

FIMITIC CONFERENCE

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITY

7-9 November 2003, Zagreb , Croatia

RESOLUTION

Women with Disability - how far have we come?

The Third FIMITIC Women Conference in cooperation with the Croatian Union of Associations of Persons with Disabilities -SOIH- and under auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Walter Schwimmer as well as the Governmental Committee on Labour, Social Policy and Health Care of the Republic of Croatia in the framework of the European Year of Disabled People 2003 attracted the participation of 110 delegates from 15 European countries to exchange information and good practices in improving the situation of women with disability with a special focus on employment, education, health and violence/sexual abuse.

At the close of this Conference the following Resolution was approved:

The improvement in the legal situation of women has been considerable in many spheres of life, equal rights are yet to be realised. This situation is even more acute for disabled women in comparison to non disabled women and disabled men.

Women' s rights are human rights, equally to be applied for women with disability in the following areas:

RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT

Disabled women have the right to be professionally trained and motivated for employment opportunities in the labour market to enable them to contribute fully and equally to the society, including the right to be producers of values and not only recipients, thus supporting financially themselves and to achieve self-esteem and social recognition. Laws and regulations in the employment field must not discriminate. Employers to be motivated to hire women with disabilities. Public awareness raising must help to overcome the judgement of gender roles and stereotypes. Assistance to be given to maintain employment supported by services and legal protection against job loss on account of disability or by creation of small enterprises, self employment, cooperatives, social and entrepreneur firms. The currently strong decrease of employability in the public employment and other sectors must not specifically affect women with disability. Voluntary work must have the same benefits as working in paid jobs. The programmes of the International Labour office, the European Trade Union Confederation and other organisations dealing with employment and including women with disabilities to be taken as a model to establish the concept of employability in line with mainstream employment. Statistics must be made publicly available and itemised for men and women.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Disabled women and girls have the right to full access to education and training in mainstream primary, secondary and high schools as well as to vocational training as prerequisite for equal opportunities and reintegration into working life.

Teachers, educators and parents must be improved and to be given by women who are themselves disabled. Girls with disabilities must receive educational opportunities and vocational training for more qualified and future-oriented jobs in line with new technologies.

In addition, more vocational guidance must take into account more strongly the living conditions. Every

effort must be done that girls with disabilities gain greater self assurance, same time developing a positive attitude towards disability. The education in the family should take into account the independency need of a later adult disabled women. Instead of charity or medical concept positive images of disabled girls and women to be shown, especially also by the mass media.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Effective primary health and medical care must assure the specific needs of disabled women at home or at accessible practitioners and hospitals with appropriate adapted facilities and adequate trained health personnel. Medical rehabilitation services must be gender neutral and available to all women with disabilities regardless of age.

The right to a self-determined life also includes the right to sexuality. The sexuality of disabled women and the integrity must be recognized.

Women with disability must have access to guidance and information on sexuality, on contraception, pregnancy and parenthood. Disabled girls must receive comprehensive sex education. The desire to have children must be regarded as a matter of course and has to be supported.

Gynaecologists must be given comprehensive training on different types of disabilities and learn to be more sensitive in dealing with disabled women. Home visits of general practitioners and pediatricians to be set up.

In pregnancy, disabled women have not to be made feel insecure or urged to have an abortion. A community framework must provide disabled women with individual assistance during pregnancy and motherhood.

Mothers with disabilities, particularly those raising children alone, must be given advice and support. Children of mothers with disabilities must be given priority when seeking a place in a facility looking after children.

Statistical data with regard to health indications and the medical treatment to be made available. Heavily cut downs in the health sector have not to endanger the urgent needed medical therapy of women with disability. Coordinated access to health services and structured as to type of disability and illness and adapted facilities for examination, diagnostics and therapy as well as combined and transferable rehabilitation services for women with disabilities are indispensable.

RIGHT TO PROTECTION AGAINST VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Disabled girls and women due to their vulnerability are more likely to be victims of physical, psychological and sexual violence.

Research must be undertaken to examine levels of violence and sexual abuse against disabled women in order to find appropriate responses which might differ from responses to violence towards disabled men. Violence and abuse must be recognised by legislators, judges and public prosecutors.

Action must be taken to prevent these forms of violence through information training, awareness raising and monitoring.

Training courses in assertiveness and self-defence for women with disability to be encouraged and supported.

Better channels for reporting instances of violence to be established and there must be more effective institutional responses to these reports.

Advisory services and women's initiatives must take violence and abuse into account, and advice should be provided by women with disability themselves.

DEMANDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Networks should be strengthened and developed in order to promote solidarity among women with disability and also with non-disabled women and to improve the exchange of information and experience. Programmes to increase public awareness should be intensified in order to challenge negative attitudes to disabled women and help to integrate disabled women into mainstream culture.

States should ensure the recruitment of a proportion of disabled women in public administration as part of equal opportunities programmes.

Special programmes should be developed which assist and support disabled women in their integration

into the employment market.

Encouragement of women with disability to be done to enter into decision-making and participation in political life by promotion through education, training and awareness raising.

To this end the role of disability movement on local, national and international level is very important and has to be strengthened.

Results of surveys, started within FIMITIC member associations to be followed up to highlight the factors contributing to the very difficult situation of women with disabilities in the individual countries.

Proposals will be made by FIMITIC on international and national policies and practices designed to meet the specific needs of women with disabilities in order to improve their quality of life.

We strongly advocate for equalization of opportunities of women with disabilities in everyday life and demand from all national and international institutions coordinated action in the socio-political and legislative fields, which will enable disabled women to participate also in decision making processes on all levels, the need to be clearly formulated in the new European Constitutional Treaty and in the United Nations Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.