

# Weiber

# ZEIT

**Special: Europe**

## Dear reader,

This issue of WeiberZEIT focuses exclusively on the topic of „Europe“, to mark the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and the founding event for a European network of disabled women in May 2007. In order for this issue of WeiberZEIT to be accessible to as many people as possible in Europe, it has been produced in German on one side, and can also be read in English if you turn it over.

The english as well as the german version contain a summary of each article in an easy to read version.

In this issue, WeiberZEIT focuses on the following topics:

What are the living conditions for disabled women in Europe? What is their situation in central and Eastern Europe? Why do we need a European network of disabled women? What does the UN convention on the rights of disabled people mean for disabled women? Which disability organisations in Europe already have women's committees? Why are disabled people also demanding a European directive to cover their issues?

The living conditions of disabled women, as women and as disabled people, are still not being regarded in all European countries. Equal Opportunities must not be a buzz word just for this year! We must campaign together for equal rights for disabled women in Europe!

Editorial team of WeiberZEIT

## One Voice in Europe - Disabled women are developing a network

By Martina Puschke

European countries are growing ever closer together, and the significance of European policy is continuously increasing for the states in the European Union (EU). For example, European directives relating to anti-discrimination legislation have been particularly helpful to us in establishing uniform rights to prevent disadvantages for disabled women and men.

For many people, however, European policy is also a rather obscure jungle. Who is responsible for legislation? What constitutes a European directive? What are the European agreements? Which issues can or cannot be addressed at European level?



The main objectives for disabled women are as follows:

- The establishment of uniform European regulations for the consideration of the attributes of „woman“ and „disability“ within the legal guidelines of the EU member states.
- The consideration and advancement of the rights of disabled women to improve their quality of life all over Europe.
- Ratification of the UN Convention for the protection of the rights of disabled people.

## What is the best way for us to achieve these objectives?

Disability federations in the individual EU member states have not considered the issues concerning women. The specific situation of disabled women is not given anywhere near enough consideration by women's organisations. Not all European countries have specific national networks of disabled women. Besides, there is a lack of resources for European campaigning work on top of their national lobbying work. Because of this situation, the issues affecting disabled women in Europe cannot be sufficiently addressed at a national level.

There is a lot of knowledge about European policy within the European organisations and the European Disability Forum (EDF) in order to navigate the „EU Jungle“. There is also a women's committee. Within the European women's lobby, disabled women are working with and for organisations such as Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) or Fimitic, which also has a specific women's network. These already existing networks are important. However, it is a fact that the women's groups or networks are merely sub-groups within all these organisations. The issues concerning disabled women are seen as issues amongst many others.

Thus, an independent European network of disabled women is needed, which can carry out campaigning work independently of other organisations and thereby put women's issues on the agenda. This is the way the network women feel it should happen. In this network, existing experiences and demands from disabled women are to be collated, so that we can sing from the same hymn sheet in the future and have one voice in Europe. The importance of having one voice was highlighted when we were working on the UN Convention. At the meetings in New York, Europe had to express itself with one voice. This also applied to the European NGOs, who had to come to an agreement. As we are aware, with regard to the women's issues, it worked very well despite some teething problems.

The networking of disabled women in Europe for campaigning for our demands more strongly is an ambitious aim. However, we feel that it is worth it!

Join us in this European network! You can find more information in German and English at [www.weibernetz.de](http://www.weibernetz.de)

**Martina Puschke** is projekt manager of the political representation of the interests of women with disabilities in Weibernetz

## Nothing about us, nothing without us!

### The Position of women with disabilities (WWD) in the European Union

By Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel

The European Union counts 37 million disabled citizens. More than half are women and girls with disabilities (approx. 53% to 58% in 2015)<sup>[1]</sup>. Yet after 27 years<sup>[2]</sup> of EU disability policy and antidiscrimination legislation, this majority is still struggling to be heard and taken into consideration by the decision-makers in EU member states and the disability and women's movement alike. As there is a general lack of data broken down to gender and disability, and research concerning the issues women and disability is just in the early stages, WWD's situation cannot be substantiated by substantial and reliable data. Thus women and girls with disabilities often remain invisible citizens' in mainstream policy, within research and not specifically targeted within disability, women and/or gender policies.

Society often questions whether the situation of disabled women varies so much from the situation of disabled men. The notion of multiple discrimination, on grounds of gender and disability is very complex. To understand WWD's situation we have to unfold the complexity of the fact that we are women, disabled and women with disabilities (apart from other intersectional discriminatory - elements such as ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, class, poverty, etc.)

#### Complexity of disability and gender

Women (and men) with disabilities are often seen as sex-neutral beings, and without a sexual identity. They are most likely referred to as **The Disabled** with no reference to being people, let alone to being a woman or a man. This reference, often a result of the medical model, has separated the needs of a woman the first place from the needs related to the impairment or the disabling factors in society. WWD are born first as women and the disability is a secondary dimension, which is exacerbated by environmental and social factors. It cannot be seen as unimportant but certainly not the only distinguishing feature in an individual.

Society believes that disabled women and disabled men have the same needs, based primarily on the disability and not based on human potential and values.

Women live in cultures based on a long tradition of paternalistic, cultural and religious dominance of menover women, wherein women are struggling for their

rights such as equal pay pension and benefit rights, reconciliation of work and family life, reproductive rights, etc. Each woman in the EU faces a daily risk to become a victim of gender-based violence and abuse. Perpetrators of such violence can be men with and without disabilities. The position of WWD is on gender grounds no different from non-disabled women. On the basis of their impairments they face however disabling factors that restrict them in a larger context than non-disabled women. The EU's long tradition of identifying gender based discrimination and disadvantages and creating legislation and policies to advance the position of women in our societies, has hardly effected WWD. For too long WWD are referred back to disability policies only therewith denying their gender aspects and silencing the intrinsically linked discrimination or advantages.

### **Disadvantages in comparison with non-disabled women**

WWD women are valued even less than non-disabled women in relation to beauty, motherhood or parenthood, sexual attractiveness as a woman. The chance of being a wife/partner or for instance a disabled lesbian can become denied elements.

If you are a woman with a learning disability, or a woman with high dependency needs the discrimination is likely to increase, based on the fact that society in general, including non-disabled women who are also often the care-takers, are convinced that they are the sole to judges of your ability to be a woman.

WWD throughout the EU form the highest rate of unemployment, are more often deprived of education and further education and furthermore not stimulated in their development towards all facets of womanhood.

When institutionalised or being a woman with high dependency needs are not receiving the special attention or dignity needed as a woman: no gender specific choice for your carer, hardly time for female related support (e.g. make-up if you wish so, fashionable clothing instead of only practical ones, courtesy around intimate care, gender based adolescent support).

### **Disadvantage in comparison with men with disabilities**

In general being a woman is a risk factor for becoming disabled because of e.g. poverty, gender based violence, Female Genital Mutilation, armed conflict and disasters, malnutrition, insufficient medical care, HIV infection, to suffer from depression, panic or eating disorders. On top of that girls and women with disabilities face

unique barriers in comparison to men with disabilities (and non-disabled women!), such as

#### **Economic barriers**

- EU data shows that percentage of employment rates for non-disabled men is 76% versus 36% for MWD. For women, the percentages vary from 55% for non-disabled to 25% for WWD.
- WWD are subjected to low income, cultural and social status
- Benefit systems and pension schemes are hardly designed for WWD
- WWD face life-long poverty

#### **Health and reproductive health/rights barriers**

- Many barriers make access to birth control and family planning very difficult, such as physical and communication barriers. Overall we see insufficient gender and disability specific (reproductive) health care and rehabilitation services
- There presupposed role that women should play, and that assigned to disabled women contradicts: women in general are pressured by society to motherhood, while WWD are discouraged to have children, and this leads in many EU member states to
  - selective or forced sterilisation <sup>[3]</sup>
  - abortion,
  - the denial of adoption on the basis of the „care-taking incapacity of the mother“
  - false information is given about their physical capabilities to bear children
- Learning disabled women are at higher risk to forced sterilisation or abortions without consent
- Health care institutions discourage conception of WWD with an inheritable impairment/disease by stipulating WWD's „criminal behaviour“ in case of pregnancy. It can result in refusing adequate medical or maternity care.



- WWD and women with mental health problems in particular are frequently victims of pharmaceutical and medical experiments. Drugs, undefined medical treatments, operations and therapies are tested on. A recent research in the UK (2002) on treatments with Electro Convulsive Therapy showed that 68% of people treated with ECT were women and only 32% men. 44% were women over 65! Estimates show that only about 25% of ECT's have been properly reported.

### Women with disabilities and violence

Studies carried out in EU member states reveal that an overall estimate of 89% of all women and girls with disabilities experience at least once in their life severe forms of disability-gender-based violence. Approximately 76% were a victim of sexual abuse at least once in their life.

### Women with disabilities and Human Rights

The concept of disability as well as the concept of gender are internationally accepted human rights aspects and political and civil rights are recognized to women (and men) with disabilities as to all other women and men and as is the necessity to adopt the necessary measures to live their life fully. Therefore WWD's right to economical and social security, to employment, to live with their own family, to participate in social and cultural life, to be protected against any form of exploitation, abuse or degrading conditions should be recognized and advanced.

As women with disabilities we live in a dominated non-disabled society, wherein the norm is healthy, able and fit to work or actively contribute to society. WWD are still unable to fully participate into society on the basis of the issues mentioned above. As most countries of the EU chose after World War II to create an open and social welfare society it inextricably linked itself to care and welfare for the „needed“ by setting up care structures for persons with disabilities and elderly persons and therewith devaluating dependent citizens' to second class citizens.

The CRPD is the first of its kind that recognises specifically women and girls with disabilities and promotes their advancement through legal binding convention text specifically targeted at them <sup>[4]</sup> as well as gender references in various articles <sup>[5]</sup>. The Convention starts with a clear binding commitment to equality between women and men<sup>[6]</sup> with disabilities.

### Conclusion

For too long women with disabilities have been denied their EU citizens rights. They are underrepresented within disability organisations on national, European and international level. Resources are hardly allocated to disabled women's networks and the overall agenda of disability organisations have a so-called impairment and male specific focus, i.e. focusing mainly on employment from a breadwinner's perspective. Although their number is growing within mainstream women's organisations and their position was elevated on European level <sup>[7]</sup> women's organisations are still not fully open or equipped to WWD's participation in their structures. Mainstream women organisations should adopt statutory provisions to include WWD.

Issues such as disability and gender-based violence should be included in EU violence prevention programs and reliable data should be gathered about the daily lives of WWD to charter the magnitude of violence and discrimination in their lives.

The European Union and its member states by rapidly ratifying the UN Convention and adapting it to their national and European legislation will truly advance the position of WWD throughout the EU. WWD should be directly involved in the monitoring process of the Convention. This means that resources should be allocated to women with disabilities' specific organisations.

A paradigm shift is needed not only from a medical model to a social human rights model, but including a gender approach on the human rights model on disability. Only then we can really speak of

### Nothing About US Women, Without US Women!

**Lydia La Rivière-Zijdel** is an international consultant on gender, diversity and sport. Longterm activities as board member of the European Women's Lobby, the women's committee of the European Disability Forum and the Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development.

1) Eurostat Observations until 2002

2) Resolution of the Council of 31 May 1990; Resolution of the Council and the Ministers for Education meeting within the Council concerning integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education COM (96)406 final of 30 July 1996; Communication of the Commission on equality of opportunity for people with disabilities

3) although disabled men are at risk too, the number of sterilised disabled men is a fraction in comparison with women

4) Article 6.1 and 6.2

5) Articles 8, 16, 25, 28, 34

6) Article 3

7) Due to a disabled woman being the president of the European Women's Lobby from 2002-2005

## Situation of women with disability in the Central and Eastern European countries

By Erzsébet Szöllösi

Co-operation between disability organizations in the Central and Eastern European countries has been very active for more than 30 years. The similar economic and social structure of these countries resulted in the same problems for people with disabilities. The National Federation of Disabled Persons' Associations in Hungary (MEOSZ) has always taken active part in the European and international disability organizations and networks and has always fulfilled leading position in these organizations. MEOSZ gives the Vice-Presidents to FIMITIC and DPI-Europe as well. Our involvement in the activities of European and international organizations, as well as our close co-operation with individual Central and Eastern European countries has given us a very good opportunity to exchange views about the situation of disabled persons Central and Eastern Europe wide.

The underprivileged social status of people with disabilities is manifest in two fundamental ways in the Central and Eastern European countries. One of these is the condition of our physical environment, including infrastructure, access to goods and services in general, and the availability of these to people living with disabilities, in particular. The other area concerns the social milieu, the attitudes of the public towards people with disabilities and the general social perception of people living with disabilities.

The societies of these countries are generally going through a process of transition where the habits associated with the former social structure are still surviving side by side with new expectations fashioned after a European set of values.

The mentioned obsolete social attitudes include people's confidence in an omnipotent state which offers little scope for individual initiative or assertiveness. There used to be no general acceptance of the primacy of human rights, as it was not the individual human being that was projected into the focus of our perception of the world but rather an all-powerful, paternalistic state that was in control of all walks of life. This attitude used to be characteristic of the entire society but even more so in the case of people with disabilities.

Society did not rely upon its disabled members as an „asset“ in production. At the same time, it was acknowledged that society has an obligation to look after these people, even if at a relatively low standard, and provide them with some basic living.

Apparently, this approach meant that people with disabilities, too, thought of themselves as eligible to being supported by the state, and resigned themselves to the idea of being second-class citizens, as they could always rely on a relative safety according to the development level of the economy and society at the time, even if mostly within a segregated environment.

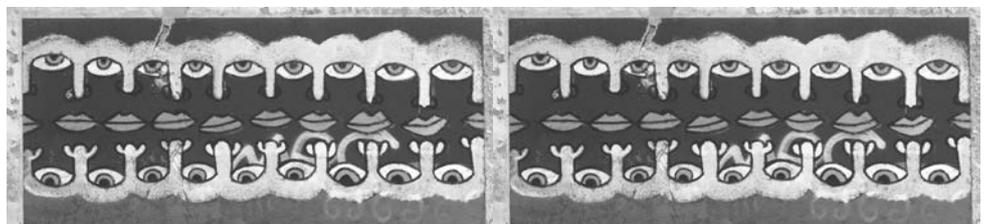
The period of political changes implied a significant turnaround in ideology and attitudes in the ex-socialist countries, at least at the level of political expression.

The question of universal human rights has been brought to the forefront of attention, and antidiscrimination has become the norm in all social strata. The movements of people with disabilities have gained the momentum, and become more confident in claiming their human rights, with respect to both the physical and the social environment.

As a result of considerable efforts, the system of legislation now shows increasing willingness to assume a human rights approach in setting the legislative rules and measures applicable to the life of disabled people. New laws have been created that prohibit negative discrimination against disabled people, and the legislation applicable to the construction of the physical environment has been added provisions ensuring general access to facilities. The regulations on education and employment have also taken into account the requirement of equal rights. That is to say, radically new developments, reflecting a substantially changed attitude, have started in the Central and Eastern European countries, regardless they are member of the European Union or not.

### Women with disability in the legislation

In 2003 a questionnaire was made by the Women's Special Committee of FIMITIC to investigate regulations on the specific issues concerning women with disabilities. (survey made by FIMITIC Associations in Austria, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia,



Poland, Romania and Spain). Lack of adequate national, regional and local regulations on the specific issues concerning women with disabilities was known. It was confirmed by the FIMITIC survey about the national regulations and programs relating to women with disabilities. This survey investigated programs and undertakings with regard to women with disabilities both on the central administration level and on the level of the disability movement as well. The aim was to collect information about the national regulations and programs relating to women with disabilities, as well as programs of disability organisations in this field.

The results showed that women with disabilities were paid only a few attention not only on state level but by disability rights movements as well. It was clear that the national disability associations or federations did not much recognise the combined discrimination of gender and disability experienced by women with disabilities. The survey stated that equity of women with disabilities needed to develop a better understanding of their special situation. The survey concluded with revealing the necessity of establishing legal instruments concerning women with disabilities, other than on women without disabilities and on men with disabilities. It was agreed also that – in spite of the fact that in these countries women's participation in the decision making bodies is very low - women with disabilities themselves should be involved in the design and evaluation of policies and measures to achieve a real impact. Policies which appear gender neutral in the field of disability may at a closer investigation turn out to affect women and men differently. They have to take into account particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men with disabilities and have to aim at eliminating inequalities and promoting an equal distribution of resources.

### **Women with disabilities in the employment**

Expectations of the socialist system in these countries resulted in the increasing number of employed women. In Hungary before 1989 nearly 100% of women were employed. The employment rate among disabled women was much higher than now, although majority of them lived on social benefits. The expectation of full employment among women was based on the underdeveloped economy in these countries where only a few mothers could afford not to work but stay at home with small children. It was not the decision of the mother to go to work or stay at home to raise children.

Women with disabilities could not meet both expectations. Either taking a job or raising children exceeded their abilities due to the lack of barrier free environ-

ment and social services. The lack of barrier free environment hindered them to go to work, take part in any field of social life. Due to financial difficulties their household activities could not be assisted by modern appliances and services (e.g. dish washer, adjustable furniture, electrical appliances, or home cleaning service). Therefore playing the „single“ role of a mother was a big challenge for most of the women with severe disability.

While women in these countries undertook more and more social responsibilities (e.g. go to work and raise children at the same time), responsibilities taken over by men did not increase so much. Household tasks and every day problems associated with raising children were not considered to be necessarily distributed equally between men and women. Due to the conservative family model nearly all tasks with care for family life stayed with women. Under these social circumstances women with disability – without any assistance – could hardly cope with the social expectations. This situation has not changed too much. The modern woman ideal has been the one who has got a lot of successes both in her carrier and in the family, although more and more efforts are made how to harmonize and make a balance between these two important tasks. Women with disabilities cannot meet these requirements. Only negligible percent of people with disabilities are employed in these countries (9% of disabled persons are employed in Hungary. That means that around 90% of disabled people are not in the employment, among them women with disabilities represent more than 50%.) Disabled women therefore cannot achieve successes at work. Most of them are employed in sheltered workshop doing low quality of work. Professional carrier for them is very rare. Only a few women with disability can meet the expectation of the society due to the lack of providing them with equal opportunities therefore they are considered to be helpless and reliant on social benefits.

Of course not only the national regulations and employment situation of women with disabilities are worth writing about. Women with disabilities face discrimination every day in Central and Eastern European countries. These countries are still not aware of the fact that by creating equal opportunities the whole society gains from equality of women with disabilities from equal distribution of benefits, tasks and responsibilities.

**Erzsébet Szöllősi** is Board member of MEOSZ and Executive Committee member of European Disability Forum

## UN convention on the rights of disabled people – from the perspective of disabled girls and women

By Sabine Häfner and Sigrid Arnade

Late in the evening on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2006, about 400 disabled people and some representatives of civil society, experienced a historical event. The people present rejoiced when the draft for a human rights convention on the rights of disabled people was adopted. Over a period of five years, an ad hoc committee which was instructed by the general assembly of the United Nations (UN), deliberated about this draft.

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006, the document was adopted by the UN general assembly, and by 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007, it had already been signed by 81 UN member states including Germany.

This convention is different from all other declarations and directions on disabled people which have been adopted by the UN. It clearly constitutes for disabled people that participating states must proactively ensure their general human rights and fundamental liberties and prevent discrimination against disabled people.

For disabled girls and women, the text of the convention includes a fantastic part in article 6. It says:

1. *States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.*
2. *States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose or guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.*

It was being debated up to the last meeting of the ad hoc committee, even almost up to the last day of deliberations, as to whether the convention would include such a self-contained section particularly relating to disabled women.

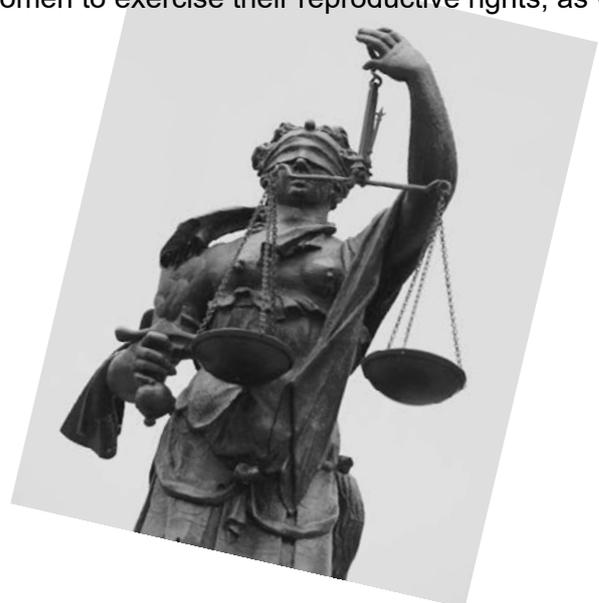
Demands for a self-contained section on the rights of disabled women and girls were first made by the South Korean delegation in June 2004 during the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the ad hoc committee. However, the article

had been written in such a way that the convention was in danger of only considering disabled women and girls in this one article, not in respect of all the articles of the convention.

After that, the authors of this contribution opted for an integrative, two pronged approach which they called „twin track approach“. Firstly, a self-contained article was to generally commit the participating states to take wide-reaching steps to ensure equality of disabled women. Secondly, where specific action relating to particular areas of human rights was required in order to ensure the respective right for disabled girls and women, these actions should be contained in the appropriate articles, e.g. in the areas of violence, education, health provision, work and employment.

After some difficult discussions, the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ad hoc committee in August 2005 achieved that the disabled women from all over the world who were present would together opt for this „twin track approach“. At this meeting and at the following ones, the diplomatic efforts made by Dinah Radtke and Brigitte Faber proved to be particularly effective here as well as the political contacts from the Dutchwoman Lydia La Rivière-Zijdel. The result was that, at the 7<sup>th</sup> and penultimate meeting of the ad hoc committee in January 2006, the state delegations also agreed on the „twin track approach“. The actual form of it, however, remained under debate. Those women, who had been fighting to ensure that the convention would not remain gender blind, were therefore even more relieved when its draft was finally adopted.

Not all the demands from women were considered in the final document. Missing issues include the express statement relating to a guarantee for disabled women to exercise their reproductive rights, as well



as specific action to ensure disabled women's and girls' rights to education, work and employment. Their demand for the provision of gender-specific data in relation to disability and the involvement of disabled women in this monitoring process was also not included.

However, disabled women can be proud of their achievements that were greatly supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The first UN-Convention containing a gender-specific approach was adopted. Thereby, the method of gender mainstreaming, which was introduced at the fourth World Congress of Women in 1995 in Peking, was included in an official, international agreement for the first time.

Apart from article 6, guidelines relating to disabled girls and women were achieved in the following sections:

- in the introduction
- in article 3 – general principles
- in article 8 – awareness raising
- in article 16 – prevention of exploitation, violence and abuse
- in article 25 – health
- in article 28 – adequate standard of living and social protection
- in article 34 – committee for the rights of disabled people

### Outlook

A state's signature to the text of the convention expresses the agreement of that state to be bound to the convention at a later time. However, such a signature already obliges the state not to act knowingly against the aims of the convention. For a commitment to the convention, it is necessary to lodge a so-called ratification certificate. For Germany, the constitution provides a legal framework to legislate for an agreement to the convention. The German president can only carry out the ratification when this has been done. The convention on the rights of disabled people comes into force when 20 member states have lodged their ratification certificates with the United Nations.

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**Dr. Sigrid Arnade** is Board member of Netzwerk Artikel 3

## European directive for disabled people

By Brigitte Faber

The year 2007 was declared the European Year of Equal Opportunities for all ...

It can be assumed that approximately 10% of the European population have a disability and/or chronic illness. Even though their living conditions are likely to vary considerably depending on the European country they live in, they have one thing in common: compared with the non disabled population, they are still experiencing some disadvantages in many areas of life. These can be caused by a lack of, or difficulties with, access to mainstream schools, universities or other training opportunities. Disadvantages are caused by many disabled people living on considerably lower incomes compared with non disabled people, even if they have equivalent qualifications. Therefore, disabled people frequently live on or below the poverty line. A further reason for disadvantage is the lack of access to public buildings or public transport, as well as the fact that cultural events are not widely provided in an accessible way. Information, such as that provided on Internet sites, is often not presented to an accessible standard. Healthcare provision is often not accessible to all disabled people without difficulties, and there is also a general lack of awareness, for example, of the interactions between a „common“ illness and a disability, or on the course of a pregnancy in a paraplegic woman. Last but not least, many disabled people are still denied the choice of independent, self-determined living, either on their own or with a partner in their own home. Many are still completely reliant on the support of their families or live in residential accommodation.

Through the Amsterdam treaty, the new article 13 was introduced into the EU treaty in 1997. This article enables the Council to take steps „to fight discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation“.

With reference to this article, a range of directives on equal rights has since been established. The application of four of these directives in Germany has led to the introduction of the general equality law, which had been demanded by disability organisations for a long time, and which, up to the end, was „welcomed“ to different extents by the different political parties. This legislation brings together the different scopes (employment and civil law), as well as the attributes of discrimination within any one legislation <sup>1</sup>.

Those directives, which are mostly restricted to some attributes of discrimination (e.g. gender), as well as some scopes (e.g. provision of goods and services) are frequently implemented on an individual basis. People who have several attributes of discrimination often fall through the loops. In many directives, disabled women and men are not considered as a target group. This results in them remaining „invisible“, which means that they are not considered when measures are agreed. Guidelines and measures are often not easily applicable to the living conditions of disabled people. An example for this is when a person lives in a residential home or works in a sheltered workshop for disabled people. Therefore, disability organisations have long been demanding a comprehensive EU directive for the prevention of discrimination of disabled people.

In March 2003, the European year of disabled people, the European Disability Forum (EDF) presented a draft for an EU directive on anti-discrimination for disabled people <sup>2</sup>. This draft includes some articles on indirect and direct discrimination, on access to information, buildings and public transport, and on access to education, as well as the portrayal of disabled people in the media.

From the perspective of disabled women, the inclusion of a few further topics is necessary, for example an article on the protection from violence or on their right to sexual and reproductive self-determination. While it is pleasing to see that a gender-specific evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures within this EDF draft is scheduled, it would be even better for disabled women if their specific issues were being considered in the design and implementation of measures. Experience shows that this consideration is not achieved just by a general declaration of intent; particularly as such a declaration is not legally binding. Instead, an independent section, as well as the integration within the relevant sections of a directive or law, is necessary. An example for this kind of approach is the UN convention on the rights of disabled people, which was adopted in December 2006. At an international level, this convention is seen as groundbreaking for the future of human rights <sup>3</sup>. This does not only apply to the advancement of social integration, but also with regard to the consideration of fairness between genders. An EU directive which lags behind these very welcome standards would be very regrettable.

In December 2003 the former EU commissioner Mrs Diamantopoulou made the promise of such an EU directive for the prevention of discrimination on the grounds of disability.

The European Year of Equal Opportunities would be a fantastic opportunity to fulfil this promise.

**Brigitte Faber** is projekt manager in Weibernetz and Board member of the German Women's Council

1) Directive 2000/43/EU, June 2000 on the application of the equality principle without differentiation between race or ethnic origin

Directive 2000/78/EU, November 2000 on the definition of a general framework for the realisation of equality in employment

Directive 2002/73/EU of the European Parliament and the council, September 2002 for the amendment of the directive 76/207/ECC of the council for the realisation of the principle of equality of men and women regarding access to employment, professional training and promotion as well as regarding employment conditions

Directive 2004/113/EU of the council, December 2004 on the realisation of the principle of equality of men and women with regard to access to goods and services

2) <http://www.edf-feph.org/Papers/nondisc/EDF%20Disability%20Directive.pdf>

3) <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/conventioninfo.htm>;

3) <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/conventioninfo.htm>;



### Petition

of the European Disability Forum for a directive on anti-discrimination for disabled people:

**1 million for disability**

<http://www.1million4disability.eu/>



## DPI Women's Networks in Europe

By Dinah Radtke

Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) is the only worldwide organisation of disabled women and men that represents the interests of all disabled people. DPI is a human rights organisation and has advisory status with the UNO. It was founded in 1981 in protest against worldwide organisations for disabled people, where the interests of disabled people are represented by non-disabled people.

Soon after founding DPI, disabled women realised that their interests were not represented within the organisation and to the outside world. For this reason, DPI's Worldwide Women's Committee was formed in 1984. Since that time, five regional women's committees have been established in Europe, Africa, Latin America, North America-Caribbean and Asia-Pacific. The main aim has always been the provision of a forum for disabled women so that they can discuss their relevant topics and publicise their political demands. Disabled women must have equal opportunities to participate in society. All the bodies and committees must have equal representation, including those within DPI at international, regional, national and local levels. DPI's women's manifesto primarily contains projects on training and empowerment.

In 1994, the European Women's Committee was formed in Frankfurt and met in London in 1995 in order to determine its aims and objectives. Since then, a number of large European conferences for disabled women have taken place, the first of which was held in Munich in 1996 on the subject of „Independent living of disabled women“. The second conference was held in 1998 in Moscow on the „Development of networks between organisations of disabled women“. There were two further large conferences in Italy, one in 2001 in Falerna on the subject of „Disabled women and violence“ and the other in 2005 in Paestum on „Assistance and violence“. Brochures were published on all the conferences except the one in Moscow. Information is available on the homepage of DPI Europe (<http://www.dpi-europe.org>).

The conferences were received by disabled women with great enthusiasm because the women realised that their situation and their concerns were being taken seriously. Women were encouraged to form women's groups and organisations in their own countries and to firstly empower themselves as disabled women and then to bring their concerns to public attention.

Through the work of the DPI's Women's Committee, groups and organisations of disabled women have been established in various European countries. National organisations of disabled people have thus realised the importance of supporting disabled women within their own bodies.



The European conferences have demonstrated to us that we are not alone with our issues and that we don't need to fight as individuals. We can fight together and be stronger in a group. We have an active network but we must keep getting stronger. We realised that as European women we have the same issues. We can work together although we may have different cultural backgrounds. The conferences have given us a lot of strength and our national organisations have always been proud to send their delegates. Our successes over the last 16 years have shown us that we are on the right track as we are stronger together!

### The structure of DPI's European Women's Committee

DPI's European Women's Committee is one of five regional committees (Africa, Latin America, North America-Caribbean and Asia-Pacific) that reports to the worldwide Women's Committee. The Women's Committee has a chair and can have up to three vice-chairs. There is no treasurer because the committee does not have its own budget. The committee has no fixed structure. We rely on the good will of DPI Europe and of our respective national organisations. This also means that we operate with the support and the funds of our own national organisations.



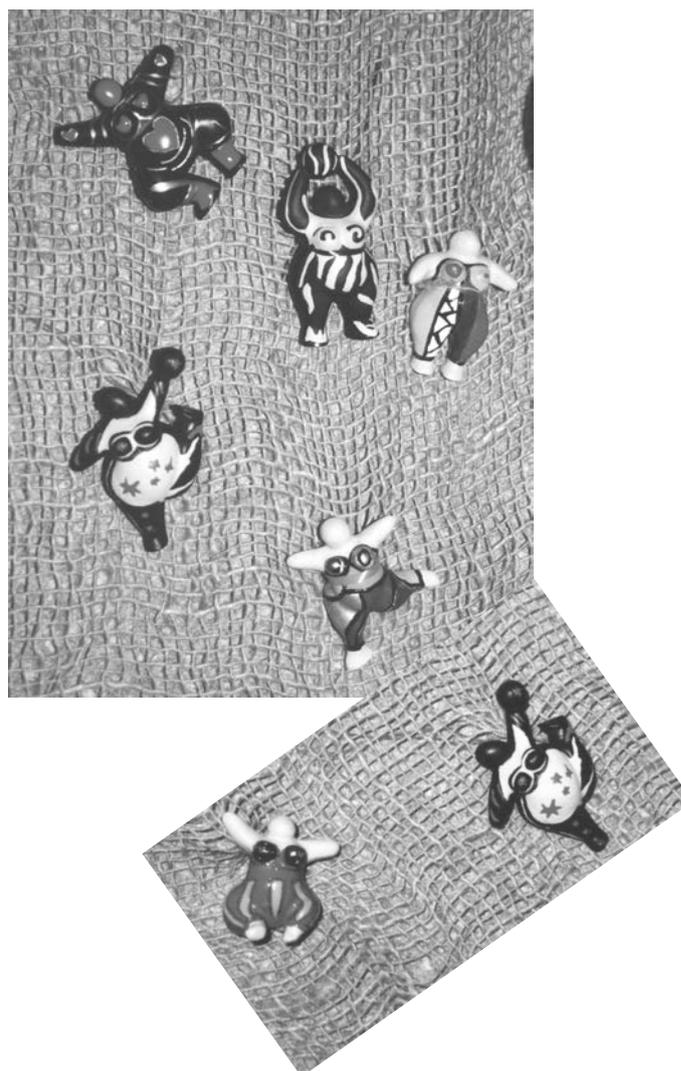
The aim of the DPI's European Women's Committee is to provide a forum for disabled women in Europe. The purpose of this forum is to develop joint activities and policies concerning the issues and the situation of disabled women. Some other European organisations of disabled women which support our philosophy can become affiliated groups to the committee.

Our aims within the committee include working with disabled women in Europe at an equal level so that all disabled women, irrespective of race, cultural background, religion or sexual orientation, can participate in the work of the committee and to represent disabled women in Europe at regional and international meetings, forums, seminars etc. One of the activities at the regional meetings of DPI Europe, which take place every four or five years, is the establishment of a Women's Action Plan.

Some of the committee's objectives are as follows:

- disabled women are consulted in all the services that affect them
- disabled women have equal access to education and employment, including access to nursery places and services for disabled children and parents
- disabled women can make choices in their lives
- they have control over their own lives
- they lobby governments on behalf of their peers, together with non-disabled women if appropriate
- all women's groups are aware of the issues affecting disabled women
- all women's groups develop strategies and political activities to encourage the participation of disabled women in their activities and events
- women's groups develop proactive policies to support disabled women in being free of discrimination and violence
- national groups of disabled women are encouraged and supported in carrying out their work
- disabled women work within the national organisations of disabled people

**Dinah Radtke** is Vice-chair of DPI and Chair of the Women's Committee



## The Women's Committee of the European Disability Forum (EDF)

EDF women's committee is one of the permanent committees of the European Disability Forum - EDF and deals with disabled women's and girls' issues. The committee members represent different organizations, countries and disability groups. The women's committee works internally in the EDF and externally.



In 1997 the committee published a European Manifesto of disabled women. It is available on the web: [http://www.edf-feph.org/en/policy/women/women\\_pub.htm](http://www.edf-feph.org/en/policy/women/women_pub.htm)

The manifesto includes statements on human rights, national and European legislation, education, employment, violence, personal assistance etc.

More information: [http://www.edf-feph.org/en/policy/women/women\\_news.htm](http://www.edf-feph.org/en/policy/women/women_news.htm)



**The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella group of women's organisations in the European Union.**

## **What are the functions of the EWL? - An Interview with Brigitte Triems**

**Brigitte Triems:** Since its formation in 1990, the European Women's Lobby (EWL), which represents over 4,000 women's organisations in Europe, has been striving to achieve equal opportunities for women and men in all areas of society, to demand more respect for the human rights of women and to abolish any kind of violence against women. Furthermore, the EWL wants to ensure equal opportunities irrespective of gender, and consideration of the human rights of women in all political areas of the European Union.

### **WZ: Would you please describe the structure of the EWL?**

**B.T.:** Any national umbrella groups of women's organisations in the member states of the EU, as well as those in accession negotiations, can be members of the EWL. Presently, the EWL has 26 national steering groups. Additionally, there are some women's federations which operate across Europe, as well as some European sections of international women's organisations. These groups can also apply for membership with the EWL. Presently, 18 such federations are members. General meetings of the EWL take place every year. At these meetings, the tasks for the coming year are set. Elections of the board are held every other year. The operation in between the general meetings is led by an executive committee. The general secretary and her secretariat are responsible for the every day campaign work. Interested women's federations can join the EWL as associate members. Individuals can become supporting members.

### **WZ: Does the EWL currently focus on specific topics?**

**B.T.:** It is part of the EWL's mission to follow closely all the developments within the EU from a gender point of view. This means topics such as the following are always on the agenda: equal opportunities for women and men in decision making processes; independent means of living for women; achieving human rights for women; campaigns against women trafficking; protection of sexual and reproductive rights of women, and conditions for female migrants and women in specific circumstances. Naturally, this year there is a strong focus on the year of equal opportunities for all. In connection with this, the EWL is also closely following the establishment of the European Gender Institute.

### **WZ: To what extent are the interests of disabled women considered?**

**B.T.:** For many years the European Disability Forum has been represented on the EWL and its board through the active membership of its women's committee. The EWL has actively been campaigning for the UN Convention on the rights of disabled people. It has repeatedly encouraged its member organisations to put pressure on their respective governments in order to consider the specific situation of disabled women and to ensure a gender-sensitive language. In the EWL campaign on care and support, which was launched in May 2006, the specific situation of disabled women was highlighted and appropriate measures for their support were demanded.

### **WZ: How can European policy have a concrete impact on individual women in EU countries?**

**B.T.:** The EWL is constantly working on encouraging the national steering groups to spread their knowledge on EU equal opportunities policies in their countries. Nowadays, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the European Commission make decisions affecting the interests of women in individual European countries. Most legislation on a national level is now based on EU guidelines. Examples for this are the General Equality Law (GEL), as well as the convention against human trafficking, which was adopted by the Council of Europe in May 2005. In this convention, the issues of women and child trafficking were particularly highlighted. To date, this convention has only been signed by 29 European states and has been ratified by 6 states. For this reason, it has still not come into force, even two years after adoption. Therefore, campaigning work by women and their organisations is urgently needed.

**Thank you very much for this interview.**

**Brigitte Triems** is Member of the Executive Committee of the European Women's Lobby and vice chair of the German Women's Council

## Easy to read summary:

### Disabled women are forming a network in Europe

By Martina Puschke

Why do disabled women in Europe need a new network?

There are already some organisations that look after disability policy in Europe.

One of these is the European Disability Forum.

This forum also has a women's group,

and there is also a federation of women's organisations in Europe.

This federation is called the European Women's Lobby.

There are also some disabled women working in this federation.



There are also some other organisations that make European policy.

In Disabled People's International (DPI) some women work together in a women's group.

This is the same in „Fimitic“, which is an organisation that is working with people with physical disabilities worldwide.

So, there are already many organisations that work all over Europe and that have women's groups.

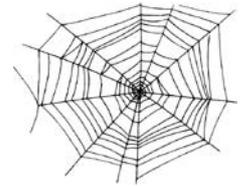
However, there is not yet an organisation just for women's issues throughout Europe.

Because of this, disabled women now want to form a network for European policy. In this network, women with different disabilities from all European countries should get together.

There they can talk about their experiences and their problems.

They have many experiences in common, but there are also differences.

For example, disabled women in England experience different things from disabled women in Romania.



In this network the women from the many different countries will write down their demands.

We want good living conditions for disabled women in each country in Europe.

This is a big aim.

We will work hard for this aim, but we think that it is worth it!

Join us in the Network of Disabled Women in Europe!

You can find information on the internet at [www.weibernetz.de](http://www.weibernetz.de)

**Martina Puschke** is projekt manager of the German network from women with disabilities - Weibernetz

## Easy to read summary:

### Disabled women in Europe

By Lydia La Rivière-Zijdel

Disabled women have disadvantages as women and as disabled people. However, disabled women are often not seen as women. People talk about „the disabled“.

Disabled women often don't count as much as non disabled women. This is particularly true for women with learning difficulties or women who need a lot of assistance.



Throughout Europe disabled women are the group with the highest unemployment rate.

Disabled women are often poor, because they have very little money. When disabled women need assistance, they can often not choose their assistants.

They often receive poorer education in school.

When a disabled woman gets pregnant, it is often hard for her to find a good doctor.

In many European countries, disabled women are told not to have any children at all.

Some women with learning difficulties have to have an operation so that they can not have children.

Violence is a big problem all over Europe.

Most disabled women have had some violence in their lives.

They were touched against their wishes, or someone hurt them.



Most European laws don't include disabled women.

Disabled women have the right to live independently.

However, this right has not yet arrived in all the countries in Europe.

Because of this, it is a good thing

that there is now a worldwide right for disabled people (see page 16).

It is important that disabled women ask for the things that are important to them.

European policy must set up some rules for the rights of disabled women.

Disabled women need to join in the work on the writing of those rules.

Nothing must be said about us women without us being asked!

**Lydia La Rivière-Zijdel** is a consultant on women and sport. She works in several different associations.

## Easy to read summary:

### This is how women with disabilities live in Eastern Europe

By Erzsébet Szöllösi



The situation of disabled people in Eastern Europe is different from that in Western Europe.

Countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Russia, and some other countries, lie in Eastern Europe.

This article was written by a disabled woman who lives in Hungary.

Disabled people in Eastern Europe have to live with many barriers around them.

There are still many houses, streets, trains and shops which are not accessible for disabled people.

There are also not many rights for disabled people yet.



The disadvantages of disabled women are not covered very much.

No difference is made between women and men.

The situation is especially bad in employment.

Nearly all disabled women in Hungary

are working in sheltered workshops for disabled people.

Besides, as mothers, at school and in many other ways,

disabled women are treated worse in Eastern Europe.

A study showed that disabled women need to speak up more in their organisations and with politicians.

They need to make demands for disabled women.

Only then they can get the rights to live independently.

It will be good for the whole society

if disabled women get their rights.

The countries in Eastern Europe need to learn this.



**Erzsébet Szöllösi** is the chair woman of the hungarian disability movement.

And she is board member of the European Disability Forum.

## Easy to read summary:

### Disabled women are proud of their rights worldwide

By Sabine Häfner and Dr. Sigrid Arnade



Last year, a new convention for disabled people was written. A convention is a kind of agreement between the countries of the world. The agreement applies in all the countries that have signed it and that want to stick by it.

The new convention is about the rights of disabled people. It says in the convention that there should be no disadvantages for disabled people.



The countries that have signed this agreement have to take care of this.



This convention is especially good for disabled women. It says in the convention that disabled women have disadvantages because they are women and because they are disabled. There is a special guideline for this, and it says in some other guidelines that women must have the same rights. All the countries now have to ensure that disabled women are no longer treated worse.

Before the convention applies, it has to be signed twice. The first signature says that the convention is good and that it should apply. The convention only applies fully with the second signature. All the countries that have signed twice have to ensure the rights in this convention in their country. More than 80 countries have recently given the first signature.



Disabled women from all over the world have been fighting so that women are mentioned in the convention. They were helped by some German politicians. All this was not easy but they have achieved it and this is something that disabled women can be proud of!

**Sabine Häfner** is a lawyer and works at the German Social Association. She is an expert for the rights of women.

**Sigrid Arnade** is Board member of Netzwerk Artikel 3

## Easy to read summary:

### Another agreement for disabled people in Europe

By Brigitte Faber

There are many disabled people living in Europe. No matter where in Europe a disabled woman or man lives, there are disadvantages for disabled people everywhere. Disabled people often don't have the choice of which school to go to. They often don't get a good education. Because of this, disabled people often have very little money.



Furthermore many trains or trams are not easy to use for disabled people. Then there are websites that cannot be read by blind people or people with learning difficulties.

Disabled people in Europe often can't live the way they want to. Many live in a home or with their family. They are often not asked how they want to live.

To change these things, we need a European policy for disabled people. There are already some laws in Europe which are good for disabled people. In European policy, a lot of directives are written. These directives are agreements between the countries. They have to be stuck to. There are already some agreements to cut back disadvantages for women. There are some other agreements on some other subjects, for example employment.



In these agreements which are on one subject, disability is often not covered. This is not good for disabled people, because it means that they can be forgotten.



Therefore disability organisations, such as the European Disability Forum, are calling for a special agreement for disabled people. In such an agreement, it is important for disabled people that there are guidelines against violence.

There must also be a special guideline for better opportunities for women. Before such an agreement is put into action in the countries, women should be asked whether they are happy with it.

**Brigitte Faber** is projekt manager in Weibernetz and Board member in the German Women's Council.

The European Disability Forum is collecting signatures for a good agreement for disabled people in Europe. You can sign on the internet at <http://www.1million4disability.eu/>

## Easy to read summary:

### What does the DPI women's group do?

By Dinah Radtke

This is the logo from  
Disabled Peoples  
International ⇨



DPI is short for „Disabled People's International“. DPI is the only organisation where disabled people speak for themselves and work together worldwide at the same time. This means that you find DPI all over the world – in America, in Africa, in Europe, in Asia etc.



Disabled women and men are active in DPI. The women soon found that there was not enough room in DPI for their topics. This is why they founded a women's group in Europe. This was in 1994.

The DPI women's group in Europe has already run four European conferences. Many disabled women from Europe came to these conferences. There they told each other of their experiences, and they encouraged each other. When they got home, they formed their own women's groups. Because of this, disabled women in Europe are becoming ever stronger.

The DPI women's group is fighting for the following:

- that disabled women can live independently
- that disabled women get asked what they need and that they get it
- that disabled women receive a good education
- that non disabled women support disabled women in their demands
- that disabled women can form their own groups  
and that they can join organisations of disabled people



**Dinah Radtke** is vice chair of DPI and chairwoman of the DPI women's committee.

This is the logo from the  
European Disability Forum  
⇩

### Womens Group in European Disability Forum (EDF)



The European Disability Forum is an important organisation. European Groups came together. They create demands for a better life of disabled peoples in Europe.

Women build up a women's group in the European Disability Forum. They are dealing with disabled women's and girls' issues.

In 1997 the womens group created an important paper for European women. The paper contents demands on various issues. For example employment, violence, assistance and so on.

## Easy to read summary

### What is the European Women's Lobby?

#### Interview with Brigitte Triems

The word „lobby“ is a difficult one.  
Lobbying work is a kind of political work.  
It means to work for your interests.  
The European Women's Lobby works  
for the interests of women in Europe.

This is the logo from  
the European Womens' Lobby



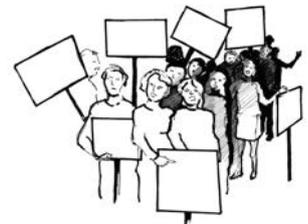
We talked with Brigitte Triems about the work of the Women's Lobby.  
She is on the committee of the Women's Lobby.



Over 4,000 women's groups from all over Europe  
have got together in the European Women's Lobby.  
Disabled women are also working with the lobby.  
The Women's Lobby works for equal treatment  
of women and men in Europe.

The lobby has an office in Brussels in Belgium.  
Brussels is the city where politicians talk about European policy.  
For this reason, it is good that the lobby has an office there.  
It means that the staff of the Women's Lobby  
can talk directly to the politicians about their demands.

The Women's Lobby keeps an eye on the topics  
which are discussed by the politicians in Europe.  
Then they raise the main points concerning women  
or they look at an important topic and make demands.  
At the moment, the Women's Lobby is working on the subject of care.  
This is also an important subject for disabled women.



**Brigitte Triems** is Board of the European Women's Lobby  
and Vice Chair of the German Women's Council.

**Imprint****Weiber ZEIT**

Frequency: quaterly

**Published by**

Weibernetz e.V.

Project „Political Representation of the Interests of Women with Disabilities,

Kölnische Str. 99, D-34119 Kassel, Germany

Phone.: + 49 (0) 561/72 885-85,

Fax: +49 (0) 561/72 885-85,

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The writers of the articles are responsible for the contents themselves

The project „Political Representation of the Interests of Women with Disabilities“ is sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

**V.i.S.d.P.:** Martina Puschke

**Lay-Out:** Brigitte Faber

**Print:** Druckerei Foto-Litho Jäger GmbH, Kassel

**Logo Weibernetz:** Ulrike Vater, Kassel

**Picture Credits:**

**WeiberZEIT - Special: Europa -**

**Graphik and Pictures:** p.1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 11 Brigitte Faber

**Pictures:** p. 12 Martina Puschke

**WeiberZEIT - Special: Europe -**

**Graphik and Pictures:** p.1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 Brigitte Faber

**Pictures:** p. 11 Martina Puschke

**Drawings:** Wir vertreten uns selbst (Ed.): Wörterbuch für leichte Sprache.

Kitzinger, Anette: Metacom-Symbole

SCHUBI PICCollection

Furthermore Windows /Clipart as well Adobe

PageMaker 7.0 Library

**Translation**

**Into easy to read version:** Martina Puschke

**English/German:** Anne K. Rigby

**Impressum****Weiber ZEIT**

Erscheinungsweise: vierteljährlich

**Herausgeberin**

Weibernetz e.V.

Projekt „Politische Interessenvertretung behinderter Frauen“

Kölnische Str. 99, 34119 Kassel

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Das Projekt „Politische Interessenvertretung behinderter Frauen“ wird finanziert durch das Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend

**V.i.S.d.P.:** Martina Puschke

**Lay-Out:** Brigitte Faber

**Druck:** Druckerei Foto-Litho Jäger GmbH, Kassel

**Logo Weibernetz:** Ulrike Vater, Kassel

**Bildnachweis:**

**WeiberZEIT - Spezial: Europa -**

**Grafik und Fotos:** S. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 11 Brigitte Faber

**Fotos:** S. 12 Martina Puschke

**WeiberZEIT -Special: Europe -**

**Grafik und Fotos** S.1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 Brigitte Faber

**Fotos:** S. 11 Martina Puschke

**Zeichnungen:** Wir vertreten uns selbst (Hg.): Wörterbuch für leichte Sprache.

Kitzinger, Anette: Metacom-Symbole

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Außerdem Clipart von Windows sowie Bilder von Adobe PageMaker 7.0 Library

**Übersetzung**

**In leichte Sprache:** Martina Puschke.

**In englisch und deutsch:** Anne K. Rigby