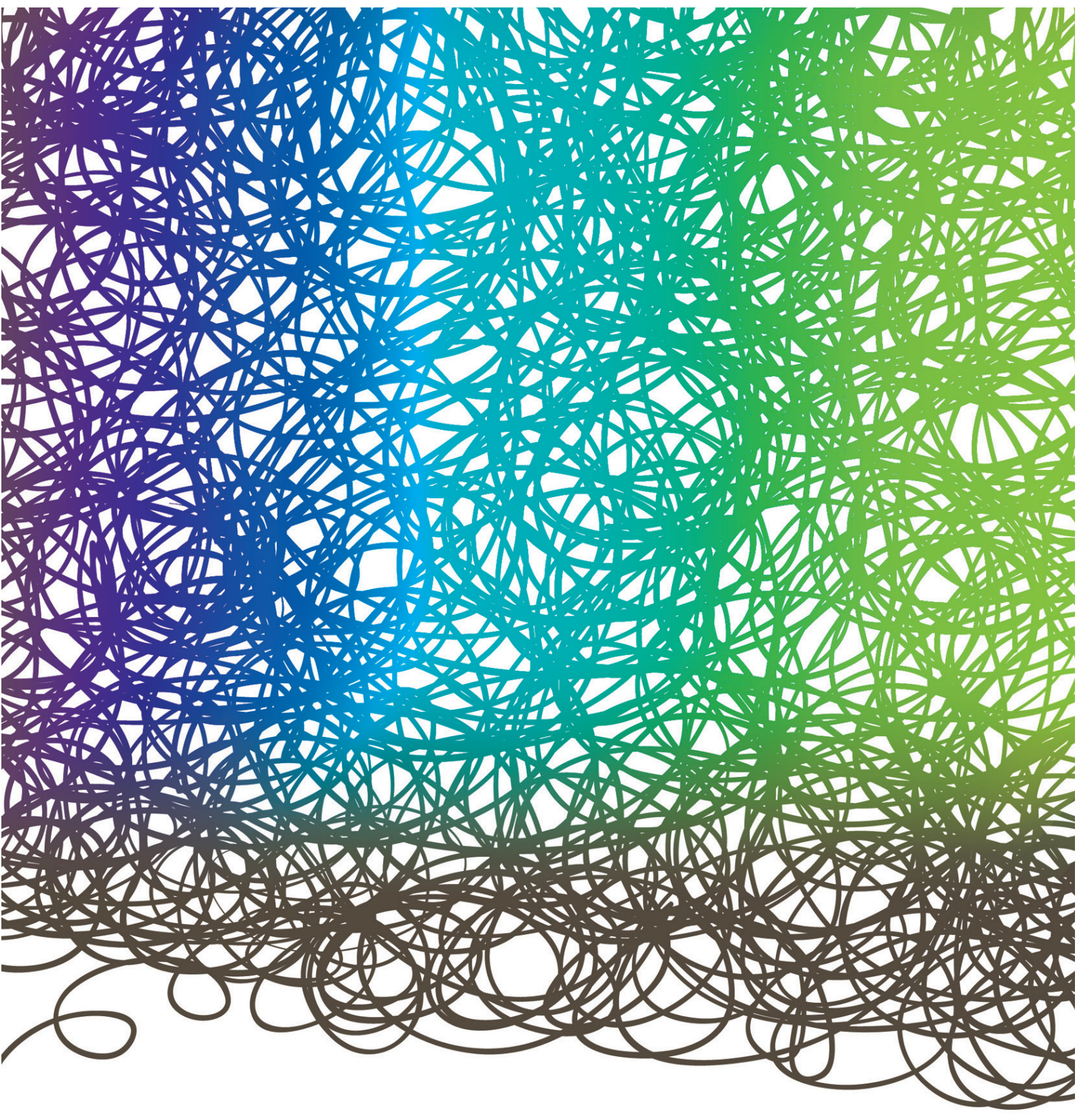


**Project: Access to support services  
and protection for disabled women  
who have experienced violence.**

## **Results and Recommendations**

Brochure for service providers and policy makers



## Editors

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## ***Hello!***

*This brochure provides important information and guidance for service providers and policy makers so they can ensure that disabled/ Deaf women who are affected by violence can access appropriate support and protection when they need it. The brochure includes recommendations for women's support services, disabled people's organisations and policy makers, based on a comparative project funded by the European Commission Daphne III programme. Further information about the project is on pages 4–5.*

The project involved disabled and Deaf women who had experienced violence. They were asked to reflect on their experiences of support and protection (both formal and informal) against the violence they had encountered in their lives, and also about how systems of support could be improved. The recommendations presented in this brochure have been developed in collaboration with the disabled and non-disabled women who contributed to the study, including the participants and the advisory group members.

## About the Project

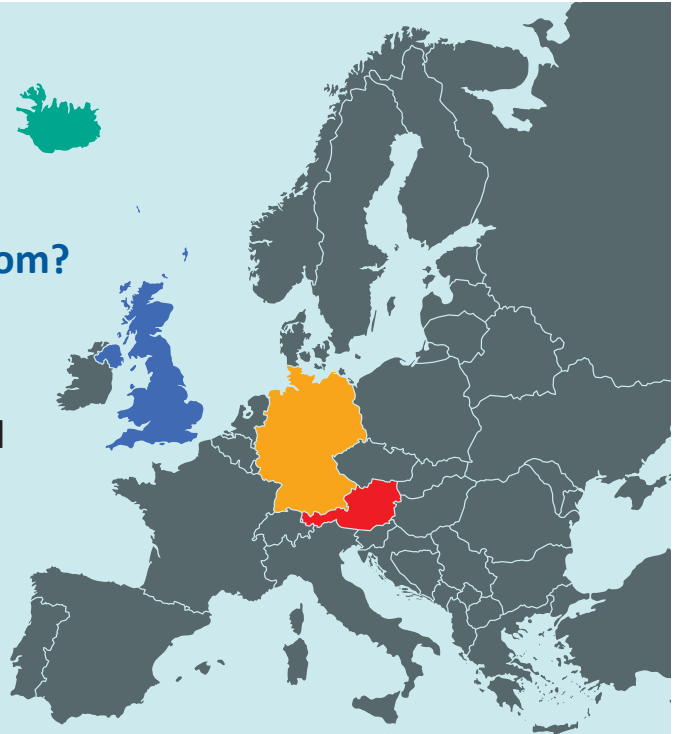
Disabled and Deaf women and girls and those with long-term health conditions are more susceptible to different forms of violence across their lives compared with non-disabled women. The violence happens within a range of contexts (e.g. home, school, hospital) and is done by various perpetrators, including professionals and family members as well as partners. However, disabled women and girls face several obstacles when trying to access information and support to escape abusive relationships, both from women's support services (which are often not accessible) and disabled people's organisations (which do not often prioritise tackling gender-based violence). The voices and experiences of disabled women and girls are often hidden or not taken seriously.

This brochure is based on research, co-funded by the European Commission, and carried out in collaboration with Universities, service providers and disabled women in four European countries: Austria, Germany, Iceland and the United Kingdom. The project was concerned with the situation of disabled/Deaf women who have experienced violence, and specifically their access to specialised support systems in their respective countries. One of the major aims of the project was to generate new knowledge, with a view to informing future policy and service provision relating to violence against disabled/Deaf women and girls. More information about the project, including the national and comparative reports and translated products (into BSL, Audio and Easy Read), is available via the project website: <http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/publications>

## Recommendations

### Where did the recommendations come from?

The recommendations presented in this brochure were developed from the findings of the four phases of the research conducted by each of the partner countries – online surveys of specialist women’s support services and disabled people’s organisations (602 responses); interviews with experts from 15 of the surveyed support services (54 expert interviews); focus group discussions with disabled and Deaf women (106 women), followed by in-depth interviews with Deaf and disabled women (81 women).



In the United Kingdom, the online survey was distributed to women’s support services by the four national Women’s Aid services and to disabled people’s organisations via national umbrella services (in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). 73 of the total 187 participants responded to the online survey, giving a response rate of 39%. Next, individual interviews were conducted with representatives from 15 of the 73 services. These included disabled and non-disabled women. This was followed by group discussions and in-depth individual interviews with a total of 45 women. The women were aged 18–65, had different impairments and were from different ethnic backgrounds. Group discussions were held in various parts of the U.K. and facilitated by the U.K. investigators who were disabled and non-disabled women. Topics of discussion and interviews focused on the women’s experiences of violence and support during their lives.

The recommendations are presented on pages 8–9 of this brochure. They are divided into three sections – for women’s support services, for Disabled People’s Organisations and for policy makers. All relevant documents and the guidelines for identifying good practices are available at the project website: <http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/>

## Summary of Project Results

In all four countries there are national legal instruments in relation to violence against women and disabled people. All countries have signed up to the main international treaties related to violence against women and on the rights of disabled people. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). However there were significant gaps identified in relation to protecting disabled women against violence.

In addition, disabled women encounter several barriers to accessing the justice system and the support services which are open to non-disabled women. These include lack of physical access to services, the inaccessibility of publicity materials and lack of accessible alternative accommodation such as refuges. Social stereotypes, such as that disabled women are asexual, tragic or burdens to society, and professionals' poor understanding of disability and impairment-specific abuse often result in disbelief that the women have experienced violence. These barriers can leave disabled women without protection from more general sources of support.

Like non-disabled women, the disabled women involved in this project reported experiencing different forms of violence over their lives, including psychological, emotional, physical, sexual violence and institutional abuse. However disabled women are at a greater risk of experiencing additional types of abuse at the hands of people who are supposed to "care" for them, such as personal assistants, parents, health care workers and staff of residential settings. Being reliant on the perpetrators can prevent the women from accessing support, either because they have to rely on the perpetrator to access support or because they are afraid that disclosure may result in them losing the support necessary for them to manage their daily lives.

Some women in all countries had difficulties in understanding sexual boundaries and recognising sexual abuse. In some cases women only recognised the abuse later in their lives, and their lack of knowledge can only have exacerbated their powerlessness in the eyes of perpetrators.

In all countries most women reported that peer support groups, empowerment groups and peer counselling were helpful. They also valued opportunities to provide support to other women in similar situations to their own. However in terms of support services, only a minority of women reported these to be adequate in their area. Many women, in all countries, lacked knowledge and information about the service provision that was available for those affected by violence and abuse. Those who did have this knowledge had links with support services, through their own work, studies or association with disabled peoples organisations (DPOs).

Lack of funds was a consistent problem in all countries. Specialised service providers experienced more demand than they could meet. Therefore they faced difficult decisions about who they could help. In some instances service providers turned disabled women away because they considered they would be more difficult and would require more resources to help.



## Recommendations for Women's Support Services

- **Be prepared and willing to support disabled/Deaf women**

Support Services should include disabled/Deaf women in their clientele and be willing to undertake necessary changes in order to provide successful and barrier free support to them.

- **Provide regular disability equality training to staff, including support staff and front-line workers**

Women's support services need to ensure their staff have the right skills and attitudes to serve disabled and Deaf women who have been affected by violence. This may require regular disability equality training to be put in place for support staff and front line workers. The training should address the specific situation of violence against disabled women, including the different manifestations of violence perpetrated against them. It should also promote a social model understanding of disability.

- **Provide accessible support**

Services should be accessible to women with different impairments. This means ensuring they are physically accessible to allow women who use wheelchairs to be able to access the building and all rooms in the building. It also means having facilities like a text phone, hearing loop, staff who are proficient in sign language and audio materials to ensure women with visual or hearing impairments can use the service effectively. Information needs to be available in different accessible formats. It is important for support staff and therapists to be trained to be able to meet the needs of women with different impairments.

- **Include disabled/Deaf women on paid and voluntary staff**

Support services should include disabled/ Deaf women as part of their workforce, ensuring they have the same opportunities as non-disabled staff in terms of career progression and decision making. This should



ensure that support given to disabled women is better grounded in their experiences.

- **Provision of peer support within support services**

Evidence suggests that disabled and Deaf women affected by violence benefit from peer support. Therapeutic support services and organisations should facilitate the development and maintenance of safe peer support forums for disabled women and Deaf women. This may require additional funds to facilitate women's travel requirements, personal assistance and dietary needs in order to participate in the meetings.

- **Ensure information is provided in accessible formats**

Services should ensure all information about support offered is available in accessible formats – electronic, BSL clips or audio files and easy read

- **Actively raise public awareness about violence against disabled women**

Services should ensure that public events and literature on violence against women reflect the experiences and voices of disabled and Deaf women.

- **Train other professionals about issues around violence against disabled women**

Services should train professional groups, such as those who work in the disability and health & social care sectors, about the different manifestations of violence against disabled women and how they should respond to such cases.

- **Collaborate with other organizations**

Women's services should collaborate with Disabled People's Organisations and organisations for disabled people to establish networks engaged in preventing violence against disabled and Deaf women.

## Recommendations for Disability Services and Disabled People's Organisations

- **Include combatting gender-based violence in the mission of the organisation**

Organisations should address the issue of gender-based violence within their work so they can offer support to disabled/ Deaf women affected by violence.

- **Collaborate with women's support services**

DPOs and organisations for disabled people should actively engage with women's support services and other organisations that offer support to women affected by violence. DPOs should provide support services with disability equality training and help with accessibility issues.

- **Improve accessible information**

DPOs and disability service providers can use their expertise to translate information about support for disabled women affected by violence into accessible formats. Also they could collaborate with women's support services and participate in outreach programmes to disseminate support materials to disabled and Deaf women affected by violence.

- **Develop clear protocols to prevent violence against disabled people**

Disability service providers should acknowledge and address the fact that violence happens within the service system. Preventing violence should systematically be implemented in the practices and activities of the services. Service providers should develop protocols or obligatory guidelines to ensure that all instances of violence or 'suspicious cases' are identified and investigated. Such guidelines would encourage staff to intervene and improve users' safety. It is paramount that management support the implementation of such guidelines actively. When establishing concrete intervention strategies, users of the services should be involved.

## Recommendations for National Policy Makers

- **Formally commit to improving access to services for disabled/Deaf women who experienced violence**

According to Article 16 of the CRPD all States should take all appropriate measures to promote the recovery of ‘persons with disabilities’ who have become victims of violence. It is important that policy makers make a commitment by prioritising the issue and funding implementations necessary to facilitate access to support. States should make law reforms or put in place legislation and policies to ensure psycho-emotional support for disabled/Deaf women who have experienced violence.

- **Provide ring-fenced funds for support services to support and protect disabled/Deaf women affected by violence**

Funds to women’s support services should be increased, and special attention and resources focussed on projects that address support for disabled/Deaf women affected by violence. Additional ring-fenced funds should be given to women’s support services to put more resources in place to support and protect disabled/ Deaf women.

- **Provide funds to establish and maintain user-led support groups**

Many disabled/Deaf women value self-help groups and peer support. It is important to fund and promote the establishment of such support options.

- **Make support and resources available for disabled/Deaf women in rural areas**

States should emphasise access to support and protection for disabled/Deaf women living in rural areas.

- **Improve access to information**

Information about violence and support should be accessible to ALL women. Information about how to recognise different forms of violence, and what support is available should be available in different accessible formats (i.e. BSL, audio format, Braille and Easy Read) which can be found in public spaces and through different media (i.e. internet, radio, television and in print media). All accessible information should be developed in collaboration with disabled women.

- **Promote sex and reproductive education for disabled/Deaf women and girls**

Governments should ensure that information about sexual and reproductive rights of disabled/ Deaf women and girls is part of core curricula in schools and other educational institutions. Such education should also promote self-empowerment and help for women to distinguish inappropriate and abusive behaviour.

- **Promote training and knowledge exchange for professional groups**

Professionals who work in the support or disability sector should receive training about violence against disabled women and about how to support victims/ survivors with various impairments. Such training should be incorporated into professional or undergraduate level courses within the health and social care sectors and criminal justice system. It should aim to address prejudices and provide a deeper understanding about the living conditions and experiences of disabled/ Deaf women. Where possible, training activities should be designed and facilitated by or in collaboration with, disabled/Deaf women.

- **Raise awareness about violence against disabled/Deaf women and girls in public domain**

Ensure the issue of violence against disabled/ Deaf women is debated in public and included in mainstream discourse on violence against women. In accordance with article 8 of the CRPD, states should undertake measures to raise awareness about societal perceptions of disabled people and violence against them. This should aim to reduce prejudice towards disabled women who speak up about the violence they experience and increase their chances of being believed.

- **Improve access to justice for disabled/Deaf women**

Access to legal assistance for disabled/Deaf women who have experienced violence should be improved. Policy makers should review or amend legislation to facilitate the participation of disabled/Deaf women in legal proceedings. They should furthermore strengthen laws that make the exclusion of carers or perpetrators from the home possible, rather than requiring the woman to leave. Such an approach should also apply to disabled/Deaf women living in institutions. This can be important in cases where women do not have alternatives, such as when refuges are physically inaccessible for women. They should also ensure that the criminal justice sector is supportive of disabled/Deaf women by providing disability equality training to lawyers, judges and law enforcement officials about the rights of disabled women and the types of violence they can experience, including that specific to being disabled.



## Contact information:

These contact details are for service providers or groups who can provide more information for groups working with disabled or Deaf women after violence and abuse – the email addresses may not be confidential or immediately answered. If you need help and support, call 999 for the Police, the National Domestic Violence helplines or use the contact information provided in another brochure for this project: Violence and Abuse – What Can I Do? Information for disabled or Deaf women. *Thank you.*

### UKROL

UK Refuges Online (UKROL) is a UK-wide online information system about domestic violence/abuse services available for women and children and refuge vacancies, including access information. It is available to services that are members of any of the Women's Aid Federations: Welsh Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. It is a carefully password protected website, with a strict level of security that is available only to these refuge and domestic violence/abuse service providers and, via a confidentiality agreement, to those who are responsible for building and administering the system.

If you are not a member of any of the Women's Aid Federations you can purchase a hard copy directory of domestic and sexual violence services called the Women's Aid Gold Book.

**Women's Aid Federation of England,  
PO BOX 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH,  
England** 0117 944 44 11 (general enquiries only) Fax: 0117 924 1703  
Email: [info@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@womensaid.org.uk)

### England

**Rape Crisis England and Wales**  
[rcewinfo@rapecrisis.org.uk](mailto:rcewinfo@rapecrisis.org.uk)  
(staffed part-time)

### **Disabled people's organisations working against hate crime, domestic and sexual violence**

Stay Safe East (London) – Advocacy, Training and Reporting  
Tel: 0208 519 7241 Text: 07587 134 122  
Email: [advocacy@staysafe-east.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@staysafe-east.org.uk)  
<http://www.staysafe-east.org.uk/contact>

**Vision Sense – Safety and Justice Ambassadors, Accessible Information and Training** Tel: 0300 111 0191  
Email: [justice@visionsense.co.uk](mailto:justice@visionsense.co.uk)  
<http://www.visionsense.co.uk>

**Deaf Hope** Tel: 01494 687600  
voice/minicom 020 8772 3241  
Email: [deafhope@signhealth.org.uk](mailto:deafhope@signhealth.org.uk)  
Website: <http://www.signhealth.org.uk/deafhope/>

### **For local organisations led by disabled people**

UK Disabled People's Council: <http://www.ukdpc.net/site/membersbr>  
(information only – no current staff)

**National Forum of People with Learning Disabilities**

Email: [national.forum@voiceability.org](mailto:national.forum@voiceability.org)

Website:

<http://www.nationalforum.co.uk/>

**People First Members Groups**

Tel: 0207 274 5484 Website:

<http://peoplefirstltd.com/members/>

**Deaf Connections** Tel: 0141 420 1759

<http://www.deafconnections.co.uk/>

**Shaping Our Lives** Tel: 0845 241 0383

Email: [information@shapingourlives.org.uk](mailto:information@shapingourlives.org.uk) Website:

<http://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/>

**People First Members Groups**

Tel: 0207 274 5484

<http://peoplefirstltd.com/members/>

**Wales**

**Welsh Women's Aid, Cardiff**

Tel: 02920 541 551

Email: [admin@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:admin@welshwomensaid.org.uk)

Website:

<http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/>

**Disability Wales, Caerphilly**

Tel: 029 20887325 Fax: 029 20888702

Email: [info@disabilitywales.org](mailto:info@disabilitywales.org)

**Northern Ireland**

**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

129 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP,  
Northern Ireland O2890 249041

info@womensaidni.org Website:

<http://www.womensaidni.org/>

**Disability Action, Belfast**

Tel: 028 9029 7880

Email: [hq@disabilityaction.org](mailto:hq@disabilityaction.org)

Website:

<http://www.disabilityaction.org/>

**Scotland**

Scottish Women's Aid: Tel: 0131 226  
6606 Email via website link:

<http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/>

**Rape Crisis Scotland**

Rape Crisis Scotland, 46 Bath Street,  
Glasgow, G2 1HG Tel (General

enquiries): 0141 331 4180 (Monday  
– Friday, 9.30am-4.30pm) Fax and

minicom: 0141 332 2168 (Office)

<http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/>

**Wise Women**

Tel: 0141 550 7557

<http://www.wisewomen.org.uk/>

**Saheliya** Tel: 0131 556 9302

<http://www.saheliya.co.uk/>

**Shakti Women's Aid, Edinburgh**

Tel: 0131 475 2399

Email: [info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](mailto:info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

Website:

<http://www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk/>

## Project Partners



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

