutritious diet.







## **SUMMARY AND THE EXPERT GROUP'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS AT THE NORDIC LEVEL**

The expert group emphasizes the importance of people who themselves have a disability or, through representative organizations, are involved in a meaningful way in the activities of the proposals presented below.

### **Break the taboo!**

Persons with disabilities are victims of violence and abuse to a greater extent than others. Violence against vulnerable groups is a taboo subject, difficult to talk about and has long been an invisible problem.

#### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Break the taboo and show that the Nordic countries dare to talk about it! Develop a Nordic campaign with general information on the topic of violence and abuse against persons with disabilities. People with disabilities should be those mainly heard and seen in the campaign. The material should be both physical and digital.

### **Policy**

Current Nordic policies on violence and abuse do not notice people with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group. Neither have violence and abuse received attention in Nordic policy on persons with disabilities. It has been shown at national level that this risks obscuring vulnerable groups even in the practical work against violence and abuse.

#### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Integrate the disability perspective in all policies and preventive measures at the Nordic level in cases of violence and abuse. Consider children and women with disabilities in particular.
- Make the understanding of violence and abuse visible in the strategies and activities that relate to women, men, girls and boys with disabilities.

### **Research**

There is a lack of research on violence and abuse against women, men, girls and boys with disabilities. This is because the group is small and heterogeneous, and Nordic countries are too small to study the sufficient critical mass.

#### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Establish a broad comparative mapping study on violence/abuse against persons with disabilities through a number of research environments in the Nordic countries' universities. The study should include scope, kinds of violence/abuse, continuance, vulnerability, consequences and access to justice systems.
- Treat violence and disability as a theme of a wider research program through Nordforsk.



## **Training**

Key actors for preventing and detecting violence and to meet victims are not accessible to people with disabilities. Knowledge about this topic is scarce among these professionals. On the other hand, there are good national examples of materials that can be spread in the Nordic region.

### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Develop a joint Nordic training package targeted at key actors. The training package should include, among other things, operational methods of documentation and investigation. There should be a special focus on how people with different communication disabilities can be understood and believed when they communicate abuse.
- Make this type of training mandatory for police, health personnel, social services, schools and childcare. Employers could also be a target group, given their responsibility to prevent and combat discrimination and degrading treatment.

## **Access to justice**

There are strong weaknesses in various legal processes when it comes to rights of persons with disabilities. This applies throughout the Nordic region, both for accessibility, information, knowledge and attitudes.

### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Identify and develop methods and procedures to examine the legal issues and processes based on the theme of accessibility, functionality and justice.

- Highlight good examples of how to ensure quality and documenting of court cases where people with disabilities are victims of violence or accused of committing acts of violence.

## **Accessible information about rights to assistance and protection**

Victims of violence should have access to information about what violence is and where to turn for help. The current situation lacks many important activities where information is available for recipients with disabilities.

### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Develop principles for accessible information on violence and abuse and how the material can be brought to people with various types of disabilities.

## **Accessibility to crisis centres and shelters**

The availability of crisis centers and other protective activities is currently insufficient, keeping children and adults with disabilities in hazardous environments and destructive relationships.

### **THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:**

- Make a list of minimum requirements for what crisis centers must offer, based on the accumulated knowledge about the needs at such centers. This can be done by the existing expert group along with representatives of crisis centers.
- Create a material to support the work on accessibility at crisis centers and make sure it is spread throughout the Nordic region.

## **ADDED VALUE FROM CONTINUED NORDIC COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF GENDER-RELATED VIOLENCE AND DISABILITY**

The expert group sees a number of compelling reasons to cooperate in this area at Nordic level.

The topic of gender-related violence and disability is studied in many international contexts. Thanks to historical, cultural and welfare policy similarities, the exchange of experience and knowledge in the Nordic region is strong in comparison with other international contexts. Sharing good examples and learning from bad ones is easy, as is learning from something in another country and converting it to your own context. While the differences that do exist provide new ideas and contribute to innovations and new ways of thinking and acting.

The Nordic countries have a common set of values with regard to perceptions of the equal value of all people, the right to protection and conditions for self-realisation. The Nordic region has a strong tradition of supporting especially vulnerable groups that need extra help in being able to participate in the community. In this respect, the Nordic region differs from many other parts of the world. There is also a strong culture and tradition of involving target groups and communities in developing policies and services.

The Nordic countries have a common perception of a number of key concepts. There is a common image of the understanding of violence, where the Nordic region has a wider interpretation than many other countries. The Nordic countries also have a common definition of disability. There is a viewpoint of a social definition, in which primarily the immediate environment prevents the individual from participating. This differs from the individualistic perspective,

in which the person's disability is considered to be the primary problem.

Research into complex subjects with a heterogeneous target group can be expensive. Cooperation can provide better use of resources. Cooperation in the area of disability and violence has great potential.

Persons within minority groups who are vulnerable to violence represent heterogeneous groups in themselves. The limited populations of the Nordic countries makes it difficult for research to make stable, large-scale studies of them. Cooperation enables putting questions to a larger population, and thus also comparative studies of vulnerable groups.

Joint education and training of professionals provides greater value at Nordic level, since training more people is more cost-effective. Professional groups and experts resemble each other in terms of tasks and competence level.

There are a number of good examples of how Nordic concepts have been spread to a larger international arena. The ombudsman concept is one example. A good example at Nordic level is the "Allmänna barnhuset", where Norway's strong concept of the protection of children has spread to other parts of the Nordic region. The crisis centres and sheltered accommodation in the countries of the Nordic region are similar and there is experience of integration of different ethnic groups. This experience can be used in the integration of people with different needs based on their functional abilities.

On one hand, the Nordic welfare models resemble universal schemes that have made the Nordic region a role model for many parts of the world.

On the other hand, the countries have not sufficiently identified the issue of violence that affects particularly vulnerable groups in the welfare system.

In the view of the expert group, this is a dilemma and a challenge that the Nordic countries should address together. Thanks to the similarities of

systems and ambition levels, the conditions exist to plan what we in the Nordic region need to attend to together. This applies to both the inclusion of persons with disabilities and how we protect all our citizens from violence and abuse. On this basis, we in the Nordic region can plan how to prevent violence against particularly vulnerable groups.



## **MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON GENDER-RELATED VIOLENCE AND DISABILITY**

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## GENDER-RELATED VIOLENCE AND DISABILITY

### – WHAT DO WE KNOW?

**WOMEN, MEN, GIRLS AND BOYS** with various disabilities are vulnerable to the same types of violence as others. The violence described in research and from experience from projects and municipalities is physical, mental, sexual, financial, honour-related or culturally dependent. It may also be about coercion and human trafficking. The violence may be gender-related in the same way as for women, men, girls and boys without disabilities, but the question is more complex and the patterns are not entirely consistent.

There are still great barriers to preventing and detecting violence and abuse and to addressing violence when it occurs. The barriers are based, among other things, on stereotypical perceptions, about people with disabilities and also that people who live close to people with disabilities are by nature good and not violent (Mandle et al. 2015; National Board of Health and Welfare 2011). There is also a strongly-fixed perception that people with disabilities are asexual and lonely and do not therefore live as partners in relationships where violence could arise (National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women, 2007).

Disability and gender-related violence is relatively young as a subject for combined research. It is still unusual for the two social categories of gender and disability to meet intersectionally in research into violence. Disability and violence are concepts that are central to this report. The report describes how violence can be related to gender and disability.

According to *Sickness, Disability and Work* (OECD 2010), between 13% and 21% of the population in the 20-64 age group self-report that they have some form of disability. A report by SFI in Denmark on living conditions for people with disabilities (2013) shows that one in three people in Denmark feel that they have some form of disability. The difficulty with questionnaire surveys is that they are not available to all groups of people with disabilities. In the national public health survey produced by the Public Health Agency of Sweden, an average of 21% state that they have some form of disability.

Thus, depending on the definition, somewhere between one in five and one in three of the Nordic population have some form of disability. Given a total Nordic population of 25 million, that means 5 to 7 million people.

In many ways, the life situation of people with disabilities differs from that of others. In terms of violence, abuse can occur in more and different environments and there is a higher vulnerability risk. The perpetrators can usually use their position of power over persons with disabilities in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Women and men with a disability live with a greater risk of violence in couple relationships (European Fundamental Rights Agency, FRA 2014).

People with a disability are a heterogeneous group, but overall they live with more risk factors for violence than others. They are also vulnerable to a greater extent regardless of age or gender (Damgaard et al. 2013; Nilsson and Westlund 2007; Muff 2001; HIOA, 2014; Handu 2005 et al.).

International studies of extent show that both the type and extent of violence differ according to gender and also to type of disability. Women with a disability have also been shown to be victims both more often and for longer periods than other women (Olsvik 2011). Men with disabilities find more often than women with disabilities that they are victims of violence in public environments (Swedish Agency for Participation 2016).

Few Nordic population surveys consider the aspects of gender, disability and violence at the same time. For various reasons, the crime statistics do not show whether people who are victims of or report violence have any disability. We may assume that there is a great deal of under-reporting.

The Danish population survey SHILD is a good example of information gathering on the subject. This has 19,000 respondents who self-report a disability and is currently the only survey that considers gender along with different types of both disability and violence. This therefore permits comparison between different social groups that have, or do not have, some form of disability. In 2013, data from SHILD was analysed in the report *Everyday Life and Living Conditions for People with Disabilities* (Damgaard et al. 2013). Among other things, this shows that one woman in ten with serious physical disability has been the victim of violence in a close relationship during the past year. The corresponding figure for men is half as high.

The text below describes types of violence and other aspects that appear to be different among this target group. The text then goes on to extent and differences depending on whether the victims are women, men, girls or boys.



## **MORE CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE IN RELATION TO DISABILITY**

Close relationships often refer to relationships with family members and the extended family such as relatives and close friends. In other words, the people most often responsible for security and care. In addition to these close relationships, many people with disabilities have other people who are to provide security and care. These may be health care staff, mobility service drivers and social services staff. Thus for people with disabilities, the term “close relationships” covers a large group of people.

Special aspects of violence and abuse that are suffered by people with disabilities can be generally

divided into two categories (National Centre for Knowledge on Men’s Violence Against Women, 2013).

1. Abuse in support or care situations that are directly related to a person’s having a disability.
2. Types of violence that everyone risks suffering, but that would not have occurred if the victim had not had a disability. The person’s vulnerability as a consequence of disability gives this violence a special character.

What the categories have in common is that the perpetrator can exploit the disabled person’s reduced autonomy and ability to resist.

### **Concrete examples of abuse that has occurred in social and health care establishments (category 1):**

- Staff are rough when giving treatment
- Staff subject users/patients/clients to verbal persecution relating to the disability
- Staff neglect to give pain relief during medical treatment
- Staff touch the person in a sexual manner during an examination or other intimate care.

### **Concrete examples of how violence and other abuse can be related to a person’s disability (category 2):**

- The perpetrator leaves a person with impaired vision in unfamiliar and dangerous surroundings (mental violence)
- The perpetrator destroys a person’s essential aid (mental/physical violence)
- The perpetrator uses an aid as a weapon (physical violence)
- The perpetrator can more easily exploit, coerce or manipulate a person with reduced cognitive abilities (sexual violence, enforced marriage, financial violence)



## **PARTICULAR VULNERABILITY AND POSITIONS OF DEPENDENCE**

Structural differences in relation to the population at large, such as poverty and lack of accessibility in society's environments, give people with disabilities poorer conditions for participation, openness and security (Traustadóttir and Gunnarsdóttir 2014). Among people with a disability, women are generally also in a weaker position than men in the labour market and thus also have more difficulty in caring for themselves (Swedish Agency for Participation 2016; Barron et al. 2004).

A lack of accessibility in the immediate environment isolates people from participation in social life. Obstacles may be physical, such as the design of the built or digital environment, or social, such as attitudes and preconceptions. People and families have the opportunity to help or ignore, enable or prevent a person with a disability from participation in a particular context. Thus people with a disability find themselves in a particular position of dependence in relation to accessibility. Not just because of the design of their surroundings but also through the unwillingness or inability of other people to help.

When it comes to violence and abuse, the structural differences can make themselves felt in many ways. For example a person with a mental disability, even a mild one, can have many different problems. These may be a lack of education, living in a vulnerable area, unemployment and financial problems. That is to say, a combination of risk factors that can put the person into a particularly vulnerable position.

People with an intellectual disability have a limitation in their ability to think abstractly, which

makes them especially vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. In addition to unconditional submissiveness, the disability can lead to the acceptance, without critical reflection, of what adults or other persons in authority say and do. This contributes to an increased risk of violence and abuse (Davidian et al. 2013). It can be especially problematical for girls and women with intellectual disability. They may easily fall into a situation of financial dependence and are often easy to manipulate. Among other things, this has been described in studies of prostitution and women with intellectual disabilities (Kuosmanen and Stark 2011 and 2013).

Stereotypical perceptions involve further obstacles to gathering information (Traustadóttir et al. 2014). The concept of violence is redefined according to the environment in which it takes place (National Board of Health and Welfare 2011). One great problem is the stereotypical and generally held perception that those who live close to people with disabilities could never do any harm. When abuse still occurs, it is not always perceived as serious, or even as violent. The abuse can be explained away with "parents of children with disabilities are exhausted and stressed" or that some users of social services or health care are particularly burdensome. When violence is perpetrated by those who have a disability themselves, this may be due to a lack of understanding of the incident. The victim of the abuse is thus rendered invisible.

In many cases a disability means a particular dependence on the surroundings. This may be due to a need for help in moving around, reading, seeking information, doing the housework and other aspects of everyday accessibility. A dependent relationship on family, health care

staff and staff in other support activities can be unhealthy (National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women, 2013; Social Development Centre SUS 2007). Vulnerability to violence and abuse is partly connected with a dependence on assistance. A need for health and social care as a result of disability involves an increased risk of violence and abuse, including in segregated residential forms. People with a disability often lack the large, secure social network that may be needed to break out of a destructive relationship (Traustadóttir and Gunnarsdóttir 2014).

It must be possible to detect violence and abuse in key environments. The conditions for being able to contact others and make yourself understood in such environments are vital for people's perception of security.

There is also generally a complexity in the desire for normality. One example is young women with cognitive disability who want to "do what is normal". These women often have low self-esteem, which means that they may find it difficult to set limits and decide when they are being subjected to abuse. They therefore run a greater risk of being victims of sexual offences.

If society cannot identify dangerous environments, give the right kind of protection and prevent abuse, then the security of people with disabilities will be reduced, regardless of their gender and age.

#### **MORE DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENTS**

Violence in conjunction with disability occurs most often in the home environment and in society's own health care and support environments (Mandl et al. 2014). This means day-to-

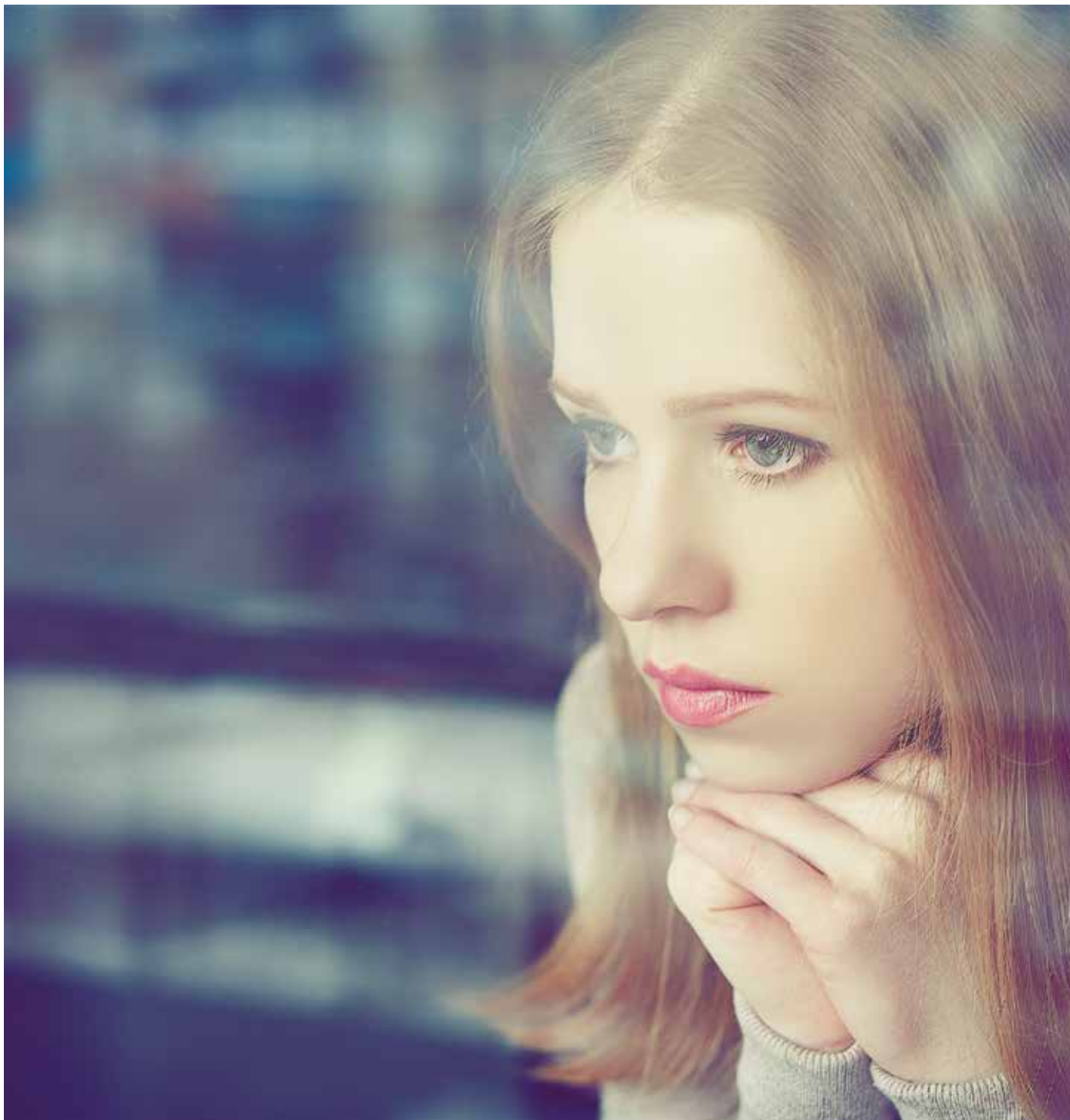
day activities, transport services, hospital environments, institutions and other environments on which people are emotionally and financially dependent. For example when an apartment is adapted to a person's individual needs. If threats or violence occur in the home there occurs – in addition to the crisis that always arises in connection with violence in close relationships – the difficulty in finding an alternative home environment to seek protection in (Unicef's report Children with Disabilities 2013; Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

There is sometimes a lack of routines and guidelines both for the prevention of violence and for how incidents of violence and abuse must be reported and handled. Such defects lead to obvious risk factors, in particular in the accommodation and other institution-like environments. The lack of routines and guidelines means that the users, the people in the accommodation, become dependent on encountering the "right" service staff (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014). A study of minority women commissioned by the European Parliament shows that up to 80% of women with disabilities who live in institutions have been exposed to violence (European Parliament 2003, page 13).

#### **VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND BOYS WITH DISABILITIES**

International studies show that children with disabilities run a 3 to 7 times greater risk of being subjected to some type of violence than other children. The most vulnerable are children with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities (Fundamental Rights Agency, FRA 2015).

Intellectual and psychosocial disabilities may mean a dependence on care and other risk fac-



tors for the children. There also arises a particularly strong dependence on the adults around them. In cases of abuse at home, invisibility is also particularly evident (Social Development Centre SUS 2007). Vulnerability and positions of dependence make it particularly difficult to prevent the sexual abuse of children and young people with intellectual disabilities. Sexual exploitation is particularly concealed and under reported (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

The UN Children's Committee describes the causes of these children's vulnerability primarily in terms of their inability to see, hear, move and care for themselves. They live isolated from families;<sup>1</sup> they may be ignored and disbelieved or misunderstood if they report abuse. Parents can be vulnerable and the children may be seen as non-sexual and indifferent within their bodies. They are therefore particularly vulnerable to people who are disposed towards abuse, especially sexual abuse (FRA 2015). One explanation of why the children are subjected to violation is that they do not behave in the same way as other children but appear different and are considered to be demanding (FRA 2015). Another factor is that the parents of children with disabilities may have a lower degree of connection with the child (Nilsson and Westlund 2007).

Studies of abused children generally show that children with disabilities are over represented. Girls and boys with disabilities are more likely to suffer from bullying and a lack of care. NOVA's report 17/11 featured interviews with young adults with disabilities who had previously been in the care of the social services (child welfare) because of failure of care. All of them found that the failure of care to which they had been sub-

jected was connected with their disability (Gundersen et al. 2014).

Children with disabilities may also be the victims of sexual abuse and physical violence. Girls are considered to be more at risk of sexual abuse than boys. Studies also show that the more extensive the disability is, the greater the risk of abuse (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

When women in FRA's study of violence against women interviewed women with disabilities, 46% stated that they had been subjected to physical, sexual or psychological abuse before the age of 15. The corresponding figure for women without disability was 15% (FRA 2014 p. 187).

The research does not clearly show whether children with disabilities are more at risk of sexual abuse than children without disabilities. The hidden statistics are probably high (Public Health Institute 2012 pp. 39 and 50; Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

With regard to bullying, this is primarily done by pupils of the same age group in school, often other children and young people with disabilities (NOVA 2011). Lack of care and sexual abuse most often occur in, or in connection with, the home (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

With regard to sexual abuse, the location and perpetrator are considered to vary according to the age of the victim. The older the child, the more likely it is for the abuse to be committed by people outside the home. Men commit most abuse of both girls and boys (National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against

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1 In many parts of the world, many children with disabilities live in institutions.

Women 2013; Mandl et al. 2014; Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

There is a great lack of knowledge about intellectual disability among professional who provide support to vulnerable children. The same applies to knowledge about sexual abuse among professionals with knowledge of children's special needs. For this reason, the abuse is not detected by the professionals who encounter them (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

A further risk factor is that those in authority on whom the child is dependent can more easily guide the child's perception of what is normal in relationships.

The young people's lack of education about sex and relationships is a big problem. So is the lack of available information about how children and young people with intellectual disabilities can protect themselves from abuse.



*Source: Fundamental Rights Agency, FRA 2015*

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

International and national research from the Nordic region shows that women with disabilities have an above average risk of violence. The most common occurrence is for the violence to be in a close relationship and recurrent. The perpetrator is most often a family member and in most cases one or more men. Thus the pattern of violence is the same as for other women who are at risk of violence (Viemerö 2005; Olsvik, 2011; Traustadóttir and Snaefridar-Gunnarsdóttir 2014; Sumo Report 2014; Grøvdal 2013; National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women 2013). The difference for women with disabilities is the dependent relationship with the those around them as a result of disability and age. See the previous section under "More dangerous environments".

In FRA's study of violence against women, 34% of women with disabilities stated that they had been subjected to physical, sexual or mental abuse after the age of 15. The corresponding figure for women without disability was 19 % (FRA 2014 p. 187).

In terms of violence in couple relationships, women with disabilities suffered violence for longer periods than other women (Kristensen 2011; FRA 2015). They run a greater risk than other women of physical violence both before and during pregnancy and are at considerably greater risk of abuse by care personnel and other carers (Olsvik 2011). Women with disabilities also have a greater risk of serious physical violence and are more frequently forced into sexual activity than other women (National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women 2012 et al.). Honour-related violence, arranged

marriage and enforced marriage are more frequent among young women with intellectual disabilities than among boys (Davidian et al. 2013). Several projects have drawn attention to the problems and demonstrated financial exploitation, violation of personal integrity and sexual abuse against women with intellectual disabilities.

In an interview study in the EU project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence (2011-2013), all the women interviewed stated that at some time in their lives they had been subjected to some form of violence (Mandl et al. 2014).

Women with mental and intellectual disabilities run a greater risk of violence, especially in the form of sexual abuse, than other women with disabilities (Damgaard et al. 2013). Older women with mental disabilities are more at risk than others (Bengtsson Tops 2004).

In addition to vulnerability to sexualised and sexual violence, studies indicate cases where women with various forms of disability are prevented from having sexual relations (Davidian et al. 2013) and forced to undergo abortions and sterilisations without having been properly informed of the consequences of these procedures (Kristin Björnsdóttir 2011).

There is as yet no research into human trafficking in women, men, girls and boys with disabilities. The expert group is enquiring into research in this area.



## **VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN WITH DISABILITIES**

Almost all studies of violence in close relationships are about women. For men the research is very sparse and it is not possible to give a picture of the violence or trends with any certainty.

Even though it is mainly women who are vulnerable, the studies that do exist show that men with disabilities also represent a vulnerable group. More research is needed, but the information that exists shows that violence against men with disabilities is most frequently committed in public areas and by unknown men. Men with mental disabilities or serious impairment of the ability to move are more frequently at risk indoors and from known perpetrators, either at home or in special accommodation or institutions (Damgaard et al. 2013; Crime Prevention Council 2007).

Because of their care needs, men with disabilities are at more risk in home and care environments than other men (Damgaard et al. 2013). It would therefore be a reasonable assumption that the vulnerability among men with disabilities is that which deviates most from corresponding groups in the total population (Nilsson and Westlund 2007).

The prevailing norms for masculinity and traditional gender roles mean that vulnerable men, more often than women, choose to obscure the injuries by not reporting abuse and violence in close relationships. Men less frequently seek health care for injuries they have received through violence in the home environment (Björnsdóttir, Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

One reason why men do not go to crisis centres and similar establishments is that they do not

know that their protection also includes men. According to Norwegian crisis centre legislation, Norway's local authorities are under an obligation to also offer protection to men. Unfortunately this does not work in practice. A study by the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) with centre employees shows that what is offered for men is not at all as well developed as that for women. The same study also showed that sheltered accommodation for men is very rarely available for people with disabilities who have limited movement, for example (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

Stereotypical presumptions prevent society from discovering men's vulnerability. One perception is that men with disabilities are asexual and do not live in relationships (Barron et al. 2004). Another is that they are protected from violence by those around them. Because the masculinity norms mean that men are not expected to be vulnerable to violence or to need help, there is a double vulnerability for men with disabilities. If, in spite of the norms, they seek help, it is often not available (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

## **THE HIDDEN STATISTICS**

The incidence of violence in close relations is characterised by hidden statistics and generally limited access to data. The hidden figures are even greater in respect of disability. Many studies from sheltered accommodation show that only a few represented women with disabilities. Both women and men with disabilities are victims of violence, however, but obstacles mean that they cannot use or even seek the help that society offers (Cresso 2015; National Board of Health and Welfare 2012).

Actors who should be able to recognise violence or abuse usually have limited experience and



knowledge about communication with people with disabilities. This applies in particular to people with impaired vision, hearing and cognitive abilities.

One obstacle to the collection of information is that violence can be redefined and renamed as “deficiencies” or “incidents” at special accommodation, for example (National Board of Health and Welfare 2011). Vulnerability and violence can also be difficult to assess. Sometimes staff must make a subjective decision as to whether an incident should be considered as violent or not. It is thus the staff who have a preferential right of interpretation in defining abuse and violence. If an incident is reported or not depends on the assessment of the staff. Thus the seriousness of the incident is assessed by the employees – not the victim.

The expert group considers that the preferential right of interpretation in cases of abuse should rest with the victim.

In the absence of a forum for reporting experiences of violence, information may come forward in other contexts. One example is an Icelandic interview study of women with disabilities on the labour market, in which participants also began to report experiences of violence and a constant presence of violence (Ref in Traustadóttir and Snaefridar- Gunnarsdóttir 2014).

People who are frequently or continuously exposed to violence do not always perceive that they are at risk. The research describes a “constant presence” of violence that prevents those at risk from reporting it. This may be because they have become used to the violence or have stopped believing and hoping that the outside

world can and will help and protect (Mandl et al. 2015).

This underlines the importance of staff, assistants and others who work in support and services being aware of the opportunities there are for action – or refraining from action. Their task is to support and help. They have at the same time a position of power in relation to those for whom they provide the services.

#### **WHEN THE PERPETRATOR HAS A DISABILITY**

The commonest situation is that people without disabilities subject people with disabilities to abuse, but situations also exist in which the perpetrator, or both parties, have a disability. People with intellectual disabilities who are the victims of sexual abuse have to a great extent been abused by people with similar disabilities (Damgaard et al. 2013; Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

According to the expert group, there is an ongoing discussion about what role segregated forms of accommodation and personnel play in situations where residents abuse each other.

According to the Danish population study SHILD, in the past year more men than women with disabilities have shaken, struck or kicked another person.

People with mental disabilities are more likely to resort to violence than people with other disabilities. In most cases, those who use violence direct it at friends, neighbours, current partners or someone in the family (Damgaard et al. 2013). Perpetrators with disabilities are less likely than others to be convicted of crimes they commit. They also receive less support to help them out of their violent behaviour.

## LEGISLATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCESS TO PROTECTION AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM

### INTERNATIONAL RULES AND COOPERATION

The rights perspective has found international expression in the Nordic countries and self-governing areas, including by means of undertakings as partners in UN conventions and collaboration in the Council of Europe and the EU. The United Nations, the Council of Europe and the EU have, in conventions, action plans and various activities, drawn attention to the risk and existence of multiple discrimination. All three international organisations advocate initiatives with both a disability and a gender perspective. The situation for women and girls with disabilities is alarming. Both knowledge and measures are needed if the situation is to change.

The UN Convention on Human Rights forbids violence and discrimination. Target group-specific conventions clarify the organisation's Articles on general human rights of 1948 and how they can be realised. The target group-specific conventions also indicate particularly vulnerable groups. Of particular relevance for this report are the conventions on civil and political rights (CCPR), economic, social and cultural

rights (CESCR), women's rights (CEDAW), children's rights (CRC) and the rights of persons with disabilities (UNCPRD).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a well-established document. The Nordic countries send delegations to the Meetings of States Parties. All the Nordic equality ministers travel to New York each year to mark the importance of international support for equal opportunity.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of several parts in the legislations of the Nordic countries. Article 23 is about children with disabilities. The children's committee's general commentary number 9 (2006) on children with disabilities states that in all contexts these children are at greater risk of all types of abuse.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability was adopted by the general assembly in 2006. Article 6 of the convention is about women and girls with disabilities and Article 7 is about children with disabilities.

All the UN conventions have committees that follow up with and investigate the state parties. The investigation committees make an independent and objective assessment of how the state parties, in their national contexts, promote and comply with the convention's intentions. Of the Nordic countries, only Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Sweden have so far been investigated by the UN committee on disability. Norway has submitted its first report on how the convention's intentions are implemented in the country's administration.

In 2014, the committee on disability adopted a special general commentary. This clarified the content of Article 9 on accessibility and Article 12 on equality in the law. A general comment was formulated on how Article 6 on women and girls should be interpreted.

The Council of Europe's parliamentary gathering, the Council of Ministers, expert committees on rights for persons with disabilities and the anti-discrimination section have drawn attention to the topic in conventions and recommendations. The European Council has issued a number of publications, especially about the situation for women and girls with disabilities. The Istanbul Convention on women's and girls' situation and right to health and safety is also relevant and has been adopted by all the Nordic countries.

The European Convention on Human Rights is a fundamental document for European cooperation. All countries have committed themselves to follow its rules. The EU is the only regional organisation to have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This demonstrates a high level of ambition and sets requirements for the member countries to transform and act correctly. The Directive on Employment Equality (2000/78) directly affects such passenger rights as apply for bus, sea, rail and air traffic.

The EU also has an action plan for the inclusion of persons with disabilities as well as specific cooperation initiatives, including to promote freedom of movement between countries (European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe).

In 2013 the EU's human rights institution, the FRA, performed a survey that focused on violence towards women. The Violence against women in the EU was published in 2015 with an appendix on violence against women with disabilities (FRA 2015). The FRA has also studied violence against children with disabilities (FRA 2015).

The European Commission financed the project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence, which was carried out during 2012-2014.

## Ratification of some international conventions that are relevant to the topic

Country or self-governing area	UN children's convention, Articles 2, 19 and 23	UN women's convention	UN disability convention, Articles 5, 6, 7, 12, 14 and 16	Istanbul convention on women's and children's right to health and safety
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Faroe islands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greenland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Åland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

### NORDIC COOPERATION ON EQUALITY, VIOLENCE AND DISABILITY

Nordic gender equality policy focuses on gathering information about and balancing power relationships between women and men.

It is the Nordic countries that have come farthest in the world with equality between women and men. This has been made possible by problematising stereotypical gender roles, creating conditions for equal conditions on the labour market and a vision of zero gender-related violence. (Nordic Council of Ministers 2015).

Violence and other abuse are extreme forms of the exercise of power. Nordic cooperation on violence in close relationships has focused, among other things, on risk assessment. A Nordic expert group contributed to the book *Risk Assessment of Partner Violence: Experiences and challenges in the Nordic countries* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014). After an evaluation of the effect of participating countries' systems, it has been shown that violence still exists to a great extent in close relationships. This in spite

of many years of active work on gender equality and a considerable boost to the rights of women and children. Previous cooperation in risk assessment did not include any analysis based on the victim or the perpetrator having any form of disability.

The strategy *A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2013), which is the Nordic cooperation ministers' strategy for sustainable development, says the following:

*"The Nordic cooperation model is known for universal welfare systems. The core values are equal opportunity, social solidarity and security for all regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, conviction, functional ability, age and sexual orientation. It is about social rights and the principle that everyone shall have equal access to social and health services, education and culture. This applies also to care for the socially exposed and vulnerable groups in society. The welfare model is based on diversity where all groups are integrated into society."*

Nordic policy on disability is primarily organised under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Social and Health Policy. The Nordic Council of Ministers' action plan for work on disabilities covers the period 2015 to 2017 and has three focus areas: Human Rights, Diversity and Freedom of Movement (Nordic Council of Ministers 2015).

Each of the focus areas includes three concrete activities for promoting the effective inclusion of people with disabilities. The project, which is one of the activities under the Diversity focus area, aims to supplement the agenda of Nordic policy on equality with a diversity perspective on the basis of the varying functional abilities of the population (Nordic Council of Ministers 2015).

As part of this Nordic cooperation project, a Nordic expert group has been set up. The group's members come from all over the Nordic region. The expert group includes people who complement each other in terms of expertise and personal experience in related areas. The group includes representatives of organisations for the disabled, as well as people with personal experience of disability and the need for accessibility. During the project period, the group members have contributed to the gathering of information and participated in two meetings and in study visits.

The Council for Nordic Cooperation on Disability has provided input for the report during the project period and has backed its recommendations.



## **LEGAL GAPS IN PROTECTION AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

The EU project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence (2011-2013) included four European countries, one of them Iceland. This made a thorough review of legislation in three areas:

- Social support and services for persons with disabilities.
- Support and services for persons at risk of or who have experienced violence.
- Legislation of relevance for special vulnerability among women, girls and other groups at risk of violence in close relationships and gender-related violence.

In spite of the genuine and extensive legislation in these countries, the EU project's final report concluded that women with disabilities are still at risk because they find themselves in legal gaps. The Daphne project formulated recommendations aimed at decision makers at local, national and international level. The recommendations are also aimed at other recipients, including organisations for the disabled (Mandl et al. 2015).

The FRA report on violence against children with disabilities went through international and national legislation in countries participating in the study, including Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Gaps were found in similar ways in terms of the legislations' inability to cover both the child's and the disability perspective at the same time. Sweden, Denmark and Finland are included in the study (FRA 2015a).









## NATIONAL LEVEL IN NORDIC COUNTRIES AND INDEPENDENT AREAS

### **NEED TO DEVELOP LEGISLATION TO PROTECT MORE PEOPLE**

The Nordic expert group sees similar tendencies in the form of legal gaps in the Nordic countries' national legislation, as the results of the EU project show (Mandl et al. 2015). Laws aimed at protection against violence are difficult to apply in ways that protect everyone. For example, legislation on the protection of women lacks formulations that cover particularly vulnerable groups. This is reflected at organisational level. Units that work to counter violence are not governed by the same regulations as those with responsibility for disabilities and support or services for persons with disabilities (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

The expert group discussed cases of general legislation that does not point out vulnerable groups, even though it supposedly applies to everyone. It has proved to be difficult to follow up the situation of people with disabilities and special needs for accessibility. There is a lack of focus in political orders and in laws. It there-

fore also becomes difficult in practice to see and prioritise special needs among people who need social support and services after having been exposed to violence. Legal protection for people belonging to especially vulnerable groups needs to be clarified in the legislation. Violence as a topic also needs to be clarified in legislation on support and services for people with disabilities.

### **UNREASONABLE DIFFERENCES IN SENTENCING DEPENDING ON THE CONTEXT OF THE CRIME**

The expert group has pointed out another defect in existing legislation. This is about the differences in the classification of crime and sentencing tariffs for violent crimes in hospitals and other institutional environments.

One example is the sexual crime rules in Finland. Sexual crimes in hospitals and other institutions are punished by sentences on a lower scale than those in other environments. The tariff for offences in institutions runs from fines up to four years' imprisonment. The tariff for the same of-

fences in other environments is imprisonment from one to six years. The UN committee for the convention on women's rights recommended in February 2014 that Finland should take action on this. There is a similar difference in Norway.

### **FUNCTIONAL ABILITY AS A BASIS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF HATE CRIME IS LACKING IN SEVERAL NORDIC COUNTRIES.**

Hate crime means offences that are committed on the basis of the perpetrator's negative attitude to, for example, sexual orientation, skin colour or religious affiliation (Roulstone and Mason-Bish 2013). Hate crime is sentenced more severely than other crime. In the Nordic countries, only Norway has disability as a basis for hate crime in legislation (Penal Code chapter 20 section 185 Hateful acts). Finland's action plan for basic human rights describes how mechanisms are to be improved in order to identify violence against vulnerable groups. This includes persons with disabilities. The action plan also states that the government must strengthen work to counter hate crimes against these groups (Finnish Ministry of Justice 2012). Denmark's strategy on disability, One Society for All, has specific

measures for mapping hate crime against persons with disabilities.

In several Nordic countries, the fact that the victim of a crime has a disability is seen as an aggravating circumstance and therefore leads to a more severe penalty (FRA 2015b).

### **UNEQUAL LEGAL PRACTICE IN CASES OF SPECIAL VULNERABILITY**

Disabilities and special vulnerability on the part of victims of crime can be regarded as an aggravating circumstance and lead to a more severe sentence. During the project period, the expert group therefore discussed whether there is unequal legal practice where the countries do things in different ways. Here too there is a lack of knowledge in the judicial system. The judicial system, the police and the courts will be generally discussed later in this report.



## **POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT YEARS**

The expert group also emphasises some good examples. In general there is increased awareness about gender-related violence in close relationships and where society encounters people with various types of disability. Norway introduced the Crisis Centre Act in 2010. Since this there has been a doubling of recruitment of personnel with expertise on women and children with disabilities who are exposed to violence. This occurred during the period 2009 to 2013.

The disability perspective has been clarified in legislation that is intended to protect people from exposure to violence. Even though no legislation is complete, the expert group has been able to point out a number of good examples from the Nordic region.

The disability perspective exists to varying extents in:

- **Constitutions**  
Denmark: The Danish constitution, which applies to all citizens  
Finland: The Finnish constitution, Article 2 Basic freedoms and rights
- **Legislation on discrimination**  
Denmark: The constitution  
Finland: The discrimination Act (30.12.2014/1325); entered into force 2015  
Sweden: The Discrimination Act (2008:567), DL.
- **Legislation on hate, crime and penalties**  
Denmark: The constitution and the penal code
- **Legislation on support for the victims of crime**

Denmark: The Services Act

Sweden: The Social Services Act (2001:453), SoL, specifically points out a number of groups with regard to social services' responsibility to provide support. This specifies children and young people, people with disabilities, victims of crime and women exposed to violence. There is a specific chapter in the Act covering these groups. The Administration Act (1986:223), FL, has provisions on the obligation of the authorities to engage interpreters in the case of persons with hearing impairment, speech impediments or who do not understand Swedish.

- **Legislation on confidentiality**  
Denmark: The Administration Act
- **Legislation on the obligation to report**  
Denmark: Obligation to notify the municipality regarding children and young people. This obligation applies to citizens (section 154 of the Services Act), professionals (section 153 of the Services Act) and an inter-municipal obligation to advise (section 152 of the Services Act)
- **Legislation on crisis centres (Norway)**

The expert group was also able to give examples of how violence and gender-related violence is given attention in legislation that is intended to give support and services to people with various types of disability.

Violence is covered to varying degrees in:

- municipality law
- legislation that governs the social services
- legislation on support and services
- health care legislation



## STRATEGIES, ACTION PLANS AND OTHER TOOLS

Strategies, action plans, regulations, governing documents, manuals and training materials are all tools for the effective implementation of the legislators' intentions. In recent years, many countries' strategic plans on violence in close relationships have pointed out women and children with disabilities as particularly vulnerable groups. With few exceptions these countries

have successfully put protective and violence-preventing measures into practice.

Described below are some examples of how the disability perspective has been identified in strategies, action plans, guidelines and other tools to counter violence in close relationships and gender-related violence.

**The table below shows which of the Nordic countries have strategies to counter violence in close relationships, how persons with disabilities are identified in these and whether there are other activities to identify and address the problems.**

Country or self-governing area	National strategy to counter violence in close relationships	Persons with disabilities specifically mentioned	Other ongoing campaigns and projects that identify persons with disabilities at risk of violence
Denmark	Yes	Yes	No
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Faroe islands	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greenland	Yes	No	No
Iceland	Yes	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes
Åland	Yes	Yes	No



## DENMARK

In the strategy “The 2020 Social Goals: Everyone Included” there is a goal that women will receive help in getting out of violent relationships. Women with disabilities are not specifically mentioned in this strategy, but it applies to all women.<sup>2</sup>

”The “Abuse Package” is a combined effort intended to protect children and young people from abuse.<sup>3</sup>

In the ”National Action Plan against violence in families and close relationships” the government intends to continue, strengthen and improve efforts for a wide target group of persons at risk of violence.<sup>4</sup>

The website of the National Board of Social Services has material aimed at children and adults with disabilities, as well as personnel and the general public.<sup>5</sup>

LOKK (the National Organisation of Women’s Crisis Centres) and Danner (crisis and knowledge centre) have developed educational material aimed at school children in years 5-6. The material has no special focus on people with disabilities.

The Danish action plan for policy on disability ”One Society for All”<sup>6</sup> does not specifically mention violence. But within the framework for the strategy, the social, children’s and integration ministry as set up an anti-discrimination unit concentrating on disability. The unit will focus on discrimination and offensive treatment and has been charged in particular with mapping hate crime against people with disabilities.



2 [http://www.stm.dk/multimedia/alle\\_skal\\_med\\_m\\_ls\\_tninger\\_for\\_de\\_mest\\_udsatte\\_frem\\_mod\\_2020.web.pdf](http://www.stm.dk/multimedia/alle_skal_med_m_ls_tninger_for_de_mest_udsatte_frem_mod_2020.web.pdf)

3 <http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/born-og-unge/overgreb>

4 [http://sm.dk/filer/nyheder/dokumenter-til-nyheder-2014/hp\\_vold-i-naere-relationer.pdf](http://sm.dk/filer/nyheder/dokumenter-til-nyheder-2014/hp_vold-i-naere-relationer.pdf)

5 <http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/udsatte/vold-i-familien>

<http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/udsatte/vold-i-familien/hvordan-skal-du-handle/Er%20du%20ansat%20paa-bosted-for-voksne-med-handicap>

[http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/handicap/aktuelt\\_sik/ny-behandling-til-mennesker-med-kognitive-handicap-der-har-varet-udsat-for-seksuelt-overgreb](http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/handicap/aktuelt_sik/ny-behandling-til-mennesker-med-kognitive-handicap-der-har-varet-udsat-for-seksuelt-overgreb)

6 [http://sim.dk/media/923612/handicappolitisk-handlingsplan-2013\\_acc.pdf](http://sim.dk/media/923612/handicappolitisk-handlingsplan-2013_acc.pdf)



## FINLAND

The purpose of the programme to reduce violence against women (2010-2015) is to prevent violence by influencing attitudes and behaviour patterns. The programme includes a total of 60 proposed measures. A key area of the programme is to develop means of identifying and counter-acting violence against people with disabilities. Among other things, means are to be developed to identify and counter violence against people in vulnerable situations. Information about and expertise in the prevention of violence and help for victims are to be increased in the authorities and among professionals.<sup>7</sup>

To help reduce violence against women with disabilities, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, THL, has produced the handbook “Dare to speak - dare to be”. The book includes information about various forms of violence, about where help can be obtained and about women’s own experiences of violence. Women with disabilities who have personal experience of violence have contributed to the content together with specialists in women’s networks. The handbook is a practical tool for all those who work in the area of disability. The book also includes a section on violence against children.<sup>8</sup>

THL’s recommendation is to use the book “Systematic mapping of violence in close relationships in social and health care” in order to

identify and counter violence in close relationships and in the disability services. The mapping is suitable for both women and men as target groups.<sup>9</sup>

Finland’s programme for disability policy, VAM-PO, mentions violence and abuse.<sup>10</sup>

## THE FAROE ISLANDS

The “Unified plan on violence in close relationships” applies to the whole population and does not specifically mention people with disabilities.<sup>11</sup> Work on implementing the first Faroese plan on violence in close relationships began on 1 May 2012. The plan has a broad definition of violence as physical, mental, sexual, financial and material.<sup>12</sup>

The points of the plan cover training for professional groups, information events and material and offers of treatment for victims of violence and those who use it, among other things. The plan does not mention people with disabilities specifically but applies to the whole population and therefore also includes this group.

There is also a “Unified plan on sexual abuse”. One of the eight points in this is about abuse against people with disabilities, “The same opportunities to speak out and set limits - people with a mental handicap and mental issues”.<sup>13</sup>

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7 <http://stm.fi/sv/forebyggande-av-vald-i-nara-relationer>

8 <http://www.thl.fi/sv/web/vammaispalvelujen-kasikirja>

9 [www.thl.fi/kasvunkumppanit](http://www.thl.fi/kasvunkumppanit)

10 <http://stm.fi/sv/handikappolitik>

11 [http://www.amr.fo/media/1923/heildarætlan\\_harðskap.pdf](http://www.amr.fo/media/1923/heildarætlan_harðskap.pdf)

12 [http://www.amr.fo/media/1923/heildarætlan\\_harðskap.pdf](http://www.amr.fo/media/1923/heildarætlan_harðskap.pdf)

13 [http://www.amr.fo/media/6234/21406\\_vmr\\_heilarætlan\\_kynsliganagang.pdf](http://www.amr.fo/media/6234/21406_vmr_heilarætlan_kynsliganagang.pdf)



When the action plan was being produced there was a discussion on whether it should have any specific points about disability. Several sources mentioned that groups in society could be stigmatised and that these groups were already included in the plan, as the points applied to all social groups. The result was point 7 of the action plan, which covers among other things training of staff and a large conference to be held in Tórshavn in 2017.

The conference is aimed at personnel and the authorities, as well as to people with disabilities and their families. This will be held over two days and the ambition is that delegates will come from all the Nordic countries.

Work on the two action plans is headed by the Social Ministry in cooperation with other authorities and relevant people.

There have been improvements in the last two to three years. For example, money has been granted for a treatment offer for children of violent offenders, as well as more support for the crisis centre in Tórshavn.

There has also been extensive information work on violence in broad terms and about the prevention of violence. The information work has borne fruit in society and helped make it easier for people to put the subject into words.

The Faroe Islands do not yet have a strategic plan for disability policy.

## GREENLAND

The then Ministry for Families and Justice (now the Ministry for Families, Equality and Social Issues) organised the conference “Violence is not the Solution” in 2009. A meeting in autumn 2013 adopted a strategy and action plan called ‘Strategy against violence’.<sup>14</sup> The intention is to realise this document during the period 2014 – 2017.

“Rejseholdet” is a project in which a number of psychologists travel to towns and communities throughout Greenland and offer support and treatment for people who have been subjected to abuse in childhood.<sup>15</sup>

The ministry does not at present have evidence of how widespread violence against people with disabilities is in Greenland. Neither is there any current work on this, although there is interest for the future.

Greenland does not yet have a strategy or action plan for disability policy. However disability is specifically mentioned in the Coalition Agreement 2014-2018 and all four municipalities have their own disability policy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [www.nanoq.gl](http://www.nanoq.gl)

<sup>15</sup> [http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Familie/DK/2015/Rejseholdet/Rejseholdet\\_DK.pdf](http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Familie/DK/2015/Rejseholdet/Rejseholdet_DK.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Naalakkersuisut/DK/Koalitionsaftaler/SIUMUT\\_DE-MOKRAATIT\\_ATASSUT\\_Isumaqatigiissut%20atuuttoq\\_04122014\\_dk\\_endelig/Koalitionsaftale%202014-2018%20Dansk.pdf](http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Naalakkersuisut/DK/Koalitionsaftaler/SIUMUT_DE-MOKRAATIT_ATASSUT_Isumaqatigiissut%20atuuttoq_04122014_dk_endelig/Koalitionsaftale%202014-2018%20Dansk.pdf)

## ICELAND

The present programme for equality in Iceland covers 2011–2014 (AP 2011–2014).<sup>17</sup> The programme is divided into topics such as the labour market, political representation, education and gender-related violence. The five points that address gender-related violence include the development of an action plan to counter gender-related violence and an analysis of the situation for women with disabilities, in particular their risk of being subjected to violence, abuse and exploitation. A new plan is being developed for 2015–2018. The most recent plan in Iceland to counter sexual abuse and violence in close relationships (PADDSV) covered the period 2006–2011.

A new project is currently being formulated in a collaboration between the Ministry of Welfare, The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education. The purpose is to strengthen cooperation between the social services, child protection, the health and education agencies and the police and prosecution service so as to improve efforts against violence in Icelandic society. The project focuses on countering violence against children, violence in close relationships and violence against people with disabilities and other groups at increased risk of being subjected to abuse.<sup>18</sup>

In one police district there is also a pilot project on case handling that will also be transferred to other districts. This method is called the rights method.

There is a manual to assist in handling cases of violence against children but it does not specifically cover children with disabilities.

There is one piece of educational material on violence that is aimed at people with disabilities. Among other things, this covers what is normal and healthy in sexual relationships.

The Rights Guardians consists of a number of lawyers and is connected to the Ministry of Welfare. These assist people with disabilities whose legal position needs to be defended in both private and public cases. This body's monitoring function can help to prevent violence. The lawyers also assist people with disabilities who are exposed to violence to report violence and offer necessary legal assistance. As employees of the Ministry of Welfare, the lawyers who are members of the rights guardians can also increase awareness of these issues in government and contribute to the development of appropriate services. The rights guardians represent a relatively new function with the potential for great benefit.<sup>19</sup>

Researcher from Iceland have been active participants in the project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence. Information material has been produced there for women with disabilities who are in need of help. The material has been produced in various formats, including for organisations that have been tasked with protecting vulnerable people with disabilities.

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17 [http://jafnretti.is/D10/\\_Files/Gender%20Equality%20Action%20Programme%202011-14.pdf](http://jafnretti.is/D10/_Files/Gender%20Equality%20Action%20Programme%202011-14.pdf)

18 <http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/frettir-vel/nr/34968>

19 <https://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/raduneyti/nefndir-rad-stjornir/nr/33401>

A brief report on the project's main results has also been published in various formats including easily-read text, sign language and sound recording.<sup>20</sup>

At present Iceland has no disability policy or action plan.

## **NORWAY**

"A life without violence - action plan to counter violence in close relationships" (2014-2017) is an interdepartmental action plan with concrete measures in the areas of prevention, knowledge and competence, help and treatment offerings, prosecution and cooperation, as well as coordination.<sup>21</sup> According to measure 17, the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, Bufdir, is to concretise and follow up any measures from the research institute NOVA's report on the services offered to vulnerable people with disabilities.

In accordance with measure 21 of the action plan to counter violence and sexual abuse against children and young people, in 2015 Bufdir started work on creating guidelines for discovering violence and sexual abuse against children and young people with disabilities.

Bufdir has developed guidelines in respect of sexual abuse of adults with developmental issues in accordance with measure 18 of the action plan to counter rape.<sup>22</sup> Measure 20 of the action plan to counter enforced marriage, genital

mutilation and serious limitation of the freedom of young people<sup>23</sup> is also relevant. "Guidelines on sexual abuse of adults with disabilities" is aimed at personnel who work with adults with developmental issues or others that may come into contact with violence against particularly vulnerable groups.<sup>24</sup>

During 2016, Bufdir will launch "Children in child protection who have disabilities - a guideline". This is aimed at those employed in child protection. The guideline is intended to ensure good treatment of children with disabilities who are subjected to abuse or lack of care.

Norway does not have a national plan for disability policy. It is the task of the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs to monitor the living conditions of the group and compile data for the Ministry of Children and Equality, which has coordinating responsibility for policy.<sup>25</sup>

## **SWEDEN**

The action plan for countering men's violence against women, violence in single-sex relationships and honour-related violence and repression, skr 2007:39, mentions women with disabilities as a group with a particular vulnerability risk.

Several authorities have tasks that are connected with the action plan. The National Board of Health and Welfare will provide competence

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20 <http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/countries/iceland>

21 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/et-liv-uten-vold/id733697/>

22 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/handlingsplan-mot-voldtekt-2012-2014/id691821/>

23 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/handlingsplan-mot-tvangsekteskap-2013-2014/id732759/>

24 [www.vernmotovergrep.no](http://www.vernmotovergrep.no)

25 [http://www.bufdir.no/Statistikk\\_og\\_analyse/Nedsatt\\_funksjonsevne/](http://www.bufdir.no/Statistikk_og_analyse/Nedsatt_funksjonsevne/)

support to the social services and distribute development funding to local authorities. In this way the local authorities will be able to increase their work in this area, often in cooperation with voluntary organisations. Five pieces of educational material have been produced, aimed at vulnerable groups. One of these, called “Seldom Seen”, is about violence against women with disabilities.

Various other guideline material has been produced - on sheltered accommodation, on asking questions, on violence and on support to victims. The recommendations in the guidelines are to question whether violence applies to all cases in child and youth psychiatry and women who visit psychiatrists. In the other guidelines, disability is presented as an important aspect to consider.

In 2015, a manual was published to support the work of the social services and the health care services on violence in close relationships. The manual is based on the statute that entered into force on 1 October 2014. One section of the manual specifically describes vulnerabilities such as disability. This perspective is then to be constantly found in the other parts of the manual.

In Sweden’s strategy for implementation of disability policy, 22 national authorities have been given strategic tasks in order to improve the status and situation of people with disabilities. The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority is one of these.<sup>26</sup>

## ÅLAND

The overall goal of equality policy in Åland during 2012-2015 is that women and men shall have the same freedom and power to shape society and their own lives. Among other things this includes freedom from gender-related violence, that women and men, girls and boys have the same right to bodily integrity and that the protection of women is a priority area during the mandate period.

The framework programme for work on equality in Åland in 2012-2015 puts forward a number of specific areas. These are education, the labour market, protection of women, power, norms and identity. Among other things, it is aimed at improving the conditions for Åland to be an equal and equitable society with economic growth. Everyone - regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, social orientation or disability - shall have the same rights to good quality education throughout the educational system.

One of the government’s specific initiatives in the framework strategy concerns sexual education. This describes material called Fair Sex, which is to promote equality and prevent gender-related violence and abuse in schools. The Fair Sex material will also be adapted for pupils in special education. Teachers and other staff at secondary and upper secondary level will also be offered thorough knowledge and competence development in gender and equality issues.

Åland’s programme for protection of women mentions women with disabilities among those that are at greater risk of violence.

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26 <http://www.regeringen.se/rapporter/2011/06/s2012.028/>

The government states that society must take action to protect and support those at risk. In its preventive work, society must also identify values, norms and attitudes that tend to maintain the exercise of violence. The government also sees a challenge in realising and developing knowledge in targeted initiatives, so that support and help can reach those who need it. Åland's opportunities for addressing this challenge are unique, due to the size of its society. The need to realise knowledge in initiatives can be met but focusing on a women's and children's centre of reasonable size. This can be supplemented by training relevant bodies with a need for such a centre as a partner.

The government has recently increased the duties of the protection of women committee. These now also include mapping the tasks and responsibilities of the relevant authorities and other bodies in respect of violence in close relationships. The need for cooperation and collaboration will also be mapped within each body as well as between the various bodies.

In Åland, the following needs analysis is used as a basis for targeted efforts:

- What do children who are growing up with violence need from society?
- What do vulnerable women need from society?
- What do the perpetrators need from society?

Åland's programme for disability policy, An Accessible Åland<sup>27</sup>, has no points on violence or abuse.

## **LACK OF ACCESS TO THE LEGAL SYSTEM**

The UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities emphasises the importance of access to legal proceedings for people with disabilities. According to the convention's Article 12, states must take action to give people the support they need in order to exercise their legal capacity. Article 13 gives states the responsibility for educating personnel in the judicial system (courts, police and prison staff) so that effective access to legal proceedings can be assured. Article 15 emphasises that people with disabilities have the same right to the judicial system as other citizens, including the right to make some adjustments. The UN convention on discrimination against women, the European human rights convention and international conventions on citizens' and political rights also have provisions to protect against discrimination.

It can be extremely difficult to detect abuse of people whose disability affects their ability to communicate and inform directly. The judicial system and the heart of a court case are based to a great extent on linguistic practice, including in the form of police statements, examinations in court and explanations of the court's interpretation of statements (Muff 2001).

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27 <http://www.regeringen.ax/styrdokument-rapporter-publikationer/tillgangligt-aland>

### **Disabilities make the circumstances complicated.**

During the project period, the expert group has discussed the question of legal rights and access to justice as this is ever present in the context of violence. People who are subjected to violence need knowledge, confidence and access to the legal system in order to dare to and be able to report abuse. For the group that this report is about, all three of these areas are complicated.

The possibility of describing a relationship, expressing oneself clearly and consistently and being perceived as a credible witness is often decisive to the outcome of a criminal case. It is also typical of abuse cases that there is little objective evidence and it is one person's word against another. In court cases the credibility of the prosecutor's witnesses is of great significance for the outcome of the case. Interviews with the police and lawyers indicates experience of this type of case and the difficulties of bringing someone to court (Handegård and Olsen 2009). There is often a lack of good forms of dialogue between the police and social authorities when, for example, someone with communications-related disability has been the victim of abuse (Social Development Centre SUS 2007).

When people with disabilities are the victims of violence or abuse in close relationships, the perpetrator usually runs less risk of being discovered, reported and convicted. The number of reported assaults is low in comparison with the degree of suspicion. Abuse is only rarely reported and seldom has consequences for the perpetrator. In the case of sexual abuse of children with disabilities, very few cases proceed from the suspicion stage because they are very diffi-

cult to prove (Social Development Centre SUS 2007; Muff 2001).

### **Access to the law for all?**

In this context, access means for example the perceived possibility of contacting the police and reporting an offence. Existing research, public reports and the representatives of organisations for the disabled indicate defects, for example, in physical and communicative accessibility to the various parts of the judicial system (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014). This is in spite of the fact that the law's provisions on legal rights, access to legal proceedings and protection against abuse apply to all citizens. This is an important principle in the criminal law process.

Victims of crimes must have the possibility of explaining themselves and using interpreters for sign language and minority languages. They also need to have confidence in the judicial system and the perception that they will be taken seriously. The judicial system must be able to exchange forms of communication and take needs into account through the use of compensatory measures for persons with cognitive disabilities.

The rule of law is considered to be an important part of a state governed by law. The principle of a state governed by law can be difficult to define in practice as the term is used in different ways. It usually refers to the individual's protection against abuse and the discretion of the authorities, as well as the possibility of realising one's legal position and defending one's legal interests. Also, so as to take equality and fairness into account, there are formal requirements for rules to be binding. Although the principle of the rule



of law is evident in legislation and international conventions, experience shows that implementation in practice is difficult (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

### **Universal design is part of the way forward**

In recent years Nordic research has been relatively sparse in the subject of disability, access to criminal law processes and similar opportunities for legal protection against crime and violence. However studies that illustrate various aspects of the subject have been published in the last five to ten years. In Norway, Lundberg and Simonsen (2011 and 2014) compiled Nordic and international research focusing on obstacles in legal processes. They particularly emphasise the importance of the position of those with impaired hearing in the judicial system and give a systematic overview of existing and relevant research, both nationally and internationally. The work covers the legal situation for those with impaired hearing and others with disabilities, as

victim, accused and witness. Language and interpretation are a key aspect of the work. The perspective is obstacles and the authors discuss universal design as a strategy for further knowledge development - including linguistic and cultural knowledge gaps in criminal law.

The processing system of the judicial system does not record information about any disabilities that victims may have. Thus no crime statistics are created in which these questions can be the subject of systematic knowledge about the subject. Deaf persons arise as victims or suspects, prosecuted or sentenced in several relevant case studies of Norway's criminal law system. The studies show that accessibility is about much more than sign language interpretation. Basic knowledge and attitudes among the professionals appears to be equally important for protecting the individual's legal rights as the technical and administrative aspects (Olsen et al. 2010; Olsen and Kermit 2014. Lundberg and Breivik 2014. Hauland 2014).

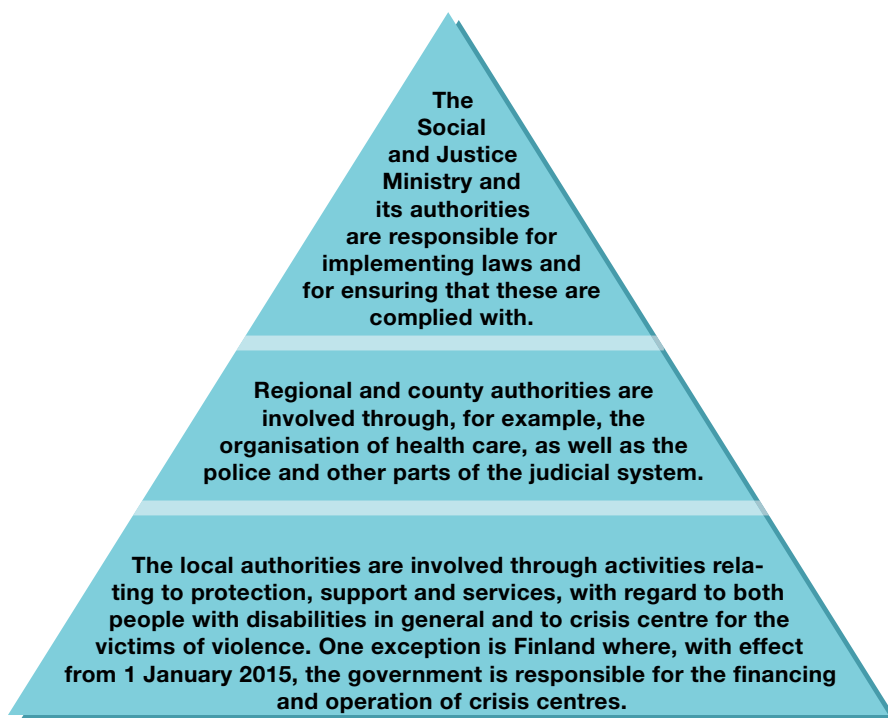


### **THOSE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEEING, HEARING AND UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF ABUSE**

A disability increases the risk of violence in close relationships, regardless of age, gender, occupation or family status. In close relationships where one or more parties have a physical or mental disability, the risk of violence is higher than in other relationships. Monitoring of statistics also shows that few people with disabilities seek help or support as a victim of violence or

abuse. Compared to people without disabilities, they also appear to remain longer in relationships that are characterised by violence before seeking help. This demands stable and certain preventive work and cooperation between society's actors at different levels.

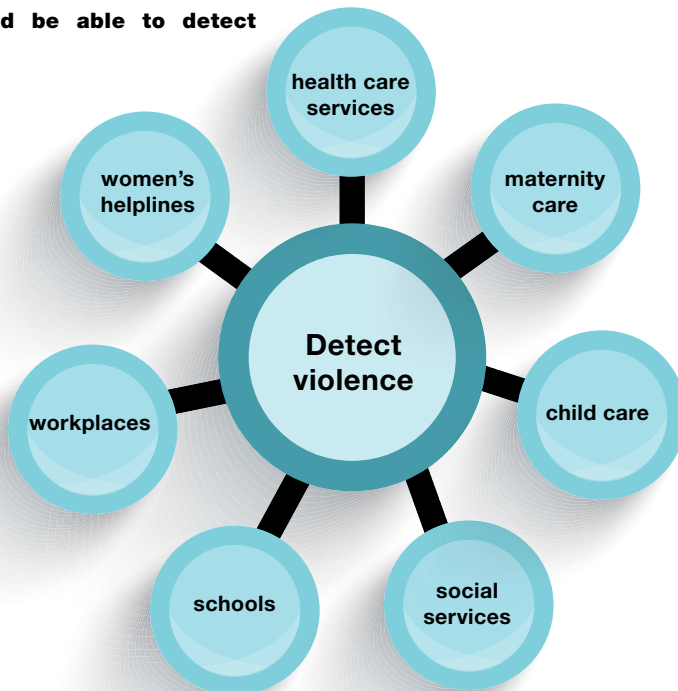
The expert group has pointed out a number of bodies and environments with key roles for ensuring that everyone receives equal protection from gender-related violence and violence in close relationships.



**Actors that should be able to prevent violence**



**Actors that should be able to detect violence**



### Actors that should be able to give protection



The role of non-governmental organisations has been particularly discussed during the project. Some countries describe these organisations' public, political interest and prime mover role. They shall contribute to the debate on living conditions for women, men, girls and boys with disabilities.

In some cases organisations for the disabled and/or their women's networks have participated in developing services, educational material and political programmes. However the subject has been taken up more frequently by organisations that work in the field of violence to women than by organisations for the disabled. With few exceptions, violence and equality have not until now been common topics in the disability movement.

## KEY ACTORS IN EACH COUNTRY

There follows a list showing the distribution of responsibilities in the respective Nordic countries.

### DENMARK

Ministry for Children, Equality, Integration and Social Conditions.

National Board of Social Services

SISO - centre for social initiatives on violence and sexual abuse of children

VISO - the national knowledge and special consultancy organisation in the social area and special teaching.

Danner knowledge centre

Danish organisations for the disabled

Institute for human rights

National organisation of women's crisis centres, LOKK

Social and health administration in the 98 local authorities including housing, targeted employment and daytime schools for persons with disabilities, as well as day care, nurses and carers.

Schools

Practising doctors

### FINLAND

The Social and Health Ministry

The institute for health and welfare THL

The disabled organisations' women's network

The parliamentary ombudsman can check and visit homes and housing for the disabled and is therefore a key actor for our subject.

The discrimination ombudsman monitors discrimination legislation and the discrimination board can decide and give responses that affect disability, among other things. Reasonable adaptations in paragraph 15 of the Act are very important since they specifically affect persons with disabilities.

Church administration

Valvira, permit and supervisory authority for social and health care

The regional administration authority promotes the realisation of basic freedoms and rights and legal protection, access to basic services, environmental protection, sustainable use of the environment, indoor safety and a safe and healthy working and living environment in the regions. The authority also handles statutory controlling, execution and supervisory tasks in its field.

Women's line in Finland

Viola – Free from Violence

The disability services of the 317 local authorities

### THE FAROE ISLANDS

Social Ministry/Almannamálaráðið

Almannaverkið

Sjóndeplinum

With regard to mental and physical violence towards teachers and other professional groups, the Faroese teachers association has continued to focus on the problem.

The social administration has regularly organised courses and competence raising themed days for employees of the local institutions.  
The 30 local authorities

#### **GREENLAND**

The Ministry for Families, Equality and Social Issues has the statutory responsibility for the area of disability and is responsible for independent care institutions. The field of disability has been divided between the four local authorities since 1 January 2011 and these thus have direct contact with citizens.

The knowledge and advice centre on disability, IPIS

The Danish Institute for Human Rights, in partnership with Greenland's Council for Human Rights, is charged with monitoring the implementation of the UN convention on the disabled in Greenland. Greenland's Council for Human Rights focuses on the field of disability and there is disability group with members from the disability organisations in Greenland.

#### **ICELAND**

The Ministry of Welfare

Jafnréttisstofa

The rights guardians (Rättighetsvakten)

Öryrkjabandalags Íslands

Thróskahjálpi  
Stígamót

The 98 local authorities

#### **NORWAY**

Ministry of Justice and Public Security (JD)

Children and young people are coordinated by the Ministry of Children and Equality (BLD)

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs  
(Bufdir)

The 429 local authorities

#### **SWEDEN**

Ministry of Social Affairs

Ministry of Justice

National Board of Health and Welfare

County Administrative Boards

Health and Social Care Inspectorate

291 local authorities and 21 county authorities

#### **ÅLAND**

The Government's Equality Unit and Social and Environmental Department

The discrimination ombudsman

Åland association for the disabled

The 16 local authorities



## **GAPS IN MAPPING AND INFORMATION GATHERING AMONG ACTORS WITH A RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT AND DETECT VIOLENCE**

As previously mentioned there is a great lack of continuous population surveys that measure health, security, disability and gender. Without basic data it is difficult to develop good systems for mapping, and without mapping it is difficult to address problems effectively.

It is primarily the police and social services that map risks of people being subjected to violence or repeated violence. In many cases there is a lack of both available information (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014) and response plans for what to do when it is discovered that someone with a disability is exposed to sexual abuse (Social Development Centre SUS 2007). One example is honour-related crime such as enforced marriage, where schools do not have competence, working models or clear guidelines when they become aware of pupils that are at risk of being married against their will (Davidian et al. 2013). It is important to establish clear routines and guidelines in all organisations that might discover that someone is exposed or risks being exposed to violence. Bufdir has formulated proposals for such guidelines (Bufdir 2014).

In general there is a great lack of routines and guidelines for the prevention, reporting and handling of violence as well as incidents of violence and abuse. The lack of routines and

guidelines means that the users, the people in the accommodation, become dependent on encountering the “right” service staff. There are therefore clear and particular risk factors in accommodation and other institution-like environments (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

As part of the project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence, recommendations have been formulated for the development of units that see, understand and act on behalf of persons at risk of violence.

According to the expert group, more awareness of disability is needed, as well as a general and systematic mapping and risk assessment of violence. All bodies with responsibility for risk assessment need special knowledge about accessibility and the particular vulnerability that a disability can lead to.

This is about involving the target group in an adequate manner so as to get to grips with the vulnerability. More people need to be able to assess whether violence is taking place. The general instruments of assessment therefore need to be designed to be accessible in many cases. In concrete terms we are talking about alternative interview methods, opportunities to answer questions in different ways, increased competence among investigators etc. Children and young people participated in a British study on the exploitation of children with intellectual

***What society does not ask about, it cannot detect or do anything about.***

disability. The children value adults' time and find that support and services personnel listen to them and work individually to help children to understand exploitation and risks (Anita Franklin et al. 2015).

According to the expert group, reliable routines and action plans are the most important. For example in the Nordic countries women in other risk groups are screened for the risk of being exposed to violence. This occurs to varying degrees on different occasions and with varying abilities to discover whether the woman also has a disability.

The need and prerequisites for preventive work may appear different in different contexts. One example at local authority level is that large local authorities need a system to ensure that the same methods and legal judgements are made by all service providers. In small local authorities there is a need for systems to handle sensitive issues professionally and objectively even though there may be personal connections between victim and service provider.

### **What we do to get more to report**

The lack of reporting and monitoring procedures in care systems affects a victim's judgement as to whether to warn or give attention to violence. Such gaps lead to a fear of being disbelieved or treated as being difficult, and that an overhaul could have negative consequences for care. A good example is Denmark's new law on the obligation to report.

In order to be able to formulate preventive initiatives and functional protective mechanisms, there is a need for more systematic information gathering about different risk groups. There is a need for better statistics and also for more information directed at target groups, so that more people report and gain access to support and protection.

### **GOOD EXAMPLES OF PREVENTING AND DETECTING VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

If a vulnerable person with a disability is to be able to report abuse, every agency that this person comes into contact with must be prepared for varying levels of functional ability among those who report. The professionals affected need to have competence and knowledge about what it means to have a disability. They also need to know what it can lead to in the form of increased risk of being exposed to violence and other types of abuse. People who work in these positions must also know what to do when they become aware that someone could be the victim of violence.

The expert group has selected a number of pieces of material that could be useful in preventive work.

The National Board of Social Services in Denmark has gathered information about cases where persons with disabilities who live in special accommodation have been the victims of violence.<sup>28</sup> The resource centre SUS has various material for preventing, encountering and dealing with sexual abuse of people with mental

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28 <http://socialstyrelsen.dk/voksne/vold-i-naere-relationer/hvordan-skal-du-handle/er-du-ansat-pa-bosted-for-voksne-med-handicap/personer-med-handicap-der-lever-med-vold>

disabilities.<sup>29</sup> This include "Good advice when the damage is done"<sup>30</sup> and about seeing and preventing abuse<sup>31</sup> and the material "Abuse – no thanks"<sup>32</sup>

LOKK (the national association of women's crisis centres) focused in 2005–2009 on women and children with disabilities in the project Disability, Developments at Crisis Centres (HUK). Eight crisis centres participated in the project. The staff received training on the subject and became better prepared to receive women and children with disabilities. Crisis centres were made more accessible and the leaflet "Women and children with disabilities at crisis centres"<sup>33</sup> was distributed.

In Finland, THL (the institute for welfare and health) recommended systematic mapping of violence in close relationships and the use of screening and mapping forms in all social and health care services as part of mapping the client's initial situation.

In Finland, training has also been organised for the police, prosecutors and judges. The women's line's website<sup>34</sup> has information about violence against women in sign language and as a sound recording and a dedicated telephone line was opened for ten hours a week in spring 2015.

Iceland has Stígamót, which is a resource and knowledge centre for women who suffer sexual violence and abuse. In recent years the centre has developed its ability to receive women with various kinds of disability, Including by moving to more accessible premises and employing staff with specialist competence.<sup>35</sup>

In Sweden the National Board of Health and Welfare and the County Administrative Board have been jointly tasked by the government to work at raising the competence of the social services in violence in close relationships. This is done for example through educational initiatives and material such as "Looking the other way" which is also available in English.<sup>36</sup> In autumn 2014 there was a series of conferences in seven locations aimed at the new regulations and general advice (2014:4). The conferences were aimed at both health care and social services. In total around 1,700 people participated and specific questions were raised about people at risk of violence who have disabilities. There are many good examples of how Swedish local authorities have worked on information that is adapted to various groups with disabilities.

The development centre Dubbelt utsatt by Bräcke Diakoni was active for some years in Sweden in the field of violence against women

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29 <http://www.sus.dk/udgivelser/seksuelle-overgreb-mod-mennesker-med-psykisk-funktionsnedsaettelse-forebyggelse-og-handtering/>

30 <http://www.sus.dk/udgivelser/seksuelle-overgreb-mod-mennesker-med-handicap-gode-rad-nar-skaden-er-sket/>

31 <http://www.sus.dk/udgivelser/seksuelle-overgreb-mod-mennesker-med-handicap-gode-rad-om-at-se-og-forebygge-overgreb/>

32 <http://www.sus.dk/udgivelser/seksuelle-overgreb-nej-tak/>

33 [www.lokk.dk](http://www.lokk.dk)

34 [www.naistenlinja.fi](http://www.naistenlinja.fi)

35 <http://www.stigamot.is/>

36 <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/publikationer2011/2011-9-6>

with disabilities. The centre gave education and produced films and information material. It also assisted in producing pictogram material on violence. Pictograms are a visual language that help people with limited speech abilities to read and write. With the aid of pictograms, people exposed to violence can more easily outline what has happened.<sup>37</sup>

### **GOOD EXAMPLES FOR INCREASED INDEPENDENCE, BETTER SELF-CONFIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PERSONAL RIGHTS**

A positive self-image, self-esteem and awareness of the law are protective factors for people with disabilities. According to the expert group, this is true regardless of gender or age. If the risk of exposure to violence is to be lessened, people with disabilities need to have a much higher status in society. Creating the right conditions is society's responsibility but changes must also come from these people themselves.

Good sex education prevents abuse and sexual violence. Everyone, including the disabled, needs to have a balanced view on what sexual relationships can be. Then it is easier for them to judge when someone is going too far and becoming offensive or abusive.

The project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence maintains that only a few of the hundreds of women with disabilities who were interviewed had a good awareness of their rights (Mandl et al. 2014).

The expert group highlights a number of bodies and activities that work well.

The Senso project in Finland developed material for sex education and guidance for people with developmental issues.

There is a national campaign in the Faroe Islands with seminars on violence against women in which the disability perspective is included. In the seminars and discussion groups, women can put words to their own experiences and hear what others have to report. They also receive information about their rights and where help can be found.<sup>38</sup>

Tabú in Iceland has a website put together by two young women with disabilities. They seek to influence through the website and other channels. The website draws attention to the subject of violence on many occasions.<sup>39</sup>

In Sweden presentations are organised on self-confidence, the right to one's own body and integrity for pupils in special school gymnasias. Nå vidare is a project including and for young people with intellectual disabilities who are subject to or risk being subject to honour-related violence and repression. The organisation TRIS (girls' rights in society) develops methods within the project and spreads knowledge about honour-related repression and violence among young people with intellectual disabilities. The project is mainly aimed at professionals who encounter the target group.<sup>40</sup>

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37 <http://t.brackediakoni.se/vara-projekt/arkiv/dubbelt-utsatt-vara-publikationer/>

38 <http://www.amr.fo/arbeidsoki/hardskapur-i-parlagi/>

39 <https://tabu2014.wordpress.com/english>

40 <http://www.tris.se/na-vidare-1/>

Respect 4 me is a project in Sweden aimed at women aged 16-21 with mild developmental issues. The project's educational material develops the ability to understand what exploitation is and to look out for warning signals. Awareness of various kinds of risk behaviour is also increased.<sup>41</sup>

### **ACCESSIBILITY OF CRISIS CENTRES AND SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION**

When there is a risk of violence or if the damage has already been done, vulnerable persons must be able to seek shelter and protection. There is a good deal of knowledge about the extent to which services for those at risk of violence are accessible to people with various types of disability, primarily in terms of the accessibility of crisis centres and sheltered accommodation.

The project Access to Specialised Victim Support Service for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence has shown that practically no sheltered accommodation is fully accessible for all types of disability. That is to say visual, hearing, movement and cognitive impairment. A few shelters were accessible by people with movement impairment. The most uncommon were shelters accessible by people with sight and hearing impairment. Finland's crisis centres are open to all, regardless of gender, but only four are equipped to receive people with impaired movement. As part of the project, principles for good practice were produced, (Snæfríðar-Gunnarsdóttir and Traustadóttir 2015).

In Denmark, crisis centres must be accessible for people with various types of disability. Currently eleven sheltered accommodation centres

are accessible for people with physical disabilities. Ringsted sheltered accommodation receives women and children with mental disabilities. Crisis centres that have not been specially designed can also be used by people with disabilities where possible, if they sleep on the ground floor for example. The same applies to women and children with mental disabilities.<sup>42</sup>

Even if it is possible to come into sheltered accommodation in purely practical terms, other conditions may be lacking. It may be that residents are expected to look after themselves independently, by buying and cooking food for example. The extent to which accommodation is able to offer people special support and help depends on the local authority's resources. If people are not judged to benefit from the protection or if it is not consistent with others in the residential group, a person can be referred to an alternative solution.

In Finland there are new rules for crisis centres. In a new law that came into effect on 1 January 2015, The Sheltered Housing and Compensation Act (RP 186/2014 rd), all sheltered accommodation services are governed and paid for with central funding. The institute for health and welfare (THL) has introduced a project to develop sheltered accommodation. This is partly concerned with being better able to receive people with disabilities.

In Norway the Municipal Crisis Centre Services Act has been in force since 2010. This regulates crisis centres for persons who are exposed to or risk being exposed to violence. The purpose of the act is to ensure total protection for women,

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41 <http://www.tris.se/na-vidare-1/>

42 <http://www.lokk.dk>

men and children who are exposed to violence or the threat of violence in close relationships. The act requires local authorities to meet their obligation to ensure that protection is offered. The local authority must ensure that support is offered as far as possible so as to meet the needs of individual users. According to the requirements for universal design, what every crisis centre offers must be accessible for all users, regardless of disability. Recent studies show however that this is not yet the case (Olsvik 2011; Gundersen and Winsvold 2014).

In Norway, previous governments have earmarked specific funding to make more crisis centres accessible. Following an information campaign directed at persons with physical disabilities, among others, it could be seen that more and more women with disabilities were seeking protection in crisis centres. However the

most recent evaluation shows that services that are offered to people with disabilities who are subject to violence and abuse have major gaps, even though a number have improved over the last ten years (Gundersen and Winsvold 2014). During the course of two years the project “A place for everyone” has carried out themed seminars and investigated accessibility at 58 acute accommodation centres in Sweden, Finland and Norway. The results show that 15 of these can accept women or children in wheelchairs, 88% have experience of receiving women with mental disabilities and 70% give women the opportunity to bring a personal assistant into the accommodation with them.

The expert group considers that controlling the accessibility of crisis centres and sheltered accommodation needs to be improved.







## LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

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