



EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

A European Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with
European Parliament, European Commission and the Council of Europe

Statement on Intersectionality

As the official organisation representing all deaf people in the EU through a network of 31 National Associations of the Deaf (NADs) with a UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Consultative Status, we are committed to aligning ourselves with standards set by the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe, including their definitions of intersectionality. Furthermore, we are drawing from conceptual frameworks of several International and Regional Civil Society Organisations working with LGBTQIA+ communities, BIPOC people, gender equality and other marginalised communities.

Introduction

As the sole European non-governmental organisation representing the fundamental linguistic human rights of deaf people before the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe and the United Nations (UN), We, the European Union of the Deaf (EUD), reaffirm our commitment to foster and respect the diversity existing in our European deaf communities to leave no deaf people behind. We acknowledge that deaf people face multiple and intersectional discriminations based on their intersecting identities and experiences comprising of their racial or ethnic origin, religion, languages, gender identity, disabilities, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age and any other layers of identities.

In particular, we commit to empowering the most marginalised groups within European deaf communities to combat the pre-existing inequalities. We aim to embody the EU motto “United in Diversity”¹ by fulfilling it through the vibrant and diverse deaf communities that constitute our membership base. Accordingly, we fully integrate the values and principles of intersectionality in our work. We strive to ensure that, through our work, the perspectives of all deaf people, irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, languages and gender identity, socio-economic status are equally included and considered in all our publications and contributions. Furthermore, we ensure to be represented by people adhering to the principles of equality, equity, diversity and non-discrimination at both the Board and staff levels.

In 2021, we released a first statement on intersectionality establishing our commitment to tackling inequalities within European deaf communities. As it is a living a document reflecting the legal, economic, sociological and political developments of our societies, we deem it important to update the

¹ The European Union, EU Motto, 2000, URL: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/eu-motto_en

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statement to reflect the latest developments at the European and global levels on intersectionality.

Intersectionality

First coined by the US critical legal scholar Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality is a multifaceted and comprehensive concept that has evolved over time, encompassing a wide array of social dynamics and structures. It is a theoretical framework that has influenced justice movements, academic studies and policymaking around the world to bridge the gaps in legal and institutional frameworks, and policies with regards to the interconnected layers of oppression and forms of discrimination that exist in our societies. Indeed, there are not rigid categories of discrimination in the intersectional approach but rather the discrimination is experienced at the *intersection* of the identities. For instance, a deaf BIPOC woman is likely to face a triple discrimination based on her disability; on her racial or ethnic origin, and as a result of her gender. Therefore, to apply an intersectional approach to understanding the experience of this deaf BIPOC woman, the question becomes - what are the specific experiences of deaf BIPOC women, and how does these affect other factors such as socio-economic status?

The European Parliament, in its resolution of 6th July 2022, led by the Swedish MEP Alice Kuhnke, defined intersectionality as both a theoretical concept and a practical tool for understanding the layers of advantages and disadvantages that individuals experience. Rooted in systemic societal constructs such as capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism, it accounts for phenomena such as ableism, various forms of racism, homophobia, classism, and more. These complexities of discrimination and privilege are tied to gender identity, class, race, disability, and other markers of identity within global power hierarchies.²

The resolution differentiates intersectional discrimination from multiple discrimination. Multiple discrimination occurs when each type of discrimination can be proved and treated independently, while in the case of intersectional discrimination, the grounds of discrimination are intertwined, creating a unique type of discrimination. In this way, intersectionality allows a perspective that accounts for intersecting grounds without prioritising one over the other.³

According to the Council of Europe, intersectional discrimination occurs when two or multiple grounds operate simultaneously in an inseparable manner, creating distinct forms of discrimination.⁴ This understanding complements the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Committee's General Comment 6 on Equality and Non-discrimination, where intersectional discrimination of persons with disabilities is combined with factors such as racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, language, religion, and more. It can take the form of direct or indirect discrimination, denial of reasonable accommodation or harassment.⁵

² European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2022 on intersectional discrimination in the European Union: the socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle Eastern, Latin-American and Asian descent (2021/2243(INI))

³ Ibid, Recitals A and B.

⁴ The Council of Europe, Intersectionality and Multiple Discrimination, URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/intersectionality-and-multiple-discrimination>

⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee, CRPD General Comment N°6 on Equality and Non-Discrimination, point 19, URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no6-equality-and-non-discrimination>

The United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities recognise the intricate ways in which social identities overlap, leading to compounded experiences of discrimination or, conversely, enriching experiences.⁶ The UN emphasises that ensuring non-discrimination and equality is paramount to the realisation of all human rights, and the principle itself stands as the cornerstone of international law.⁷

In a toolkit developed by the UN Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN PRPD) and UN WOMEN, the transformative potential of intersectionality is underscored. Moving beyond merely a focus on intersecting identities, the toolkit calls for a more profound understanding of existing power structures. Crenshaw's concern about the over- and under-use of the term emphasises the need for a structural analysis and political critique.⁸

The Centre for Intersectional Justice (CIJ) highlights the so-called “by products” of the societal and structural systems, such as capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism. Some examples of by products of these systems include “ableism, cis- and heterosexism, classism, colourism, homophobia, as well as anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism, anti-Roma racism, and anti-Semitism.”⁹

Conclusion – Intersectionality in practice in the Work of EUD

Ultimately, intersectionality is not merely a theoretical concept but a vital analytical approach and practical tool for understanding, addressing, and redressing multifaceted forms of discrimination existing in our deaf communities. Grounded in a comprehensive analysis of systemic societal structures, it offers a nuanced understanding of human experiences and provides an essential framework for inclusive policies. Its application across various international bodies, academic discourses, and legal frameworks testifies to its universality and importance to leave no deaf people behind.

In our work to ensure the inclusion and participation of all deaf people in all areas of society, we acknowledge the multidimensionality of experiences and intersecting identities of deaf people. To do so, we are employing an evidence-based and intersectional approach to all our current and upcoming work, which include each of the identities and experiences, namely - age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disabilities, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and languages. Accordingly, we commit to conducting meaningful consultations with a diverse range of deaf people in order to represent their intersecting identities, where possible and relevant, in our work.

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997/C 340/05) provided a mandate to tackle discrimination on six grounds – sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation for the first time. EU legislation and policies on gender and intersectionality further exemplify the application of this

⁶ The United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Guidance Note on Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf>, page 10.

⁷ Ibid, p.11

⁸ The United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations WOMEN, *a Toolkit for Intersectionality*, 2021, URL: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf>

⁹ Centre for Intersectional Justice, *Intersectionality at a Glance*, URL: https://www.intersectionaljustice.org/img/2020.4.14_cij-factsheet-intersectionality-at-a-glance-in-europe_du2r4w.pdf, page 3.

framework. Initiatives such as the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 and the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 -2030 are some illustrations demonstrating the commitment made by the EU to addressing intersectional discrimination. Meanwhile, the Centre for Intersectional Justice and other bodies work towards integrating this perspective into broader equality and social justice initiatives.¹⁰ In the same line, we are advocating for the EU to further operationalise the concept of intersectionality to ensure the development of legislation, policies and programmes that include deaf people to best address structural inequalities such as racism, ableism, and homophobia etc.

We are also advocating for the further strengthening of intersectional data within data collection efforts at the EU level. We aim to see official data on deaf people disaggregated by the various above-mentioned identities existing within deaf communities. This will enable the EU to develop initiatives tackling the multiple and intersectional discriminations faced by the most marginalised groups within deaf communities. Moreover, we will accompany our member organisations, the National Associations of the Deaf, to embed this approach of intersectionality in their work.

Intersectionality is a reminder of the importance of operating with a broad outlook rather than focusing on one particular group within deaf communities. Indeed, it serves to ensure all marginalised groups within deaf communities are represented in policy and legislative development concerning them to ensure no deaf people are left behind.

Lists of resources

- **EIGE** –
 - [Glossary and Thesaurus](#) including terms associated with their work on gender equality such as “intersectionality” and “intersectional discrimination”.
 - [Intersecting Identities: Gender Equality Index](#)
- Response (**EASPD** project) Project State of the Art (SOTA) report: [Intersectionality and gender-based violence against women with disabilities](#)
- A report by the **CIJ**, commissioned by **ENAR** – [Intersectional Discrimination in Europe: relevance, challenges and the way forward](#)
- **Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ)** – [Intersectionality at a Glance in Europe Factsheet](#)
- **CRPD Committee General Comment 6 on Equality and non-discrimination**
- **United Nations** – [Guidance Note on Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination, & Protection of Minors](#)
- **UN PRPD and UN WOMEN** - [A Toolkit for Intersectionality](#)

¹⁰ There are several definitions for intersectionality provided by EU level civil society organisations e.g. the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) (EIGE) defines it as an “Analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination.” Further, the [European Network against Racism](#) (ENAR) defines it as examining the “intersections of the three most important global systems of domination: racism/colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy; and their by-products: classism, homo- and transphobia, cis- and heterosexism and all other forms of racism.”

- [European Parliament resolution](#) of 6 July 2022 on intersectional discrimination in the European Union: the socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle-Eastern, Latin-American and Asian descent 2021/2243 (INI)
- **Council of Europe** –
 - [Webpage](#) for the "Intersectionality Transforms Our Realities" campaign of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe
 - [Resources and information about intersectionality and multiple discrimination](#)

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