

Organisers:
**Government of the Republic of Malta
& UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA)**

with co-sponsors:
**Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO),
Autism Research Centre – University of Cambridge, Department of Disability
Studies – University of Malta, Inclusion International, International
Disability Alliance (IDA), Autism Advisory Council – Malta, Commission for
the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) – Malta**

Leave No Autistic Mother Behind:
Autism and Motherhood – Experiences, Challenges and Positive Strategies

*A side event for the 12th session of the Conference of States Parties to the
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*

3.00pm - 4.15pm, June 13, 2019; UN Conference Room 12

CART and International Sign interpretation provided

Abstract

Autism is a partially genetic, lifelong neurodevelopmental difference, yet there is limited research examining parenting in autistic mothers.

This side-event will discuss, from both an academic and an experiential point of view – including through 2 panellists who would be speaking both as researchers and as autistic mothers – the experiences of autistic mothers in areas related to parenthood: pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period, self-perception of parenting strengths and weaknesses, communication with professionals in relation to one's child, and the social experience of motherhood, including disclosing one's diagnosis of autism in parenting contexts.

Furthermore, the issue of autistic mothers' experiences of interacting with child protective services will be discussed, particularly in view of the fact that mothers with intellectual disabilities and mental health difficulties are at an increased risk of being targeted by said services, in comparison with neurotypical mothers. This could have significant consequences for families, especially if social services have little knowledge about the parent's condition.

Panellists will discuss research being carried out by a consortium led by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen at the University of Cambridge's Autism Research Centre, as well as the experiences of mothers, disability advocates, and persons dealing daily with state policy and practice related to the subject-matter.

Outcomes

This side-event aims to:

- (a) discuss strategies for reaching and meaningfully supporting autistic women, through appropriate interventions, policies and programs, rooted in the UN CRPD model and in line with the targets of the SDGs, and;
- (b) investigate barriers women experience obtaining a diagnosis and the effect a late diagnosis has on their health, wellbeing and outcomes.
- (c) share examples of innovative ways to address shortcomings in:

- (i) awareness for mothers, professionals and members of the wider public;
- (ii) service delivery models, while discussing strategies for promoting inclusion and access for autistic mothers and mothers-to-be, and for reducing discriminatory treatment including pre and post-natal care; and
- (iii) achieving the Sustainable Development goals, recognising that autistic women need specific, targeted programs, because they have significantly higher rates of pre and post-natal depression than the general population.

PROGRAMME

Message from Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Malta to the United Nations

Moderator: Hon. Anthony AGIUS DECELIS, Junior Minister for Persons with Disability and Active Ageing, Government of the Republic of Malta

Panellists:

- (1) **Claire AZZOPARDI LANE**, Member, Autism Advisory Council – Malta; Head, Department of Disability Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta
- (2) **Monique BLAKEMORE**, Researcher, Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) – a member of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
- (3) **Sarah CROCKFORD**, Researcher, Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge
- (4) **Rhoda GARLAND**, Executive Director, Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) – Malta
- (5) **Dena GASSNER**, Member, Board of Directors, The Arc – USA; Adjunct Professor, Towson University
- (6) **Connie LAURIN-BOWIE**, Executive Director, Inclusion International
- (7) **Robert VENNE**, Social Affairs Officer, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA)