

# RESPONSE Policy Recommendations

How to develop enabling  
frameworks on the  
prevention of gender-  
based violence against  
women with disabilities

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**Project name:** Responsive services to address gender-based violence against women with disabilities

**Project acronym:** RESPONSE

**Call:** ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PCOOP-ENGO

## **Deliverable 4.2 - RESPONSE Policy Recommendations**

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# 1. Introduction

This document presents a set of policy recommendations that are an outcome of the RESPONSE project. The project aimed to tackle gender based violence, against women with disabilities in the European Union. These recommendations aim to assist policymakers at regional and EU levels in creating frameworks that effectively prevent and address gender based violence while safeguarding the rights, safety and well being of women with disabilities.

Various international agreements, including the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and regional instruments like the Istanbul Convention, actively affirm and uphold a woman's right to live free from violence.

Approximately 700 million women and girls worldwide are estimated to have disabilities. UN Women reports that the prevalence of disability in the female population averages at 19.2%, equating to around one in five women.<sup>1</sup> Among the 228 million women in the EU<sup>2</sup> in 2022, 29,5% have a disability<sup>3</sup> which accounts for approximately 67 million of women and girls with disabilities.

Despite this substantial number, women and girls with disabilities often remain unnoticed and excluded from participating in decisions that shape their lives, and exposed to an elevated risk of gender-based violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Council 47th Session; Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. Statement by Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Panel 1: Violence against women and girls with disabilities | OHCHR](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Statistics | Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Disability in the EU: facts and figures - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)



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As highlighted by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No.3, Women with disabilities face an elevated vulnerability to violence, exploitation, and abuse in comparison to their counterparts without disabilities. This violence can manifest in interpersonal, institutional, or structural forms. Institutional and structural violence encompass any systemic inequality or discriminatory practices that maintain a woman in a subordinate position, either physically or ideologically, relative to other individuals within her family, household, or community.<sup>4</sup> Women with disabilities thus face unique challenges and vulnerabilities due to the intersection of gender and disability, which often result in barriers to accessing support services, justice, and protection.

The global data on gender-based violence against women with disabilities is limited, and this translates into even heightened vulnerability for women with impairments. According to the RESPONSE State of the Art Report, 8 out of 10 women with disabilities who participated in the study from six EU countries<sup>5</sup> have been victims of gender-based violence.<sup>6</sup>

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025<sup>7</sup> also clearly recognises this issue and highlights the need of paying particular attention to the intersectionality of gender with other grounds of discrimination such as disability; it also confirm the relevance of mainstreaming the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the European Commission and Member States activities, both signatories of the Convention.

Recognising the urgency and importance of addressing this issue, the RESPONSE project aimed to empower stakeholders, increase knowledge, and foster collaboration between the disability and the victims' rights sectors.

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<sup>4</sup> CRPD, General Comment No 3 Article 6: Women and girls with disabilities (Adopted 26 August 2016), para 29.

<sup>5</sup> The Study involved a total of 91 women with disabilities from France, Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary.

<sup>6</sup> [RESPONSE - EASPD](#)

<sup>7</sup> A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 European Commission, 2020



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These policy recommendations are grounded in research, consultations, and experiences gathered throughout the RESPONSE project. They highlight key areas for action and provide practical steps for policy makers to address gender-based violence against women with disabilities effectively. The recommendations are organised into specific thematic areas, reflecting the diverse dimensions of this complex issue.

## 2. Develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence

Supporting services for women with disabilities who are victims of gender-based violence face several challenges:

### **Accessibility**

Many support services are not adequately accessible for women with disabilities. Physical accessibility, such as ramps or accessible facilities, may be lacking, making it difficult for women with mobility impairments to access shelters, counselling centres, or legal aid services. Moreover, communication barriers may exist due to a lack of sign language interpreters, accessible information, or communication tools for women with intellectual, developmental and sensorial disabilities.

### **Lack of Training and Expertise**

Professionals in the disability care and support sector, law enforcement agencies, health care sector, social and education services, and judicial sectors often lack sufficient training and expertise in addressing the unique needs and experiences of women with disabilities who have faced gender-based violence. This knowledge gap poses significant challenges in providing effective support and services to these women. Professionals may lack awareness of disability-related issues, including the intersection of disability and gender, and the specific



barriers and challenges faced by these women. This can result in inadequate support and services that fail to meet their specific needs.

### **Limited Coordination and Collaboration**

Collaboration among different service providers and professionals in other sectors such as legal support services, healthcare providers, and victims' support organisations is often limited, leading to fragmented and ineffective responses, leaving women with disabilities without comprehensive support.

### **Stereotypes and Stigma**

Women with disabilities facing gender-based violence may encounter additional barriers due to stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination. Misconceptions and prejudices about disability and gender can undermine their credibility as victims, leading to disbelief, victim-blaming, or trivialisation of their experiences. This can result in a lack of appropriate support and may deter women with disabilities from seeking help.

### **Limited Resources and Funding**

Support services for gender-based violence prevention and response often face constraints in terms of funding, staffing and quality of support. Insufficient funding can limit the availability and accessibility of services, including helplines, counselling, shelters, legal aid, and rehabilitation support. This lack of resources hampers the ability to provide comprehensive and tailored support to women with disabilities. In some countries, women with disabilities often also face difficulties in finding support that isn't institutionalised.

### **Legal and Justice System Barriers**

Women with disabilities may encounter some specific barriers within the legal and justice system. These can include inaccessible courtrooms, lack of procedural adjustments that take into account



the specific needs of each person, limited understanding of disability rights, and challenges in obtaining accessible information or communication support. Such barriers can impede their access to justice, exacerbating their vulnerability to further violence.

### 3. There is the need for...

#### Inclusive Policies and Legislation

- Develop and implement **inclusive policies and legislation** that target gender-based violence against women with disabilities, addressing the needs of women with disabilities and guaranteeing their full legal protection.
- Ensure that policies and legislation follow a rights-based approach and take into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women with disabilities.

#### Good practices: the role of the facilitator

Procedural facilitators are specialised and impartial professionals dedicated to assessing, designing, advising, and providing support to persons with disabilities, regardless of whether their disability is officially recognised. Their primary objective is to ensure that individuals with disabilities can exercise their right of access to justice on an equal basis with others. They also extend their assistance to justice professionals involved in legal proceedings.

The role of a procedural facilitator can be initiated by various parties, including women with disabilities themselves, legal representatives, judges, public prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, or victim support services. It is recommended that facilitators are engaged from the earliest stage possible, ideally before the formal filing of a complaint, especially in the case of victims.



Support from a procedural facilitator can be requested by the woman with a disability, lawyers, judges, public prosecutors, police services or victim assistance services. Ideally, this should happen when detecting the need for procedural adjustments, preferably before the complaint is filed in the case of victims.

By intervening early in the process, procedural facilitators can identify and implement necessary adjustments and accommodations to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in legal proceedings and have their rights upheld effectively. This proactive approach enhances accessibility, inclusivity, and fairness within the justice system for all individuals.

## Accessible Support Services

- Ensure that support services, including helplines, shelters, counselling, and legal aid, are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of women with disabilities.
- Allocate sufficient resources to enhance the capacity of service providers for persons with disabilities, disability rights organisations, women's rights organisations, law enforcement agencies, health care providers, social and education services, and judicial sectors, to deliver gender-responsive and disability-inclusive services.

## Interagency Cooperation

- Foster interagency and inter-sectoral cooperation and collaboration between service providers for persons with disabilities, disability rights organisations, women's rights organisations, law enforcement agencies, health care providers, social and education services, and judicial sectors.
- Establish referral mechanisms and protocols to ensure effective coordination and information sharing among different stakeholders.





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## Training and Capacity Building

- Provide comprehensive and ongoing training programmes for service providers, professionals, and relevant stakeholders to increase their knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Include disability-specific modules in existing training programmes for professionals working in the fields of law enforcement, healthcare, social and education services, and judicial sectors.
- Involve and educate the women with disabilities and their circle of support in awareness raising and capacity building activities.

### **Good practices: Inclusive Training Led by Women with Disabilities in Spanish National Police**

Following their participation in the RESPONSE Workshops, representatives from the Spanish National Police took proactive steps by organising specialised training sessions on the topic of gender-based violence against women with disabilities. In these sessions, women with disabilities assumed the role of trainers, imparting valuable knowledge to officers within the National Police departments on addressing cases of violence against women with disabilities.

The inclusion of women with disabilities as trainers not only injects authenticity into the training sessions but also cultivates a more inclusive learning environment for law enforcement personnel. These trainers bring firsthand insights into the vulnerabilities and obstacles that women with disabilities may encounter in situations of violence. Consequently, this approach enhances the officers' ability to respond with both effectiveness and empathy.

This noteworthy initiative aligns with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, reinforcing a comprehensive understanding of the intersectionality between gender and disability. By empowering women with disabilities as active contributors, it not only authenticates the training process but also contributes to a more informed law enforcement response to instances of violence against them.



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## Data Collection and Research

- Promote the collection of disaggregated data on gender-based violence against women with disabilities to better understand the prevalence, nature, and impact of such violence.
- Support research initiatives that examine the underlying causes and risk factors of gender-based violence against women with disabilities to inform evidence-based policy and programme development.

## Empowerment and Participation

- Promote the meaningful participation of women with disabilities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programmes, and services related to gender-based violence.
- Support initiatives that empower women with disabilities to assert their rights, access justice, and exercise advocacy in matters related to their safety and well-being.

## Awareness and Prevention Campaigns

- Launch comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns to challenge stereotypes, inform on the rights and needs of women with disabilities, and promote a culture of zero tolerance for gender-based violence.
- Develop targeted prevention programmes that address the specific vulnerabilities and barriers faced by women with disabilities, focusing on empowerment, self-defense, and building healthy relationships.
- Emphasise the crucial role of boys and men in prevention efforts and the creation of a safer society.



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## International Cooperation

- Foster international cooperation and exchange of best practices among EU Member States and partner countries to learn from successful models and approaches in addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Collaborate with international organisations and bodies to promote the rights of women with disabilities and advocate for the inclusion of disability perspectives in global gender equality and anti-violence initiatives.

## 4. Conclusions

Access to rights-based and gender-responsive support services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence remains a significant challenge within the European Union. Numerous barriers hinder the realisation of effective support. However, the RESPONSE project firmly believes that the goal of inclusive and responsive support services is both realistic and attainable. Achieving this objective requires the commitment of all stakeholders involved, who must collaborate to create inclusive learning environments that empower women with disabilities.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the specific needs of women with disabilities and provide them the needed support. Strong leadership from Member States and European institutions is imperative to foster a shift in attitudes and approaches towards inclusive settings at the local and community levels.

In line with the objectives of the RESPONSE project, the following recommendations are proposed for European, national and regional policy makers to contribute to the realisation of inclusive education and responsive support services across Europe.



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## Recommendations for European policy makers

- Mainstream disability rights perspectives into all relevant EU policies and initiatives, including those related to gender equality, violence prevention, justice, and social inclusion.
- Ensure that disability mainstreaming efforts explicitly address the specific vulnerabilities and barriers faced by women with disabilities in relation to gender-based violence.
- Allocate dedicated funding streams within existing EU funding programmes to support projects and initiatives focused on preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Prioritise funding for capacity building, training, and awareness-raising activities for service providers and professionals working with women with disabilities.
- Facilitate the harmonisation of legislation and standards across EU Member States to ensure a consistent and high level of protection for women with disabilities against gender-based violence.
- Encourage the exchange of best practices and promote the adoption of comprehensive and inclusive legal frameworks across the EU.
- Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism at the EU level to assess the implementation and impact of policies and initiatives addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Regularly collect data on the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence against women with disabilities across EU member states to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- Establish platforms and networks that bring together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to foster dialogue, cooperation, and joint learning.
- Promote awareness and education campaigns at the EU level to challenge stereotypes, raise awareness about the rights and experiences of women with disabilities, and promote inclusive and respectful attitudes towards them.



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## Recommendations for national, regional, local policy makers

- Foster collaboration and coordination among relevant government agencies, including health, social services, justice, police authorities, education, and disability affairs, to ensure a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Establish mechanisms for regular information sharing, joint planning, and cooperation to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and support services.
- Allocate funding to improve physical and cognitive accessibility, communication support, and the availability of specialised services tailored to the specific needs of women with disabilities.
- Launch public awareness-raising campaigns at national and regional levels to challenge stereotypes, inform on the rights and experiences of women with disabilities, and promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and zero tolerance for gender-based violence. Ensure these campaigns meet all cognitive accessibility requirements by presenting information in multiple formats, making them accessible to diverse audiences.



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## ANNEX 1 - Policy Recommendations Posters



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# Main challenges

of developing gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



# 1

## Accessibility

Many support services are not adequately accessible for women with disabilities. Physical accessibility, like ramps, may be lacking, making it difficult for women with mobility impairments to access shelters, counselling centres, or legal aid services. There may also be communication barriers due to a lack of sign language interpreters, accessible content, or communication tools for women with intellectual and sensorial disabilities.

## Lack of training and expertise

Professionals in the disability care and support sector, law enforcement agencies, healthcare sector, social and education services, and judicial sectors often lack sufficient training and expertise in addressing the unique needs and experiences of women with disabilities who have faced gender-based violence. They may lack awareness of disability-related issues, including the intersection of disability and gender, and the specific barriers and challenges faced by these women. This can result in inadequate support and services that fail to meet their specific needs.

# 2

# 3

## Limited coordination and collaboration

Collaboration among different service providers and professionals in other sectors, such as legal support services, healthcare providers, and victim support organisations, is often limited, leading to fragmented and ineffective responses, leaving women with disabilities without comprehensive support.

More challenges



# Main challenges

of developing gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



# 4

## Stereotypes and stigma

Women with disabilities facing gender-based violence may encounter additional barriers due to stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination. Misconceptions and prejudices about disability and gender can undermine their credibility as victims, leading to disbelief, victim-blaming, or dismissal of their experiences. This can result in a lack of appropriate support and may deter women with disabilities from seeking help.

## Limited resources and funding

Support services for gender-based violence prevention and response often face resource constraints. Insufficient funding can limit the availability and accessibility of services, including helplines, counselling, shelters, legal aid, and rehabilitation support. This lack of resources hampers the ability to provide comprehensive and tailored support to women with disabilities. In some countries, Women with disabilities often also face difficulties in finding support that isn't institutionalised.

# 5

# 6

## Barriers in the legal and justice system

Women with disabilities may encounter some specific barriers within the legal and justice system. These can include inaccessible courtrooms, lack of disability-related accommodations, limited understanding of disability rights, and challenges in obtaining accessible information or communication support. Such barriers can impede their access to justice, exacerbating their vulnerability to further violence.

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# Priority needs

to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



# 1

## Inclusive policies and legislation

- Develop and implement inclusive policies and legislation that target gender-based violence against women with disabilities, addressing their specific needs and guaranteeing them full legal protection.
- Ensure that policies and legislation are based on a rights-based approach and take into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women with disabilities.

## Accessible support services

- Ensure that support services (e.g., helplines, shelters, counselling, and legal aid) are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of women with disabilities.
- Allocate resources to enhance the capacity of service providers for persons with disabilities, disability rights organisations, women's rights organisations, law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, social and education services, and judicial sectors, to deliver gender-responsive and disability-inclusive services.

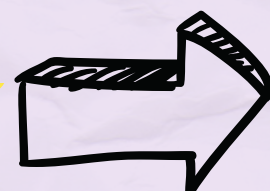
# 2

# 3

## Interagency cooperation

- Foster interagency and inter-sectoral collaboration between service providers for persons with disabilities, disability rights organisations, women's rights organisations, law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, social and education services, and judicial sectors.
- Establish referral mechanisms and protocols to ensure effective coordination and information sharing among different stakeholders.

**More needs**



# Priority needs

to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



## 4 Training and capacity building

- Provide comprehensive and ongoing training programmes for service providers, professionals, and other stakeholders to increase their knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Include disability-specific modules in existing training programmes for professionals within law enforcement, healthcare, social and education services, and judicial sectors.
- Provide women with disabilities and their circle of support with awareness-raising and capacity-building activities.

## Data collection and research

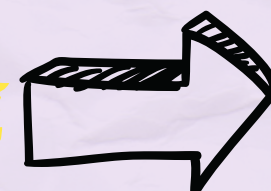
- Promote the collection of disaggregated data on gender-based violence against women with disabilities to better understand the prevalence, nature, and impact of such violence.
- Support research initiatives that examine the underlying causes and risk factors of gender-based violence against women with disabilities to inform evidence-based policy and programme development.

# 5

## 6 Empowerment and participation

- Promote the meaningful participation of women with disabilities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programmes, and services related to gender-based violence.
- Support initiatives that empower women with disabilities to assert their rights, access justice, and exercise advocacy in matters related to their safety and well-being.

More needs



# Priority needs

to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



## 7

### Awareness and prevention campaigns

- Launch awareness-raising campaigns to challenge stereotypes, inform on the rights and needs of women with disabilities, and promote a zero tolerance culture for gender-based violence.
- Develop targeted prevention programmes that address the specific vulnerabilities and barriers faced by women with disabilities, focusing on empowerment, self-defence, and building healthy relationships.
- Emphasise the crucial role of boys and men in prevention efforts and the creation of a safer society.

### International cooperation

- Foster international cooperation and exchange of best practices among EU Member States and partner countries to learn from successful models and approaches in addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.
- Collaborate with international organisations and bodies to promote the rights of women with disabilities and advocate for the inclusion of disability perspectives in global gender equality and anti-violence initiatives.

## 8

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# Recommendations

for **European policymakers** to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



**Mainstream disability rights perspectives** into all relevant EU policies and initiatives, including those related to gender equality, violence prevention, justice, and social inclusion.

1

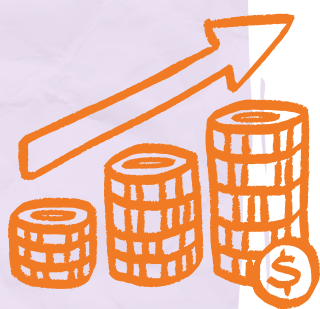


2

Ensure disability mainstreaming efforts explicitly **address the specific vulnerabilities and barriers** faced by women with disabilities in relation to gender-based violence.

**Allocate dedicated funding streams within existing EU funding programmes** to support projects and initiatives focused on preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.

3



4

**Prioritise funding for capacity building, training, and awareness-raising** activities for service providers and professionals working with women with disabilities.

**Facilitate the harmonisation of legislation and standards** across EU Member States to ensure a consistent and high level of protection for women with disabilities against gender-based violence.

5



**More European recommendations**



# Recommendations

for **European policymakers** to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



**Encourage the exchange of best practices** and promote the adoption of comprehensive and **inclusive legal frameworks** across the EU.

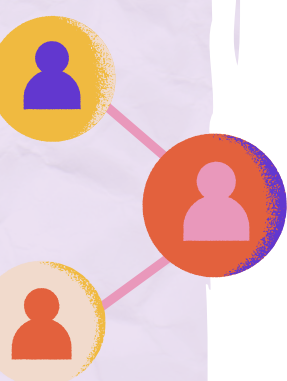


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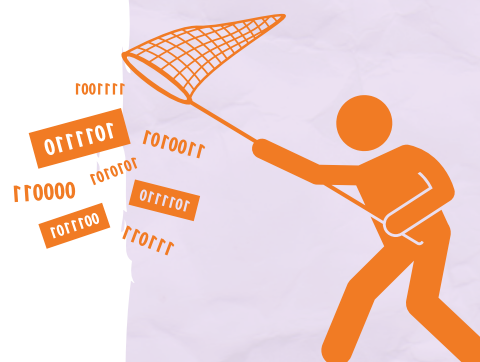


**Establish a monitoring and evaluation** mechanism at EU level to assess the implementation and impact of policies and initiatives addressing gender-based violence against women with disabilities.

**Regularly collect data** on the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence against women with disabilities across EU member states to inform evidence-based policymaking.



7



8

**Establish platforms and networks** that bring together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to foster dialogue, cooperation, and joint learning.

**Promote awareness and education campaigns** at EU level to challenge stereotypes, raise awareness about the rights and experiences of women with disabilities, and promote inclusive and respectful attitudes towards them.

10



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# Recommendations

for **local, regional and national** policymakers to develop gender-responsive services for women with disabilities facing gender-based violence



**Foster cooperation among relevant government agencies**, including health, social services, justice, police authorities, education, and disability affairs, to ensure a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence against women with disabilities.



1

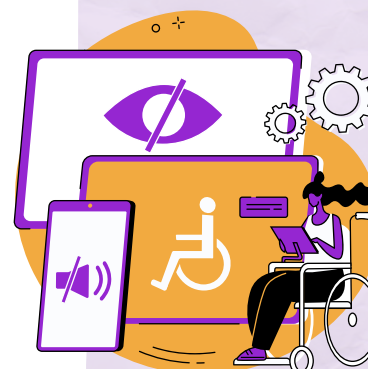


2

**Establish mechanisms for regular information sharing**, joint planning, and cooperation to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and support services.

**Allocate resources to improve physical and cognitive accessibility**, communication support, and the availability of specialised services tailored to the specific needs of women with disabilities.

3



4



**Launch public awareness-raising campaigns** at national and regional levels to challenge stereotypes, inform on the rights and experiences of women with disabilities, and promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and zero tolerance for gender-based violence. Ensure these campaigns meet cognitive accessibility needs by presenting information in multiple formats



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