



Multiple discrimination and disability

By Zara Todd

Photos courtesy of Zara Todd



People with disabilities are often seen as members of one group who are all very similar. However, the disability community is as diverse as society as a whole. We are all different shapes and sizes and have different backgrounds. Unfortunately this diversity and difference within the disability community are rarely celebrated or even discussed. Thankfully, in July 2014, the study session “Understanding and countering multiple discrimination faced by young people with disabilities in Europe”, run by the European Network on Independent Living and the Council of Europe, created a space to start that discussion.

Why was it needed?

Disability is for many people a dominant identity attribute which is difficult to see beyond as it causes an immediate reaction and has many stereotypes attached to it. The reactions people with both visible and non-visible impairments receive from wider society make it is easy for them to think that their disability is the only thing about them that people notice. This often leads people with disabilities to underestimate the impact of other aspects of their identity, such as gender, age and sexuality.

“I’m not discriminated against because I’m a woman.” This is a phrase I’ve heard over and over again from women with disabilities across Europe. Unfortunately there are research and examples that show this is just not the case. For example, women with disabilities are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than those without a disability.¹

While there have been a few sessions on multiple discrimination and hate speech in Europe, many

young people with disabilities haven’t been introduced to these ideas. If the applications to the study session were anything to go by many people thought multiple discrimination was being discriminated against multiple times on the grounds of disability rather than being discriminated against because of more than one aspect of their identity.

Multiple discrimination is discrimination against one person on the basis of more than one ground. A black disabled woman may, for instance, experience discrimination on the grounds of her disability, her race and her gender.²

Understanding how and on what grounds people are being discriminated is key to working out how to combat and stop discrimination.

It is this that makes *Compass* activities which help participants explore and discuss their identities such as “Who are I?” and “Where do you stand?” so important.

What is ENIL and why did they choose to look at multiple discrimination?

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a disabled person’s organisation (this means it is run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities) that works across Europe campaigning to ensure that all people with disabilities can have access to independent living.³ ENIL does this in lots of different ways, for example by making sure disabled people are represented at the European level and by working with different organisations and structures to promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Independent living means people with disabilities having the same range of options and same degree of choice and control in their lives as non-disabled people. It means having support and the control over our lives so that we can live in our local communities.

ENIL has been working to empower people with disabilities to tackle hate crime and multiple discrimination for a number of years. For example, ENIL has worked together with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) running workshops on tackling hate crime against people with disabilities.

As an organisation, ENIL knows that multiple discrimination and hate crimes stop many people with disabilities from achieving independent living. So the study session was born.

The study session

The study session took place from 29 June to 6 July 2014, at the Council of Europe Youth Centre in Strasbourg, France. It brought together 19 participants, all young people with disabilities, and six trainers from 16 countries.

Many of the participants identified themselves as having other aspects to their identities, in addition to disability, which could cause them to be discriminated against, such as being from an ethnic minority or being LGBTQ.

We had a number of activities throughout the week looking at things like self-advocacy, the social model of disability, tackling hate crime, campaigning and what human rights were and how to use texts like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We were also fortunate to have a reporter from the Council of Europe who made a film about the study session and why it’s important to see all of someone not just one part of a person’s identity. The report can be found at www.humanrightseurope.org/2014/07/video-go-beyond-disability/

The week concluded with the participants producing four videos which will be central to a new ENIL programme called Think Different, Think Equal which is aimed at helping young people with disabilities to tackle hate crime and multiple discrimination.

The videos are available at www.enil.eu/multimedia/think-different-think-equal-campaign/ and explore topics including self-advocacy and tackling hate speech.

It was decided to make videos because they are easily accessible and can reach a large number of people. We hope that these videos will also contribute to the Council of Europe’s No Hate Speech campaign.



1. 34% of women with disabilities identified domestic abuse compared to 19% of non-disabled women from <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-main-results>
2. Uccellari, Paola, “Multiple discrimination: How law can reflect reality”, *The equal rights review* 1 (2008), pp 24-49.

3. ENIL has a youth network which is free and open for any youth with a disability (18-30) based in Europe to join <https://www.facebook.com/groups/enilstudysession2012/>

What is the UNCRPD?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international convention which outlines the human rights of people with disabilities. It came into force in May 2008 and to date 158 countries and international structures have signed it, including the EU.⁴ It was developed in partnership with people with disabilities and is based on the “social model of disability”. Article 19 is all about the right to independent living in the community.

What is the social model of disability?

Traditionally disability is seen as a medical problem that needs to be fixed. People with disabilities are seen as problems that need to be segregated from society. This approach has led to people with disabilities being excluded, discriminated against and even killed.

The social model of disability was devised by disabled people who realised that their medical conditions were not what stopped them from taking part in society but it was how society reacted to their conditions that caused the problem. They identified three types of barriers that disabled people experienced: negative attitudes and physical/environmental and organisational barriers. So, for example, if a blind person isn't allowed into a restaurant because he or she has an assistance dog that is an example of attitudinal and organisational barriers. An essential element of the social model is that disability is not the fault of an individual and it is the whole of society that needs to take action.

Personally I think taking an approach that looks at barriers would be helpful when considering multiple discrimination as it places responsibility on the individual and makes being inclusive everyone's issue. For example an organisational barrier for those who identify themselves as LGBTQ might be the use of boxes marked male and female to express gender rather than leaving a blank space so people can respond how they like.

4. www.un.org/disabilities/ accessed 20 July 2014.



From multiple discrimination to intersectionality: IGLYO's approach

By Jordan Long

Photos by Alex Müller

I would like to get my whole community to come together so that we can work as one big organism. Will I manage?

Alex Horky (19), Czech Youth Queer Organisation, Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION TO IGLYO

In 1984, a group of young people saw the need for an independent voice in the European lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans movement. They established what has become IGLYO – the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Movement. This year, IGLYO celebrates its 30th anniversary of representing the needs and interests of LGBTQ young people.

IGLYO develops programmes to build the capacity of young activists who work on issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. These programmes take the form of conferences and workshops that explore pertinent topics or organisational development. At the same time, IGLYO lobbies in co-ordination with other European civil society organisations for inclusive measures at the EU and the Council of Europe.

For the past six years, this programmatic and policy work has been driven by a strategic plan, written and passed by LGBTQ young people to mandate IGLYO's executive board and secretariat to draft a work plan that reflects the interests of those IGLYO seeks to represent. In the past, the general assembly has decided that IGLYO should work in areas such as health, education, human rights and social inclusion. Recently, the topic of intercultural and interreligious dialogue developed into our current strategic focus area of intersectionality.

I consider myself an activist because of what I am. As a teacher I have to act on behalf of others.

Blessed Busingye (20), Youth Reproductive Health Link, Uganda