



SDGs REPORTS 2020

**Regional Report by the Arab Organization
of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD) on the
Implementation of the SDGs and the CRPD in the
Arab World**



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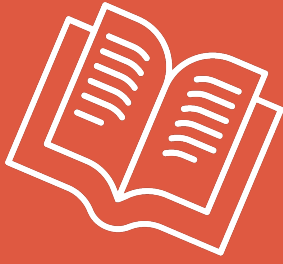
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	9
DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY	11
A. COMMITMENT TO THE CRPD	14
B. THE CONDITIONS OF REFUGEES AND REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES IN PARTICULAR	20
C. THE CONDITION OF OPDS	25
D. DISABILITY AND CRPD-SDGS LINKAGES	28
SDG 1 - Poverty and social protection	29
SDG 4 - Inclusive education	34
SDG 5 - Gender equality	42
SDG 8 - Economic development and employment	47
SDG 11 - Accessibility or sustainable towns and human settlements	52
SDG 16 - An inclusive community for everybody	56
SDG 17 - Partnerships with international organizations and agencies	59
CONCLUSION AND OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS	62
RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS	63
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT	66
RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS	67
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	67
REFERENCES	68
APPENDIX	70



GLOSSARY

AOPD	Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities
CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IADO	Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations
IDA	International Disability Alliance
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
NARD	National Association for the Rights of Disabled People in Lebanon
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	The United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNRWA	The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
US	United States
WFD	World Federation of the Deaf

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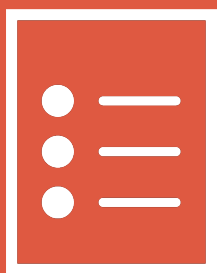
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like most persons with disabilities around the world, Arab persons with disabilities are under-represented within mainstream society, experiencing exclusion from social, educational, economic, cultural, and political life within their own societies.

Throughout all the surveyed Levant countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and many other Arab states, although some persons with disabilities from certain disability groups had access to rehabilitation, formal education, and vocational training, very few persons with disabilities hold permanent jobs or are able to start and run their own businesses.

The vast majority of persons with disabilities are not only poor, but they are also victims of discrimination on the basis of disability. They are subjected to deprivation of liberty and isolation, too. Women with disabilities are more likely than their male counterparts to experience higher rates of violence and abuse, stigma and discriminatory attitudes, and exclusion from education and employment. Both men and women with disabilities, regardless of their education level, experience discrimination, marginalization, isolation, and unemployment.

Despite the advocacy of the disability movement in their various countries, persons with disabilities in the Arab world face exclusion in all facets of society. Persons with disabilities have not been able to exercise and enjoy the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and there is a great risk that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be implemented to address the needs of persons with disabilities.

For four decades, the disability movement throughout the Arab countries has been advocating for the rights enshrined in the CRPD, to combat the prevailing discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the region. The advocacy efforts have been limited but efficient.

This report shows that although there are exceptions in which persons with disabilities lead successful careers and play an active role in their communities, the vast majority are excluded from participating in their national societies. Many barriers prevent their effective and full participation on an equal basis with others.

Unfortunately, limiting their effective and complete participation in community life negatively impacts all dimensions of their lives and that of their communities. Perhaps the most powerful proof of this exclusion is the almost total absence of children with disabilities from mainstream schools.

Another indicator is that very few persons with disabilities are invited to participate in social, cultural, and entertainment activities.



Still, one of the strongest causes of exclusion is the widespread inaccessibility of public and private buildings dedicated to public usage as well as public transport. Despite laws in some States that stipulate minimum accessibility standards for persons with disabilities, the actual implementation in these States is lacking.

Another unfortunate finding is the high rate of illiteracy among persons with disabilities. Many persons with disabilities are forced to drop out of school, even from special schools for students with disabilities, because the education system is not adapted to support diverse learning needs. For example, many special schools teach only primary and secondary education with no higher education level schooling available for students to continue their education.

In these schools, as well as among most Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD), regular education programming is seldom inclusive of students with disabilities or cognizant of their needs. This reality reinforces the prevalent discriminatory attitudes and norms that consider persons with disabilities ignorant and incapable of deciding for themselves. This amplifies exclusion.

Laws on the rights of persons with disabilities in the region do not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability or promote equal opportunities as stipulated in CRPD Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination. This leads to depriving persons with disabilities of obtaining basic services including health, social protection, clean water, and sanitation and prevents them from gaining access to education and employment. In addition, in countries that apply a quota system, a threshold of jobs reserved for persons with disabilities (usually only 1%-5%), employers still mostly break the rule. On the one hand, the quota system is not in line with CRPD stipulations. Furthermore, it may be deemed by many disability activists and public officials as an interim, necessary tool in the fight for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labor market.

This is not a reassuring posture for persons with disabilities to fully participate in the sustainable development process. Urging persons with disabilities to participate and mainstreaming them in society in their own right are two different things; the former does not promise full and effective participation on an equal basis with others.

To speak of contributing to sustainable development and the attainment of its 17 goals means sincere involvement of persons with disabilities in the everyday life of Arab societies. Inclusion is not yet a truly and fully adopted concept in Arab societies.

However, persons with disabilities are not newcomers to the labor market and rehabilitation services. They are also not strangers to development activities in their communities. It is unfortunate, therefore, that in the policy and decision-making processes on development issues, persons with disabilities have only participated in a limited manner.

In addition, they have not been actively included in decision-making processes affecting the development of their local communities. Their exclusion from these processes means that local development efforts will not effectively address inclusion and accessibility.

The charity and medical approaches to disability are the prevalent paradigms in a majority of Arab countries. Although these countries have ratified the CRPD and enacted new laws on the “rights of persons with disabilities,” the charity and medical approaches, unfortunately, continue to prevail.



Because the prevailing paradigms for disability issues are under the medical or charity model, policies and programs tend to be relegated to medical services, based on segregation, without initiatives and policy frameworks based on inclusion.

Remarkable also is that across the Arab countries, new laws on the rights of persons with disabilities fail to mention the concept of “prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.” (For example, the Lebanese law No. 220 on the rights of disability deals coyly with this. The law in one of its final articles allows persons with disabilities themselves or the National Council on Disability Affairs to sue any business or government department that refuses to employ a person with a disability on the basis of his or her disability.) The new laws may grant persons with disabilities a few rights, or what they describe as “privileges.” The Algerian law on disability, for example — enacted at the beginning of the 21st century — considers such “privileges” mere charity that persons with disabilities must accept without question.)

A frequent complaint is the inaccessibility of most schools, universities, hospitals, dispensaries, workplaces, places of worship, cinemas, theatres, museums, and restaurants for persons with physical disabilities in the first place. Persons with visual, intellectual, visual, and hearing disabilities are even more limited.

Furthermore, persons with disabilities often hold jobs in inaccessible workplaces. As such, they must devise makeshift innovations to access their workplaces, just as they often do with their own homes, especially if they live in old multi-story buildings, with long and narrow staircases.

For this reason, some observers and disability activists in the Arab world may subconsciously fear that enacting laws for the rights of persons with disabilities could form mere compensatory arrangements. This fear is reinforced by the faltering application of these laws, many years after their enactment. The examples of laws not being implemented in practice are numerous.

On one hand, for over 20 years disability cards have not been issued, which are necessary for accessing services and benefits. On the other hand, and more importantly: the limited inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools; the lack of tangible progress in ensuring accessibility standards implemented in practice; challenges in the provision of reasonable accommodations and difficulty acknowledging the legal capacity of persons with disabilities.

The correct linking of human rights concepts in the CRPD with the implementation of the SDGs within the development process demands a comprehensive, multidimensional process. In the Arab world, it is clear that this is not happening, yet.



INTRODUCTION

Over 12 years since launching the CRPD, six years after the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities, and four years after the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), it is necessary to report on the conditions of persons with disabilities in the Arab world.

This report focuses on these persons and their real-life situations with respect to enforcing the Convention and realizing the objective of allowing persons with disabilities to exercise their full rights.

The report also seeks to highlight these persons' involvement in SDGs in ten Arab countries of West Asia and North Africa. In West Asia, these are Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and the State of Palestine. The North African countries are Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. These are the most populous countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. They also host the most refugees in the region.

Since the 1980s, the Arab disability movement has been active at all levels – local, national, regional, and international – on progressive initiatives for persons with disabilities. The Arab movement participated actively in the 1981 international year of disability, the world decade of disability (1983 to 1992), and later in the development of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993).

In this respect, Arab disability activists frequently held meetings during the 1990s in order to synchronize their efforts and activities. It is such meetings that led to the establishment of the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD) on 3 November 1998 at the headquarters of the League of the Arab States, a gesture of significant value. Thereafter, AOPD proposed the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities (the Arab Decade), which would be adopted by the Arab council of the Ministers of Social Affairs that raised it to the Arab Summit for approval and implementation in 2004-2013.

The Arab Decade document consists of three parts. Part one outlines the 15 goals of the decade. Part two comprises the bulk of the document and discusses 11 axes: namely, legislation, health, education, rehabilitation and employment, facilities, and transport.

Others are children with disabilities, women with disabilities, elderly people with disabilities, information and social awareness-raising, globalization of poverty and disability, sports, and entertainment.



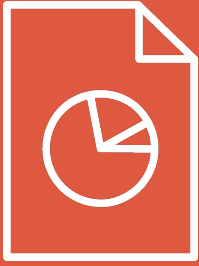
Part three presents a mechanism for audit implementation. On its part, the mechanism consists of two levels. The first is a national committee to follow up on the implementation of the axes and submit annual national reports to the technical secretariat of the Council of the Ministers of Social Affairs.

The second is a regional committee comprising the technical secretariats of the League of the Arab States and the AOPD. Unfortunately, commitment has been lacking on the part of governments to implement key aspirations of the Arab Decade. Save for scattered formal arrangements, the adoption of the Arab Decade by the Arab summit held in Tunisia in May 2004 did not lead to sufficient concrete results. The AOPD, on its part, has since 2004 mostly been engaged only with the drafting, signing, and ratification of the Convention.

In this report, all the countries studied have special laws for persons with disabilities. Iraq and Mauritania are the latest to enact new laws on the care for, protection, and promotion of persons with disabilities and special needs. Egypt in 2018 upgraded its law on the rights of persons with disabilities by enacting a new one that seems CRPD compatible, but so far is not enforced. Sudan and Jordan amended their special laws on disability in 2017. However, Palestine, Algeria, and Lebanon have kept their old laws without amendment. Lebanon in 2000 modernized its law on disabilities by repealing the one enacted in 1973. Morocco in 2016 enacted a new law on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. In Tunisia, on the other hand, in May 2016 introduced to Law No. 83 of 2005 amendments cherry-picked some CRPD concepts. Moreover, many chapters of this law remain untouched; thus, the law is still incompatible with the Convention.

In addition to assessing the status of OPD, the report examines different aspects of the social, economic, cultural, and civil life of persons with disabilities who run or help run OPD in the Arab world.

Above all, the report seeks to highlight how persons with disabilities in this region have come to be aware of their rights, and how they defend and enjoy these rights while pushing for laws to protect gains made for future generations. The report indirectly seeks to highlight how committed the States Party and society are to the promotion of these rights for persons with disabilities, which is still a marginalized group.



DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

A set of four questions were prepared (see Appendix), discussed, and sent to the respondents, which comprised leading members of OPD in their various countries and trainees and alumni of the [Bridge CRPD-SDGs Training Initiative](#). Survey participants were selected by AOPD (the Arab region umbrella organization of OPD) and the International Disability Alliance (IDA). AOPD and IDA selected OPD representing diverse constituencies of persons with disabilities, including under-represented groups, while ensuring gender diversity. They were given at least six weeks to finish their group work of writing country reports. Many points were clarified by raising specific questions to the country report writers about certain topics in order to clarify details and present them in an organized way.

The respondents' information feedback is used in the 2019 Arab Regional Report on Disability. This report is an attempt to record the observations of persons with disabilities relating to their conditions in their respective home countries. It actually seeks to highlight several important subjects; namely, it will help determine whether persons with disabilities feel convinced that their communities and country governments are ready to give them their deserved place and proper role in the sustainable development process.

Additionally, the report will aid in the efforts to attain the SDGs within the development process, while linking the SDGs with the CRPD, with the view of realizing the full participation of persons with disabilities in development activities. It is a regional report whose basic material was prepared by OPD leaders or representatives, relying on information gathered from published official data, media, and life experiences.

The report may be lacking in footnotes. However, it provides a table of references comprising information sources for most of the writers of country reports, the primary initiators of this report. The report thus depends on a respectable list of references, but without specificity.

The responses of OPD provide the basic information to be used in depicting reality and analyzing its facets and dimensions. These responses come mostly from various resources mentioned by country report writers. Simultaneously, attempts are made to augment data and information by drilling down on certain details and depending partially on additional information resources, including government reports and the 2018 UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report on disability in the MENA region.

Further, follow-up questions were directed to different country report writers in order to refine data and verify their accuracy.

The report does not attempt to embellish or stain reality. Rather, it solely points to information about each country in a way that facilitates comparison, thus revealing disparities and similarities. The report also seeks to avoid subjective interpretations and/or injecting opinions on legal citations. However, some analyses are provided only where findings are manifestly disputable.

The methodology consists of asking the participants the same four questions. The first three questions focus almost entirely on disability-related matters, such as determining what and how much of the Convention provisions are put into effect, the condition of refugees, particularly refugees with disabilities, in each of the countries concerned; and the condition of OPD and their own contribution to government policies in each country. Lastly, its inquiries about the extent to which the different Arab governments seem willing and committed to the full implementation of the SDGs, specifically with regard to goals relating to economic development as well as social and political dispensations. The last question may be regarded as a stand-alone survey. It consists of seven parts, which investigate in each country the implementation and achievement of the following seven SDGs:





- Question No. 1 highlights the importance of legislative work, how well a country's laws comply with the Convention and establish a legal framework for disability rights, and how well the laws are implemented.
- Question No. 2, about refugees, does not demand specifying each group of refugees; rather, it allows respondents to provide specific information, if available, about refugees with disabilities.
- Question No. 3 investigates the reality of OPD in each country. It asks about the number of active OPD and the role they may play in drafting and implementing policies. OPD should express the aspirations of persons with disabilities and have their representatives who liaise with governments and the national disability councils. It is noteworthy that the countries surveyed have a fairly big number of OPD with different interests and activities. However, very few of them show concerted effort in championing the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Though it complements the first three questions, Question No. 4 is more extensive in scope. It is consequently more critical in highlighting the endeavors to reveal in detail manifested links between CRPD and the SDGs in the various countries. It attempts to explain the gap between laws and development and social activities during the first four of the 15 years dedicated to realizing the sustainable development agenda.

The responses of OPD to the four questions provide the data that helps to portray and analyze the findings and all their dimensions. The responses depend on various sources cited by country report writers, who mostly do not provide scientific referencing to the sources. Therefore, an attempt is made, where necessary, to augment the data by referencing the 2018 report on disability in the Arab world prepared by ESCWA and other additional sources, including some national reports submitted by governments.

Below is an account of the detailed responses to the four survey questions.



A. Commitment to the CRPD

Question No. 1 looks at each country's commitment to reforming legislation to comply with the CRPD and to implement the legislation in practice. Nineteen out of the 22 member countries of the League of Arab States have so far ratified the Convention.

All countries surveyed subscribe to the sustainable development agenda. They are an integral part of the 2030 Agenda. Their governments have or are in the process of producing plans for achieving the 17 SDGs by 2030. It is noteworthy that with respect to implementing the SDGs, the Arab region lags behind other regions around the world.

The responses to Question No. 4 do not seem definitive or clear about the precise parts of the Convention being enforced. However, a study of the pieces of legislation on disability enacted by the various states can inform the states' level of commitment to the CRPD. It should be noted that CRPD consistent legislation and practices do not yet seem common around the world in general and in the Arab countries in particular.

Besides lagging behind in implementing the sustainable development agenda, the Arab states appear uncommitted to laws on the proper inclusion of persons with disabilities in social life. Practically all the Arab countries have endorsed the different human rights instruments. Yet, flagrant violations of human rights seem to continue in each country.

The CRPD is a binding instrument, but evidence suggests it will take a long time to be truly respected. The parts likely to be implemented fairly quickly among countries that ratify the Convention are those that address the universal design and use of different means of communication.

Since ratifying the CRPD, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia have enacted new laws or amended old ones. Of these, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia were the first to ratify the Convention in 2008, followed by Sudan in 2009, Mauritania in 2012, and Iraq in 2013. Amendments of old laws are said to have made these laws compatible with the Convention, but this is not accurate. For example, Mauritania, enacted its first and only law on disability on 23 November 2006, two weeks before the Convention draft was finalized, but the country did not amend the law thereafter. Instead, Mauritania still pursues the slow and delayed implementation of an old law that seems to be modeled on Algerian legislation. However, Jordan and Tunisia have amended their old laws, with Tunisia enacting the adjusted law in May 2016 and Jordan publishing theirs in September 2017.

On their side, Palestine and Lebanon have not amended their special laws on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enacted in 1999 and 2000, respectively, well before principles of the CRPD began to be discussed and drafted. However, the two respective laws are considered relatively progressive and somewhat consistent with the Convention, because they use a human rights framework and prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in accessing work and employment.

As for Algeria, it enacted its first special law on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities (Law No. 02-09) in 2002, but Parliament has not amended the law to reflect stipulations of the Convention and the full rights of persons with disabilities. Algeria ratified the Convention seven years after enacting Law No. 02-09.





“Recognizing also that discrimination against any person on the basis of disability is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person.”

Paragraph H of the Convention preamble

The rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and the notion of taking charge of their own affairs are not new to most Arab countries. Even before independence, many countries had welfare institutions that cared for the rehabilitation, education, and training of certain groups of persons with disabilities – an emulation of the approach common among colonial Western powers.

Therefore, it seems natural that the Arab countries surveyed would enact new laws to move from the charitable and medical approaches to persons with disabilities towards a rights approach. However, this should not exclude the social model, which implies society cares to bring down barriers and obstacles that hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all activities on an equal basis with others.

This is what should be inferred from paragraph H of the Convention preamble: *“Recognizing also that discrimination against any person on the basis of disability is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person.”* While many Arab countries passed new laws or amended old ones in an effort to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities, these laws seem nominally consistent with the Convention.

Most of the laws seem to prioritize the care approach over realizing the rights of persons with disabilities. However, some legislations stipulate the gradual elimination of the care and sheltering system, while seeking to gradually shift to the rights and social models, as might be inferred from Jordan’s Law No. 20 on disability rights.

Lebanon and Palestine appear to be unique, with their respective rights-based laws enacted a few years before the Convention. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) 1999 enacted Law No. 4 on the rights of persons with disabilities. It is a relatively brief and progressive piece of legislation.

In 2000 Lebanon enacted the more detailed and progressive Law. No. 220 on the rights of persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, many parts of this law are still not properly enforced. The PNA has also been suspending the application of certain rules imposed by Law No. 4. The Palestinian council of ministers, unlike its Lebanese counterpart, resolved on 19 February 2016 to adopt a part of the law that calls for the participation of persons with disabilities in community activities, including drafting a five-year plan (2017-2021) to implement the SDGs.

Persons with disabilities also had to be included in the plan. As for commitment and implementation of the Convention, both Lebanon and Palestine are still far behind. In any case, it is too early to tell what extent the PNA will accommodate persons with disabilities in the SDG plan. In Lebanon, on the other hand, lobbying is needed for the country to ratify the Convention and move toward a more transparent implementation of the SDGs. After the CRPD is ratified, Law No. 220 should be amended to become fully compatible with the Convention.



Jordan in 2017 enacted Law No. 20, which is CRPD compatible. It has many modifications and amendments to the law on the rights of persons with disabilities enacted in 2007. The new law makes a shift to “the equality and equal opportunities approach to realize full inclusion.” That may be said about any new law enacted after the ratification of the Convention. Jordan’s penal law has also been amended to become CRPD compliant.

The amendments called for maximum punishment for crimes of physical maleficence, negligence during care hours, and embezzlement on the basis of disability. The Jordanian central bank has also issued a policy to make all bank services accessible to persons with disabilities, allowing them full independence and privacy. This ended not only many decades of discrimination that prevented persons with disabilities from enjoying such rights on an equal basis with others, but the policy is also consistent with the country’s new law and the Convention.

Regarding the implementation of the Convention, Iraq has been quicker than other surveyed countries. It enacted Law No. 38 on the “care for persons with disabilities and special needs” less than six months after ratifying the Convention. Although the title of the law speaks of “care” or welfare,” the law incorporates numerous rights and privileges.

However, it would be more CRPD compliant if the legislators considered the input of their respective OPD. The most significant drawback of Law No. 38 is its “welfare” formula, which does not satisfy the aspirations of stakeholders. It also does not express a real shift from the charity and medical paradigm on persons with disabilities, which is incompatible with the Convention.

It is to be noted also that the Parliament of Kurdistan, the semi-autonomous, Kurdish-populated northern province of Iraq, had enacted Law No. 22 for persons with disabilities back in 2011. The law guarantees to all persons, including persons with disabilities, rights to education, health, and social welfare. Nevertheless, Iraqi persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination and exclusion when seeking access to public services open to all people. Neither law is put into practice. Suffice it to say that the laws play an important role in mobilizing for change in legislation and civil liberties.

Morocco in 2016 enacted Law No. 97.13, which sets a framework for the basic objectives of state action in the socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological areas affecting disability. Earlier in 2011, the country enacted Law No. 10.03 on accessibility. In addition, Article 2 of Law No. 51.17 on education, training, and scientific research stipulates that the “state shall mobilize all available resources and take the necessary measures to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities or with special conditions” and their empowerment to gain the right to education and acquisition of suitable skills and competencies.

On its part, Law No. 27.14 on fighting human trafficking strengthens the penalties for violence and abuse against persons with disabilities, with Article 448 stipulating: “The crime of human trafficking shall be punishable by 20 to 30-year imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 to 2,000,000 Moroccan Dirham in the following cases: 1. If the crime is perpetrated against a minor 18; 2. If the crime is against a person suffering hardship due to old age, sickness or deficiency -- physical or psychological -- or against a pregnant woman, whether her pregnancy is apparent or known to the perpetrator.”



However, there is still a need to advocate for access to justice to end the violence and trafficking of persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities.

More noteworthy is the insertion of the Convention preamble and rules of procedure in the preamble of the Moroccan constitution of 2011. The Convention is superior to the country's laws on disability, which still need to be adjusted for compatibility with the Convention. Not only has the constitution banned all forms of discrimination on the basis of disability, but it has also included a clause in Article 34 calling on the State to mainstream policies for persons with disabilities.

However, Moroccan disability activists note that the authorities continue to adopt the medical approach, which focuses on impairment prevention and treatment. This is not harmonious with the Convention, which stipulates the acceptance of human diversity and full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities. Moreover, the framework Law No. 97.13 has a loophole: it does not specify the effective date, which could imply the law is suspended perpetually. Morocco ratified the Convention and its Optional Protocol on 8 April 2009.

Following the publication of the Convention in the official gazette on 12 September 2011, "government authorities in partnership with the civil society started to act by taking several executive measures in order to realize the rights stipulated by the Convention."

As for Egypt, it has enacted a special law on the rights of persons with disabilities. It now has Law No. 10 passed in February 2018, which seeks to conform with the CRPD but is not fully compatible. Moreover, the law remains suspended. Egyptian students with disabilities need ministerial approval to legalize their admission to a regular school.

It is noteworthy that many special ministerial policy directives have been issued to make up for the incomplete, old law, or to cover some of what the new, suspended law would address. These ad hoc policy directives are meant to rectify the illegal conditions of thousands of students with disabilities. Without such measures, these students would not join regular schools and would not get official certificates and be considered graduates of secondary or vocational schools.

What is surprising is the reluctance of legislators to improve adherence to the CRPD, which is the only relevant, binding international instrument.

On its part, Algeria in 2002 enacted Law No. 02-09 for the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities. This was the country's first unique law on disability since its independence 40 years earlier. However, the title does not mention "rights," although the body sets out many significant rights and "privileges" previously not provided in law to persons with disabilities.

The law acknowledged for the first time the "group" of persons with disabilities as an "entity with full rights and duties." However, the law's incompatibility with the Convention is evident. Remarkably, the directional phrases do not signify enforcement.

Phrases such as "may," "take care," "act on," etc., allow many loopholes for possible abuse. This indicates the law's weakness. Moreover, Algeria has not renewed or at least amended its legal repertoire to become CRPD compliant.



Although it is not obligatory, the law does not mention the “universal design,” which the Convention specifically prescribes, particularly for all persons obtaining suitable products, devices, programs, or software and services. On the other hand, the law was enacted more than one year prior to discussions on the first draft of the Convention in January 2004. A major weakness of Law No. 02-09 is its treatment of persons with disabilities’ rights as mere privileges that they must accept unconditionally.

It also neglects to treat them with respect, which is of greater importance. It is important to amend this law to acknowledge that persons with disabilities must live on an equal basis with others without discrimination, in harmony with the Convention.

Mauritania took the initiative late in the fall of 2006 to enact Law No. 0043 on the “promotion and protection of persons with disabilities.” An executive decree ensuing from this law stipulates the issuance of a disability card.

In 2015, the aforementioned executive order was decreed to conform with Article 5 of Law No. 0043. It is noteworthy that the disability card mentioned in the law should allow its holders to receive free health and education services, financial allowance, and other privileges. Mauritania has also issued five other executive orders or decrees in relation to certain articles of Law No. 0043, which are not bound by CRPD. Also, no monitoring mechanism is in place to track the implementation of the Convention or to “follow up public policies that are oriented towards persons with disabilities.”

Most remarkable are the medical and charitable nuances present in many Arab laws enacted after the Convention. For example, a clause in Tunisia’s 2016 amendment of Law No. 83 of 2005 reads: “Prevention and early detection of disability, as well as limiting its repercussions [...] provide (persons with disabilities) with health and social services and rehabilitate them [...].”

As for Sudan, it enacted a special law on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2017 only eight years after the previous law of 2009, which was not CRPD compatible. However, Sudanese advocates for the causes of persons with disability criticize the new law for not banning discrimination on the basis of disability and not obliging authorities to provide reasonable accommodations to guarantee the participation of persons with disabilities in their communities, on equal footing with others.

The new law runs short of keeping all the commitments demanded by the Convention, although the law is the only legal instrument to protect the rights of Sudanese persons with disabilities. It would be worrying to regard such laws as if they are separate from the legal condition and reality in the various Arab countries.

Implementation of these laws seems confined only to certain state departments, mostly the ministries of social affairs or its equivalent. However, the legal instruments stipulate that almost all government departments must be involved in realizing the objectives of these laws.

They focus particularly on enshrining the rights of persons with disabilities to all aspects of life — accessibility, health, inclusion in regular schools, granting driving licenses to persons with disabilities deserving them, as well as the right to employment and work, the right to move freely inside their home countries and abroad, in sports, cultural and artistic activities, getting covered by social assistance, participation in political life as voters and candidates, and the right to enjoy other arrangements and facilities that make persons with disabilities equal to other community members.



If laws are considered the measure of countries' commitment to implementing international covenants, many of the surveyed Arab countries have enacted new special laws on the rights of persons with disabilities since their ratification of the Convention. However, it is debatable that the laws are CRPD compliant.

It is also difficult to determine the accuracy of adherence of Arab society and states to the rules of procedure, for a number of reasons. Due to the limited implementation of the Convention even after enacting new laws, and amending new ones, that lax commitment to the letter and spirit of the Convention implies difficulty in realization of the SDGs as well, particularly because of negative attitudes toward the participation of persons with disabilities prevents progress and thwarts achievement of the SDGs.

This highlights the need to find better ways to link the Convention with SDGs, which in turn necessitates an investigation into the condition of refugees, particularly refugees with disabilities, in the surveyed Arab countries. How well are refugees with disabilities accommodated? Or are excluded and their needs and rights ignored? It is also necessary to elaborate on the situation of OPD and its role in planning and implementing policies. Thereafter, it is possible to discuss successful links between some CRPD implications with seven of the 17 SDGs.

It seems that the new laws do not fully and truly adopt the concepts and aspirations of the Convention. It appears that in the Arab world the rights to education, employment, work, and social security are considered mostly basic rights of persons with disabilities. However, legal capacity is a rights issue that has not been addressed in all sectoral laws such as laws on employment, education, social protection, and health.

Therefore, legal capacity does not seem to be accepted as an inalienable right not only for persons with intellectual disabilities but also for persons with sensory disabilities. Even persons with physical disabilities are unable to access the vast majority of public buildings as well as private buildings dedicated for public use, such as historical buildings and places of worship.

Most workplaces employing persons with disabilities of all kinds are unfortunately still inaccessible. Even reasonable accommodations, in a large number of cases, is not arranged to facilitate the movement of employees with disabilities into and out of their offices, factories, shops, and other workplaces. This is another form of rights denial. The same law that stipulates the employment of persons with disabilities sets out the basic conditions of accessibility and implies arranging reasonable accommodations.



B. The conditions of refugees and refugees with disabilities in particular

At the heart of Question No. 2 are refugees with disabilities living under unfavorable conditions. In cases of mass displacement, forced exodus, and, sometimes, planned migration of families, it is as if persons with disabilities do not exist. If data on refugees with disabilities were available, the number of refugees with disabilities would be relatively small.

What is worrying about the condition of refugees is that most, if not all, Arab countries host many refugees from other Arab, Asian, and African countries under unfavorable conditions. A big number of refugees leave their home countries with family members that may include persons with disabilities.

Moreover, refugees do not come from only certain countries, especially those countries experiencing insecurity and social upheavals or violence. Rather, refugees from friendly countries may settle in one Arab country, yet some citizens of the hosting country may also seek refuge outside in more stable or relatively stable Arab countries.

However, the number of registered refugees and displaced persons seems higher in a few Arab countries. Arab refugees in 2015 comprised nearly 40% of the total number of refugees around the world. What stands out in the Arab world is the abject living conditions in refugee camps and settlements.

These fragile living circumstances are aggravated by the near inexistent regular health, education, and rehabilitation services. There is also a dire scarcity of job opportunities for the vast majority of refugees, particularly refugees with disabilities, who are in urgent need of reliable income and better living standards to alleviate their living conditions and economic hardship and to help them thrive and enjoy a sense of dignity.

As a result of the abject living conditions and services, it is therefore not surprising that refugees with disabilities are practically absent from refugee profiles. In most Arab countries, data on refugees is not disaggregated by disability, thus the actual numbers of refugees with disabilities are unknown.

Of the known data, Tunisia hosts the least percentage of refugees in proportion to its population, while Lebanon hosts the largest. (Tunisia (0.01%), Morocco (0.02%), Egypt (0.39%), Iraq (0.64%), Mauritania (0.75%), Algeria (1.18%), Jordan (10.31%) and Lebanon (24.85). Precise data on the PNA territory of West Bank and Gaza Strip and Sudan was unavailable.

Morocco, which follows Tunisia among the least percentage of refugees in the population, has 7,139 refugees scattered over 53 cities and towns. This is equivalent to 0.02% of the country's 36 million population. Syrians account for 42% of the refugees. The rest are refugees from eight other Arab and African countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 221 of these individuals are asylum seekers, while 4,928 need international protection. In terms of gender, men account for 58.5% of the total, while women comprise 41.5%. The 18-59-year-old refugees form 58% of the group, those under 17 years old comprise 40%, and those over 59 years account for 2%.



However, it is surprising to see that persons with disabilities are not mentioned at all in the desegregated data analysis. Of the thousands of people moving from many different Arab and African countries, the number of persons with disabilities is either zero, which is unlikely, or, more likely, absent from records. It is unlikely that OPD workers do not ask whether there are any persons with disabilities among the refugees.

It would be natural to wonder whether refugees, many having traveled long distances, came as families or lone individuals. Not only that, but it is almost common to leave members with disabilities back at home during planned migration and, in some cases, forced displacement.

Tragically, when families must sail into uncharted waters, persons with disabilities tend to be considered unnecessary, extra weight, according to narratives by disability movements across different Arab countries.

Egypt hosts the second-lowest number of refugees in proportion to its population, but with a marked difference in numbers. According to figures published by UNHCR, Egypt has 380,675 refugees, which comprises 0.39% of its 98 million population. Persons with disabilities among them sum up to 2,700, making around 0.7% of the total number of refugees, according to the UNHCR data. It is unclear why in Morocco, UNHCR lacks data on refugees with disabilities, while in Egypt, the UNCHR data exists. In Egypt, time and resources have been invested in inclusion of refugees with disabilities.

Egyptian OPD report that UNHCR pays a monthly allowance of 600 Egyptian pounds (an equivalent to USD 40) to many of the refugees. Legally, in Egypt, the refugees with disabilities enjoy the right to rent houses, which they do, in slums, because of their meager benefits. They are unable to live decently with the little financial aid from UNHCR, which would not satisfy basic needs, never mind their many needs because of their circumstances. As a result of their barriers, they cannot work temporary jobs or hold permanent ones with adequate remuneration. The inability to improve their living standards is in fact growing, due to rapidly rising inflation.

Perhaps Mauritania faces a higher burden than its two counterparts above, because the former hosts 33,000 refugees, or 0.75% of its population of 4.4 million. Of these, 3,000 settles in the capital, Nouakchott, and 30,000 reside in the eastern province of Mbera. Mauritanian disability activists believe there may be persons with disabilities among refugees settling in their country but emphasize that there are no accurate figures. Apparently, domestic and international administrators or agencies serving persons with disabilities see no need to record their statistics.

This may signify one of two things or both: first, the costs of satisfying the needs of persons with disabilities among refugees are high, particularly if they do not have a specific residence or are on the move to other places and countries. Second, and perhaps more important, inherent indifference to persons with disabilities is prevalent.

Iraq hosts a fairly small number of refugees in proportion to its population of 38 million people, with the country's report stating that out of 247,000 refugees, the number of persons with disabilities is almost 1,000. They comprise a minimal percentage (0.4%) of the total number of refugees settling, mostly in Kurdistan.

It is important to note that the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that persons with disabilities comprise 15% of the global population. Depending on how data is collected, agencies may get much smaller estimates. Refugees in Iraq are people from neighboring countries that suffer insecurity and social upheavals and have an average of 4-5% of persons with disabilities.



This raises many questions about the fate of persons with disabilities if their nucleus or extended families are forced to leave their homes to seek refuge elsewhere, including in their own home countries. Imagine the case when such families are forced to move to foreign countries or communities that speak unfamiliar languages! What is the fate of persons with disabilities in such circumstances, if the host countries are unable to provide any support for them?

Jordan, despite its smaller and dense population, hosts far more than the other four countries combined. Jordan receives the second-highest number of refugees in proportion to its population. With 1,026,047 refugees, 355,000 of them Palestinian and 671,047 Syrian, the refugee population is slightly more than 10% of the kingdom's population of 6.5 million. Among Syrian refugees who are hosted mainly in a huge camp near Jordan's northern border, 26,994 or 4.2% are persons with disabilities, according to UNHCR.

As for Palestinian refugees, surprisingly, no precise data on refugees with disabilities is available. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine refugees and government departments like the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for information on these refugees. UNRWA and the Jordanian government have together been offering assistance to Palestinian refugees with disabilities for many decades.

Therefore, many questions arise about the state of persons with disabilities, particularly as to why they remain the poorest of the poor and the least fortunate families with respect to receiving health, education, and rehabilitation services. The number of Palestinian refugees with disabilities is also surprisingly unknown or not mentioned, despite refugees living in 10 camps around the capital, Amman, for over 70 years. Another puzzle about Palestinian refugees in Jordan is that they currently number only 355,000, whereas in 1994 they were over 400,000, according to the book, *Missing Peace* by Warren Christopher, a former US Secretary of State. The fertility rate in the ranks of Palestinian refugees is relatively high, according to demographers and statisticians, hence this puzzle.

The PNA territory is crammed with camps hosting refugees since 1948 and 1967. This territory has a disproportionately large number of refugees. From the Palestinian perspective, this community suffers perennial persecution and injustice under the Israeli occupation. The Israeli security and administrative authorities interfere with the affairs of all Palestinians.

On the bright side, PNA's management of the affairs of Palestinian persons with disabilities is relatively progressive, thanks to Law No. 4 on disability rights. The Authority does not seem to discriminate between Palestinian citizens in terms of services and benefits to its people. Neither do members of the local Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip seem to discriminate against refugees. Therefore, within the territory under the control of the PNA it is difficult to speak of refugees in the proper sense of the word.

Like other Arab countries, Tunisia distinguishes between refugees and asylum seekers; the latter comprises 14% of the total number of displaced persons in that country. By the end of 2018, the number of asylum seekers reached 129, whereas the number of refugees did not exceed 885 persons. These figures, however, seem questionable, given the short violence in 2018 and for most of 2019 in the western parts of its next-door neighbor, Libya, and the turbulence spreading in other neighboring African countries.



However, the number of refugees in Tunisia skyrocketed after the 2011 eruptions in Libya. Their number rose to 151,000 refugees from Libya alone, followed by others from Sudan, Somali, Egypt, Palestine, and various African and Asian countries. They previously settled in the Choucha Refugee Camp until its closure by the Tunisian army in mid-2017. Despite such a huge figure of displaced persons, no refugees with disabilities seem to have been recorded.

Algeria hosts approximately half a million refugees, 400,000 from the adjacent Mali and Niger and 100,000 from Syria. The latter groups seem to be much more integrated within Algerian society. They seek to earn their livelihood by taking modest jobs. It is striking that refugees with disabilities, Syrians, or Africans, are not mentioned; this regrettably denotes apathy toward these persons.

However, the situation of African refugees appears to be more dire. They suffer from seemingly more miserable living conditions. Scores of them spend their nights in crowded bus and train stations. Many of them spend their nights sleeping on the ground in the open air. Others erect fragile tents or cardboard huts.

They earn their living by begging in the villages and towns. Analysts observe the difficulty the Algerian state faces in counting and keeping up with the refugees. Normally, the refugees head for the remotest southern part of Algeria and then move freely along the borders of four countries: namely, Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger.

Under such difficult circumstances, persons with disabilities are unable to move easily – it is no surprise, therefore, why no one speaks about them. The total number of refugees in Algeria is about 1.2% of the country's population of 42 million. No estimates exist on the number of persons with disabilities in the refugee population here.

However, an important observation regarding their situation here is that some with light disabilities may become street beggars, which is stereotypically expected of persons with disabilities in many parts of the developing world.

Sudan presents a good example of an Arab country that sends refugees and receives people displaced or migrating from other countries. It currently hosts a relatively big number of refugees from Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Eritrea, Chad, and other countries. In addition, Sudan remains a source, transit, and destination country for irregular movements of migrants and refugees, including refugees and asylum seekers who use the northbound migratory route from East Africa to Europe through Libya.

It was noted that Sudan continues to host a small group of Chadian refugees after a majority of them returned home by the end of 2018. It was difficult to analyze any change in the total number of refugees from the Central African Republic, with no prospects for their return to their home country. Unavoidably, there is an absence of data on refugees with disabilities among the unknown number of displaced persons moving around or settling temporarily in the vast Sudan.

Lebanon, on its part, hosts the largest number of refugees, almost 1.7 million Palestinian and Syrian refugees, according to estimates in the local media, reinforced by political sources. The figure excludes tens of thousands of Iraqi, Kurdish, Yemeni, Sudanese, Asian, and African refugees. The total thus reaches a staggering 40% of Lebanon's 6.8 million people. According to UNHCR, however, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon does not far exceed 900,000.



No concrete data can be found on the exact number of refugees with disabilities in this figure, for a country with under five million people. UNHCR does not share its data with the Lebanese authorities; it shares data with only a few Lebanese NGOs that work closely with the Syrian displaced, as they are known in Lebanon. UNHCR says that it provides some support for refugees with disabilities, while some Lebanese OPD say that they assist refugees through limited rehabilitation and training programs.

Three kinds of disability cards are issued in the Palestinian refugee camps. UNRWA issues one type of disability card. The PNA in Ramallah issues another type. A third type is issued by an NGO, Musawat Association -- which is chaired by a person with disability and takes care of the persons with disabilities, a rare occurrence.

However, it is unclear whether a person with a disability is issued one disability card or all three types. It was observed that not all the Syrian refugees are registered by UNHCR, which does not specify the number of Syrian refugees with disabilities. This is probably because families during registration do not declare their presence or absence.

International actors, governments, NGOs, and service providers addressing the rights of refugees need to ensure they identify refugees with disabilities and fulfill their rights to access and inclusion in line with CRPD Article 11 (situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies).



C. The Condition of OPDs

Question No. 3 asks about the conditions of OPD in each of the countries surveyed. It asks about their numbers in the country, as well as their roles and contributions in relation to drafting and implementing policies at the local and national levels. It is difficult to determine how many OPDs are active agents of change in their respective countries and communities.

Even though a number of OPDs in the Levant provide opinions and participate in policy and legislation discussions, often the final policies and laws do not reflect their contributions. This may explain why report writers did not offer straightforward responses to Question No. 3.

The number of active OPDs in the PNA does not exceed 15. Nevertheless, the number of registered ones is much bigger. Organizations may be defined as an OPD, but they are not considered effective if their work consists mostly of appealing for charitable contributions and financial support with no specific objective except for providing a little money here and there for a few persons with disabilities.

This is not only the case in Palestine, but it also applies to many registered OPD in Lebanon. Lebanese law permits starting associations, including OPD, with only a few founding members. A small number of persons with disabilities may gather to form an organization and register it. It may technically be classified as an OPD, but its activity would focus on fund-raising to distribute the money among members or allow the chairperson to control most of the finances.

The situation of the so-called inactive OPDs in the PNA territory is similar to the ongoing situation in Lebanon. Lebanon has a large number of registered OPDs. However, only a few of them are active, and fewer still defend the rights of persons with disabilities by running advocacy and lobbying campaigns. Many concentrate on providing services (see next paragraph), running some community-based rehabilitation, and awareness activities.

In general, both Palestine and Lebanon have a big number of organizations providing rehabilitation, education, and training services to persons with disabilities. They are known as service providers, which may imply that their boards and general assemblies do not have members with disabilities or may have one distinguished person with a disability. One important achievement recorded by Lebanese and Palestinian OPD is the contribution of a limited number of them to drafting the two relatively progressive national laws on the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Lebanese Disability Movement was fortunate to attend and contribute to the meetings of the Experts Panel and the Ad Hoc Committee that worked on the CRPD draft. The Palestinian Disability Movement also took part in the discussions of the Ad Hoc Committee. The disability movement in Lebanon gets the chance to participate in some meetings to evaluate or review some of the national reports submitted to UNHCR. The Palestinian OPD seems to be active along this line in addition to their attempt to provide quality services to persons with disabilities, as has been clarified by the activity of the Palestinian Disability Federation.



In Mauritania, the number of OPDs seems fairly small and is concentrated in the capital city. OPDs carry out diverse activities. Such activities are embraced by the Mauritanian Federation of OPDs, an umbrella organization comprising 42 national OPDs. Among these, 30 are quasi private associations, whereas 12 are associations specialized in human rights and disability matters.

It is worth mentioning that most of them carry out special and inclusive education activities. Other activities include rehabilitation, training, and vocational training in addition to awareness campaigns and fighting poverty.

As for Morocco, the report derives information about OPDs from the second national research on disability was carried out by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, Family, Equality, and Development in 2014. The research data clarifies that over 1000 associations are active in the field of disability.

They put concerted effort in the following fields: education of persons with disabilities, lobbying and advocating for the realization of their rights to be included in all policies and programs, and providing paramedical services as well as other economic empowerment services. Regrettably, research showed that only 2.9% of persons with disabilities are aware of the services provided by the Ministry. Under 6.6% of the people know about the services provided by special institutions.

Algeria, on its part, does not have a special law for OPDs. They are not at all distinguished from other NGOs, which are categorized as charitable, communal, or cultural. OPDs may be legal entities in the Arab world, but they are not seen as equal to other NGOs. This is because persons with disabilities were historically not regarded on an equal basis with others.

In the past, Algeria's OPDs were organized by impairment type, (i.e., each organization would focus on one disability.) This is no longer the case. OPDs may now act at three levels. Some act at the national level; these follow policy directives of the home ministry. Others act at the provincial level; these are subject to the provincial governments. The third category acts at the interstate level. These follow a different system, and do not cover all of Algeria's 48 administrative states or provinces.

Tunisia has up to 320 active organizations in the disability field. Some of them are national and have local branches in different regions of the country. Others are local associations. Welfare organizations form the bigger number, whereas OPDs are only 13 associations founded after 2011. Such organizations represent their members before state authorities.

However, their participation in public policymaking remains weak. This is due to many reasons, the most important of which are squabbles among leaders of different competing organizations and, sometimes, within the board of the same organization. Other reasons include lack of clear strategies, scant financial resources, and incompetent leadership.

In Egypt, hundreds of organizations are working on disability issues, but very few organizations are led by persons with disabilities. The charities and NGOs that work on disability issues often operating from a welfare or charity approach rather than a rights-based one. The most prominent OPD in Egypt is the Federation of OPD, which consists of 40 members. There is also the Egyptian Federation of the Deaf that comprises of a significant number of organizations led by persons who are deaf.



Most of the OPD in Egypt have faced limited access to funding, but they remain incredibly active in advocacy. A notable example is the provincial federation of OPD in Asyut, which has been able to make a visible impact despite limited resources, especially after its leader was elected to Parliament.

To date, most OPDs primarily support the drafting of the law on the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as reviewing the draft NGO law. They have also supported constitutional law reforms around the rights of persons with disabilities. However, outside of disability rights, OPDs are not systematically consulted in wider law and policy reforms.

The Egyptian Federation of OPD was consulted in the drafting of the special disability-related strategy of the Ministry of Social Solidarity. Egyptian persons with disabilities were represented in the Committee of Fifty for the second stage of drafting constitutional amendments by Dr. Hussam El-Massah, who is a person with cerebral palsy.

In neighboring Sudan, there are a number of active national OPDs. They act by lobbying for, demanding, or advocating and strengthening the rights of persons with disabilities. National federations of visual, hearing, physical and intellectual disabilities enjoy representation that has wider presence and influence than other agents active in the field of disability.

They are in fact admirable self-advocacy groups. They seem to have wider experience with the affairs of adults with disabilities but express a need to enhance their potential to work on matters concerning children with disabilities. Like other agents active in civil society, such organizations have been mainly occupied with demanding and providing services and devices.

These organizations also report a need to have a national federation or a Sudanese umbrella organization to undertake the responsibility of coordinating the work of local and national organizations. Such organizations began operations in the early 1970s, either as local initiatives or umbrella organizations at the national Sudanese level.

Jordan's Law No. 20 acknowledges DPOs and defines them in Article 2. In Clause (B) of Article 4, It calls for "The participation of persons with disabilities and OPDs in formulating policies, drawing plans, programs, and operations relevant to their affairs." According to an official in the Ministry of Social Development, Jordan has 260 OPDs.

Such organizations participated in all the phases of drafting Law No. 20 on the rights of persons with disabilities that was approved in 2017. The Jordanian disability movement enjoys the blessing of the royal family (who has nominated a person using wheelchair, Muhammad At-Tarawenah, to represent Jordan in the CRPD committee. He also partially participated in the discussions of the Ad Hoc Committee as an aid of the UN special rapporteur).

The number of OPDs in Iraq is much lower than that of other Levant countries. There are 15 organizations in the southern and middle parts of the country. In Kurdistan, the figure reaches 39 representing only a few millions, compared to the south and the middle regions with a population of 30 million.

A majority of the 50 organizations joined the Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations (IADO), which is currently preparing amendments to Law No. 38 on disability.



The reports also mention in general the activities and roles OPD play and carry out. They may be active in artistic, cultural, educational, recreational, and service provision fields. The OPDs may also be agents of change, advocates for adopting new ideas, concepts, and attitudes, even if, as stated earlier, their input may not always be incorporated in laws and policy.

Regardless, persons with disabilities as well as their organizations must play a role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Many stakeholders state that such a role is critical. Others perceive the potential significance of persons with disabilities' contribution to humanity but warn that different societies do not care for them as much as they should.

This is why producing a report on disability in the Arab region from the perspective of OPDs is so important. In general, under-represented groups such as deaf-blind persons, persons with psychosocial disabilities, and persons with multiple disabilities have not formed their own representative organizations and are not well represented within existing OPDs. However, persons with intellectual disabilities, who are often under-represented, are well represented in disability movements within the Arab region.

D. Disability and CRPD-SDGs linkages

Sustainable development is a process for reducing inequality and saving the planet. It is concerned as much with the development of material and economic powers among communities in different parts of the world, especially developing countries. It does not cease; it keeps moving on realizing parts of the SDGs'169 objectives and achieving any of its 17 goals. The success of sustainable development is dependent on the full and effective participation of all community groups in all development Programs, large or small.

The CRPD explicitly calls for the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in community activities. Such participation means the inclusion of persons with disabilities in community plans, making use of the services, and enjoying the dividends of social and economic development. It is reassuring that the UN Resolution 70/1 adopting the 2030 Agenda pledges that "no one will be left behind, as well as committing to prioritize the most marginalized.

The Resolution specifically mentions the group of persons with disabilities no less than seven times. Linkages between the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda with the latter's various goals acquire maximum importance when evaluating the participation of persons with disabilities in the sustainable development process; and society's real and serious interest is to have them participate on an equal basis with other groups so as not to have anyone left behind.



Disability-specific services such as rehabilitation services and inclusion do not go together in the Arab world. Commitment by both sides is crucial because disability-specific services do not follow a lifecycle approach. Thus, a person with disability needs to begin rehabilitation or other needed services each time they reach a different stage in their lifecycle. For example, when a student with a disability starts school, they begin rehabilitation services at the time schooling starts, rather than starting in early childhood. This approach means that people's impairments can become more significant throughout their lives.

They all may perceive that the situation entails great difficulties, exorbitant costs and time loss coupled with severe material needs, moral and psychological hardships. But communities belittling the significance of participation find that delaying the process is costly and exhausting, and has a negative influence on most, if not all, of those linked to it.

The report discusses the condition of persons with disabilities linked to the implementation of the Convention and the pursuit to realize the SDGs in the Arab countries. The reports of OPDs in the most populous 10 Arab countries clarifies that these countries and others lag far behind on the seven goals highlighted here, as well as linking the CRPD rules with these goals and their numerous objectives.

Question No. 4 and its answer are supposed to form the longest section of the report, as they are divided into seven sub-parts. The question requires respondents to confirm whether disability has been included within SDGs in line with the CRPD in the countries concerned. The respondents are required to shed light on the following seven goals:

SDG 1 - Poverty and social protection

Persons with disabilities have the right "to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, and housing," according to CRPD Article 28. Among a majority of persons with disabilities in Arab countries, this condition is not met. These people usually live under extremely hard circumstances.

Many of them spend their lives confined to one place doing nothing, or carrying out simple, but laborious house chores. In view of the limited number of educated persons with disabilities compared to the even smaller number of them joining the labor market, it is difficult to speak of "continuous improvement of living conditions" as prescribed in part by Clause 1 of CRPD Article 28.

Further, persons with disabilities have the right to social protection, as stipulated by Clause 2. However, if persons with disabilities are not allowed the chance to enjoy other rights, such as education, how could they enjoy the right to social protection without discrimination? It is correct that states are taking "appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right," but how can access to clean water as well as appropriate and affordable services, devices and other assistance for disability-related needs be guaranteed?

The other parts of Clause 2 of CRPD Article 28 seem not to be considered, particularly in regard to women and older persons with disabilities. In the Arab societies, females with disabilities suffer from double discrimination and are less likely to be enrolled in schools or to join the workforce.



Among many communities, older persons with disabilities seem invisible. Even in the ranks of the disability movement, these two categories are under-represented. It is unclear whether social protection programs and poverty reduction programs adequately cover persons with disabilities. Older persons may not be regarded as a unique group to be considered.

One example of discrimination is found in Algeria. Algerian family law stipulates that families with more than one child with disabilities shall be paid an allowance for each child under 18-years-old. However, the practice is that families receive the allowance for only one child, regardless of whether a family has more children with disabilities.

The money is paid to the breadwinner, (i.e., father,) according to the law; but the father would not be paid any allowance if the child has a visual disability. How, then, could more marginalized persons with disabilities be included in social protection and poverty reduction programs? CRPD Article 28 is in fact intricately linked to SDG 1 and its various objectives. This is why it is important to consider parts C, D and E as well as the previously mentioned parts of Clauses 1 and 2 essentials to the implementation of SDG 1.

How is SDG 1 implemented in the surveyed 10 Arab countries? Are social protection Programs put in place by all these countries? Do their governments show adequate interest in social welfare for the weak and oppressed? Are poverty reduction programs also adopted? Are they separate from social protection programs? Are persons with disabilities taken into account when planning these programs?

The findings in country reports, summarized in this report, confirm that persons with disabilities are the poorest of the poor. In addition, these persons in general do not hold jobs, nor are they ordinarily offered work opportunities. However, they are often exploited, working for free or almost for free, to earn their basic livelihood. It makes more sense to speak of unemployment, rather than employment, of persons with disabilities.

As for social protection, some countries provide the basics for persons with disabilities. Needless to say, such protections, often not anchored in law, hardly cover the basics among citizens with disabilities in these countries.

A remarkable example is found in the PNA territory. The PNA provides basic financial support for some 150,000 families. Among these, 36,000 are families headed by, or have, persons with disabilities. The PNA admirably insists on acting with serious intent to fight poverty by providing, as much as possible, basic social protections for the most fragile in its society. Unfortunately, a permanent policy or law to fight poverty and support persons with disabilities as well as their families does not exist.

Reports show that among most countries, there is little interest in, and attempts to, fight poverty. Underwhelming exceptions are observed in Iraq, Algeria, and Mauritania. It would be incorrect to state that other countries have no interest. However, a concerted effort that would reduce the severity of poverty affecting persons with disabilities is plainly lacking.

A discussion on policy implementation by the PNA may illustrate this point.

Despite a sincere interest on the part of the PNA to implement development policies using meager resources and under great difficulties because of sharp fluctuations in financial resources (the PNA depends mostly on limited and conditional foreign aid), such policies assume that the PNA must adequately provide social protections to the most marginalized and poorest groups. Moreover, eliminating poverty is a basic goal of the 2030 Agenda. Laws stipulate that the State should provide the following services:



Raise communal awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities;



Design disability cards that define a package of services to persons with disabilities;



Supply supporting medical aids and devices;



Organize vocational and technical training programs for persons with disabilities;



Provide easy loans to facilitate income generating projects by persons with disabilities.

The cash transfer program by the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development is the largest tool utilized to alleviate poverty among the neediest families in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is also a social safety net for those living in abject poverty. It grants seasonal cash payments to around 110,000 families, including 19,000 families headed or supported by a person with disability. Nevertheless, the cash payment program faces some criticisms, as summarized below.

The program alleviates, but does not eliminate, poverty as proposed by the 2030 Agenda. The values of the financial allowance offered to families vary from 750 to 1,800 Shekel (approximately USD 255 to USD 612) every three months. This sum is inadequate for basic needs. The format for selecting recipients of this benefit does not provide privacy to persons with disabilities, whose socioeconomic conditions get recorded.

Considering there are approximately 255,000 persons with disabilities in the PNA territory, with 19,000 families headed by, or including, a person with disability, it is apparent that the vast majority of these persons — including 116,000 women with disabilities — do not receive any cash allowance from the Ministry of Social Development.



Despite the criticism, one cannot overlook the impact of the economic empowerment program run by the Ministry. It is considered a socioeconomic instrument to fight poverty by providing job opportunities and/or small income generating projects for poor families. The program has so far assisted 28,000 families, 73% of whom are headed by males, and 27% by females. Efforts are underway at the Ministry in coordination with stakeholders to review Law No. 4 on the rights of persons with disabilities in order to make it CRPD compatible.

Perhaps Egyptian persons with disabilities wish they could obtain direct financial aid from their government, just as refugees with disabilities in Egypt receive from UNHCR. The Egyptian state supplies medical and care service to its citizens with disabilities. However, the services seem limited because of the huge numbers of persons with disabilities of all types and their diverse needs. Poverty is prevalent and deep-rooted in the majority of urban and rural communities throughout Egypt, and persons with disabilities are the poorest of the poor.

The country report did not show significant numbers of persons with disabilities in school. It also did not mention whether comprehensive healthcare coverage is available to them. The report has also not broached the supposedly high unemployment rate among persons with disabilities because of their huge numbers and the limited scope to provide jobs to the illiterate, the less educated, and individuals with no vocational skills. All this confirms that persons with disability are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

The situation in Lebanon is no better. Law No. 220 on the rights of persons with disabilities stipulates paying unemployment benefits, but its funding is subject to an executive order or decree. The decree prepared by the special government offices and departments made it impossible for any person with disability to have the right to unemployment benefits.

The Lebanese social welfare system does not grant persons with disabilities the right to receive any financial grant or allowance that would enable them to live with dignity. As a condition to receive these benefits, the decree requires that recipients should show they have been looking for work. This is an impossible condition for most persons with disabilities and it is one of the many factors that deprive persons with disabilities of the minimum financial sufficiency. Hence, most persons with disabilities depend on their parents, siblings, close relatives, or on charity.

The economic state of Jordan is equally dire for the vast majority of people with disabilities. Like their counterparts in Egypt, Lebanon and other Arab countries, Jordanian persons with disabilities suffer from abject poverty and from perennial financial insecurity. The few not in this category would be outliers.

Iraq's Law No. 38 on the welfare of persons with disabilities and special needs grants persons with disabilities tax exemptions, easy loans, and cash allowance, according to Article 17. It also stipulates that a salary should be paid to full-time assistants of persons with disabilities. Law No. 11 of social protection enacted in 2014, on its part, also includes persons with disabilities of all types and allocates the social protection allowance in order to raise their living standards.

In Kurdistan, Law No. 22 on the welfare of persons with disabilities stipulates that the state should take care of persons with disabilities within their families, or at shelter houses or rehabilitation centers, according to Article 9. Article 10 stipulates granting disability allowance along a financial allowance formula determined by decree.



The Iraqi government cares for the rights of persons with disabilities and seeks to treat them equally with others in public life, including the ability to secure suitable jobs. The Iraqi cabinet designated certain allocations in the 2019 budget to provide care for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Affairs and labor intended to start its database for persons with disability in Baghdad and other districts.

Those covered under the law of social protection net were to enjoy two rights: the right to be considered poor and the right to live as persons with disabilities who are unable to work. This implies for these persons an inability to achieve socio-economic empowerment, which is an important sustainable development goal. In other words, Laws No. 38 and Law No. 22 are being implemented in a wrong manner, particularly with respect to the right to employment in the public and private sectors.

The situation in Algeria is not as straightforward as in Iraq. Algeria's family law stipulates the payment of an equal allowance for all children. Also, the law on social security does not distinguish between children with disabilities from those without disabilities. It thus does not consider the extra cost that families incur on their children with disabilities, particularly on medical needs.

Still, the applicable Algerian laws provide that families of children with disabilities may access these benefits. Clause 2 of Article 5 of the executive decree issued on 3 May 2003 states: "Families sponsoring one, or more, persons with disabilities holding a disability card receive grants for every sponsored child." Nevertheless, it is common to find families with more than one child with disability accessing benefits for only one. However, if the children were blind, their parents would not receive any benefits.


Grants are paid only to one child with a disability who is under 18. Moreover, grants are paid only to a guardian with no income. This deprives persons with disabilities of legal and crucial assistance.

In Tunisia, it is noticeable that the social security law approved by Parliament at the beginning of 2019 covers persons with disabilities' health, welfare, and poverty eradication needs, these being the core of basic rights set out in the constitution. As for economic development, accessibility, inclusive community, the state has shifted the responsibilities to local authorities represented by municipalities and provincial or regional councils.

Such arrangements are stipulated by local community laws, as set out in Chapter 7 of the constitution on decentralization. Such measures form part of devolution of power from central to local authorities.

Mauritania is distinguished by efforts that may not seem wholly inclusive in the sense propagated by the Convention with respect to poverty eradication and provision of social protection, as stipulated in CRPD Article 28. However, such efforts may be included in the economic cycle.

The state provides some grants through OPDs for starting small income generating projects. This provides opportunities to some 300 families each year, including a person with a disability, to join the labor market as independent, productive workers. Some aids such as crutches and wheelchairs are distributed freely to those in need of them. The state has also distributed 200 land lots to people with disabilities to build their own accessible houses.



Morocco's way of addressing poverty eradication is found in the way it administers the Social Solidarity or Cohesion Fund, which provides for persons with disabilities to purchase special and technical devices and facilities to improve the conditions of children with disabilities joining schools, even if the schools are not regular and inclusive. It also encourages inclusion of persons with disabilities in vocational training, in addition to assistance with income generating projects.

Recommendations on SDG 1

- ✓ OPDs need to increase awareness among persons with disabilities and their families of their right to social protection.
- ✓ OPDs should also initiate public debate via social media and other platforms on the obligation of parents and siblings of persons with disabilities, particularly persons with intellectual disabilities to be aware of their rights.
- ✓ OPDs should utilize the media to raise awareness of the advantages of helping persons with disabilities enjoy their human rights to be effective and full partners in poverty reduction programs. In the long term, this kind of social action will go a long way helping lessen the burden of care for persons with disabilities.
- ✓ OPDs should also highlight the hard living circumstances and great needs of persons with disabilities, in particular among women and girls, as well as older persons with disabilities, and advocate for their full inclusion in social protection and poverty reduction programs.

SDG Goal 4 - Inclusive education

CRPD Article 24 stipulates the right to education for persons with disabilities. The article explains what inclusive education means, and how it is applied to affect real change in the relationships within the community as well as in human attitudes. Not only do the States Parties recognize the right to education, but they have also to realize that “right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.”

What is more important in this respect is the work of the states to ensure inclusive education at all levels as well as lifelong learning directed to “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human diversity.”

Human diversity sounds like a strange and novel idea. While many may welcome the concept, some may resent it, and many others do not have a clear idea of how to apply it. Most people and educators do not know or are not accustomed to the idea of letting—if not urging—persons with disabilities “develop their personality, talents, and creativity as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and participate in a free society.”



In all the Arab countries, persons with disabilities are excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability.

Take Egypt, for example. When reports show that 37,000 students with disabilities joined mainstream schools in Egypt, it should be noted that a ministerial directive was required to deem them lawful students. Otherwise, they would not be allowed into the schools and classes.

Even if they were admitted, they would be treated as mere audiences instead of students. The mainstream students are children and youth with light mobility disabilities and slight learning difficulties. This is not compatible with the CRPD. In Jordan, the situation seems somewhat different with the new Law No. 10 seeking to eliminate special institutes. However, no clear information is available on how well teachers are trained to teach students with disabilities of all types, especially students with sensory and intellectual disabilities, and treat them on an equal basis with others in the classrooms, nor is it known for certain how much schools and their amenities are accessible to students with all types of disabilities.

This raises questions about the extent to which facilities for special kinds of disability are compatible with the CRPD stipulations. In Lebanon, the law permits a choice between joining mainstream schools and special schools. However, the Ministry of Social Affairs so far continues to pay no less than USD 44 million annually to provide education for around 8,500 students with disabilities in special schools. Only a few of these students enjoy an inclusive educational experience. Of the number of disability cardholders, under 8% attend school. Lebanon has not ratified the Convention, but the arrangements put in place to provide education indicate that the law is not being enforced.

Moroccan authorities say that the allocations of the Social Cohesion Fund have funded education for 7,600 students with disabilities for three academic years since 2015. The number of school children with disabilities seems small, and it is not clear if they are correctly included per CRPD stipulations -- this despite the new Moroccan constitution incorporating in its preamble key principles of the Convention's preamble.

Persons with disabilities do not seem to access "an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live." In the majority of cases, reasonable accommodation is not provided to persons with disabilities, who appear not to receive the support required within the general education system.

This means that environments for academic and social development are inconsistent with the goal of full inclusion. States and their education systems are supposed to enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills. To help realize this right, teachers, including teachers with disabilities who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, need to be employed by these schools.

Professionals and staff who work at all levels of education need to receive training, which incorporates disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, as well as educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

The Convention requires that persons with disabilities "access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination on an equal basis with others." In this regard, a study of SDG 4 is necessary, to investigate the link between it and compatibility with CRPD article 24.



Reports make it clear that Arab countries are far from having any inclusive education, because of inadequate teacher training, non-compliant curriculum, inaccessible school buildings, and negative social attitudes.

However, many attempts are made at the individual and group levels to plan and implement basic inclusive education. Despite these brave and honest endeavors, they fall short of achieving the ambitious goal. The basic orientation towards inclusive education thus remains in most — if not all — Arab countries, more idealistic than realistic. The data and evidence confirm this worrying conclusion.

This is exemplified by the rapid attempts at enacting laws on the rights of persons with disabilities in the Arab countries. Even if tens of thousands of students with disabilities should join regular schools in one Arab country by ministerial directive, this will not necessarily mean inclusion.

Rather, this is an attempt to merely admit big student numbers of this category, most of them with light disabilities so that their inclusion in regular classrooms do not demand special personnel or intensive teacher training on special education. In fact, the product of this sort of inclusion seems unpromising.

Lebanon presents an unfortunate reality. Lebanese Law No. 220 of 2000 on the rights of persons with disabilities may be considered progressive, even revolutionary, with respect to inclusion in schools and the community.

However, it is immediately apparent that the number of students with sensory (visual and hearing) disabilities included in regular schools is few at best and on rare occasions. If their number exceeds 100 in one academic year, it dwindles sharply in the next year because of lower enrollment rates than graduation at many intermediate and secondary schools.

Therefore, it is practically impossible to speak of proper and regular inclusion, particularly for students with sensory disabilities. Between these factors and those with intellectual disabilities, a best scenario case will show no more than ten students of either group joining regular schools. Students with physical disabilities may have better chances of inclusion, at least in some villages and towns. Such a picture can improve with more OPDs or service providers actively supporting inclusion.

Another helpful factor would be parents getting involved in solving problems to ensure full inclusion for their children. As for students with intellectual disabilities, a limited number of them succeed in being included in regular schools. Even then, it imposes on their parents, additional financial costs, and moral courage. But if several of these students graduate from several schools, it may then be counted as a positive trend on inclusion. The current situation contradicts the inclusion orientation as stipulated by Law No. 220, Chapter 7, on education and sports.

Article 59 of this law stipulates that students with disabilities may join special or regular schools where they may be included in regular or special classes with the help of shadow teachers, and special educators who can help these students in extra special classes.

With the suspension of the newly enacted Law No. 10 in Egypt, it seems almost impossible to speak of inclusive education for students with disabilities in the biggest and trend-setting Arab country. However, putting that law into practice would hardly reassure activists on achieving real, inclusive education.



The seemingly inclusive education in Egypt has more to do with explicit medical categorization as well as administrative procedures than with conformity to the law and the spirit of the CRPD. This becomes apparent upon reviewing the ministerial executive order 229 of 2016, which allows students with disabilities to be admitted to technical or vocational schools.

Another indication is the ministerial order 252 of 2017, which permits the admission of students with light disabilities into all kinds of regular schools, from kindergartens to upper classes. It also allows guardians of students with disabilities the right to choose inclusive schools or special institutes for their children.

In 2017 Ministerial Executive Order 291 ushered in a policy for special education. It ordered adding more material to resolve important problems, e.g. modifying primary education in the schools for students who are deaf, so that school would decrease to six instead of eight years. Another order is to add two years of technical training in schools for students with intellectual disabilities.

These students would graduate with intermediate certificates in vocational training. It also bans students with multiple disabilities from joining inclusive schools. However, students with physical disabilities are exempted from the ban because their disabilities, it is assumed, do not affect their education. All these defective measures account for the 37,000 students with disabilities who were admitted in regular schools and 3,000 in special schools in the 2018-19 academic year.

As for Jordan, promising plans are observed alongside legal question marks about the extent and efficacy of educational inclusion outside the capital and other big cities. Important, however, is finding out the opinion of students with disabilities about their experience with inclusion in regular schools.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in partnership with the Supreme Council, has drawn a 10-year plan for the rights of persons with disabilities. The plan goes along with what is stipulated by Article 19 of Law No. 20 on the rights of persons with disabilities.

The plan involves providing quality inclusive education while taking care of, and considering, all the needs of students with disabilities by preparing the school environment and arranging reasonable accommodations.

Jordan currently experiences, and has been experiencing for some time, limited inclusion of students with disabilities. However, these students complain that the schools agreeing to include them are mostly inaccessible. Students are not properly rehabilitated or supplied with reasonable accommodations after having admitted these students.

Morocco in 2011 issued the executive decrees on accessibility, under Law No. 10.03. It also enacted the framework Law No. 51.17 for the system of education, training, and scientific research. Article 22 of that law stipulates that “the state acts to mobilize all available resources and take the necessary measures to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities (or “with special status”) and empower them to gain the right to education and acquire the skills and competencies that fit their situation.” However, only 7,000 students with disabilities were able to utilize the improved school conditions in the three consecutive years of 2015, 2016 and 2017.



Meanwhile, Moroccan officials are drafting a national plan to operationalize inclusive education for persons with disabilities. The plan involves, for the short term, teacher training, curriculum improvement, educational approaches, system evaluations and using pedagogical tests and evaluations for all forms of disability. Official examinations are being modified to fit the conditions of students with disabilities and regulate the conditions for how they take these exams.

Tunisia seems to move with faltering steps into the field of inclusive education. Schools in the country are in critical crisis as a result of declining quality in education and disagreements between the Ministry of Education and the teachers' trade union. These, coupled with dilapidated infrastructure in most schools and soaring drop-out rates, including among students with disabilities, have prevented modification of the curriculum and the basic law on education.

It is noteworthy that students who are blind are the only group of students with disabilities admitted into regular government schools. Students with hearing, intellectual, and multi-disabilities must attend "special educational institutes" controlled by organizations serving persons with disabilities. Since 2011, the latter group has suffered the worst conditions, especially after the government ceased financial support to them as part of "rationalizing public spending."

To make Tunisian schools inclusive and to increase their capacity, efficacy and equity in the national education system, a number of specific objectives are outlined. They include making information and instructions meaningful for children and increasing students' ability to comprehend them.

In addition, authorities seek to train teachers for vocational schools, specifically for the disenfranchised group of students, including students with disability. Officials adopted many reform-oriented policies. These include the 2002 law, which stipulates that regular education should entail comprehensive inclusion in the preparatory ages. The law also stipulates providing a support program to children facing difficulties in school, such as challenges with inclusion, academic work, and social skills.

Perhaps what applies to one Arab country can easily apply to all others. Exceptions are limited and rare. So, with regard to the fourth goal of the 17 SDGs, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," the participation by persons with disabilities is limited in most, if not all, Arab countries.

For example, Algerian students with disabilities included in regular schools do not enjoy support services. They complain of lack of "reasonable accommodation," namely, adjustable desks, "modified" computers and the services of academic assistants.

This allows teachers to justify the exclusion of these students from elementary schools, on the pretext that they are unable to follow instruction in the classroom. As for the approximately 250 psychological and medical centers supporting children with intellectual disabilities under the supervision of the Ministry of National Solidarity, they do not yet adopt customized school buildings for students who are blind in each town and city, often resulting in these students staying home instead of attending school. Unfortunately, where such support centers exist, they are considered an end, rather than a means to promote education and social communication.



Meanwhile, Algerian teachers in regular schools—just like all regular teachers in the other Arab countries—are not trained, not adequately qualified, and not ready to properly handle students with disabilities. Because of this, few disabled students complete high school.

On the other hand, the few students that do attend university meet unprepared instructors and find it difficult to treat them appropriately. As for practical measures to start organizing and running special classes for students with disabilities (pupils who are deaf or mute, and those with light intellectual disabilities), the situation is that facilities for such students start to look like ghettos inside regular schools. There are a number of issues at play here.

First, they depend on the Ministry of National Solidarity, instead of the Ministry of Education. Next, these students are not enrolled among the number of regular students. Then, enthusiastic teachers ready to work empathetically with students with disabilities are usually young, inexperienced, and untrained. In fact, the quality of teachers in the inclusion process since this initiative's launch in the early 1990s has been unproductive and inadequate. It is imperative to work on improving and upgrading the skills and competencies of these teachers.

With respect to vocational training, the institutions are rarely adjusted or made accessible. Also, no training curriculum is in place for persons with disabilities who through personal initiative join vocational and technical institutions. Those in charge of counselling and guidance in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training have not been trained to provide support to persons with disabilities.

Their tools are outdated and in much need of upgrading and modernizing to be CRPD compatible. A widespread scarcity of teachers and assistants is found in the ranks of vocational trainers, especially those concerned with the implementation of a comprehensive development policy.

Various Sudanese laws address disability, e.g., the Education Law of 2001. It stipulates that “persons with disabilities can have equal opportunities to education” if the government allows students with disabilities to attend school for free. Over 66% of Sudanese persons with disabilities are reported to have completed primary school. However, about 30% of them are illiterate.

In 2013, Sudan developed the national strategy of inclusive education for primary schools. However, Sudanese students with disabilities complain of inequality, if not discrimination, throughout the school system. In any case, the country follows a special education system for students with disabilities. Never has this system been deemed fit to provide them with quality education, education that would enable them to be competitive for opportunities in college, or higher education.

Palestinians are known to give prominence to education. They place education among the top priorities in personal and family spending. Public education in Palestine is free up to the end of secondary school. Unfortunately, quality education has started to decline in recent years. This is because education is no longer viewed as the only solution to gain knowledge. But everyone agrees, education is necessary to secure jobs that require university graduates.



Regardless, the unemployment rate among university graduates is at 35%, according to a workforce survey for the second quarter of 2018 by the government's Central Bureau of Statistics. Students pay nominal fees to join government or UNRWA schools. The cost of attendance is relatively higher in NGO-funded and private schools.

Colleges and universities charge high tuition for college degrees, according to Birzeit University researcher, Adel el-Zaghagh. Data on the state of education shows a remarkable increase in average spending during the last three fiscal years. However, the increase went mostly to the cost of erecting new buildings or salaries and wages or new recruitments, and little or no spending on improving quality or developing the education process. Salaries and wages accounted for 66% of the budget, whereas allocations for development did not exceed 18%.

The general decline discussed above has significantly affected access to schools, particularly for students with disabilities. The decline has also affected the ability of the education system to admit students with disabilities to institutions and classrooms, according to the various supervisors. Noteworthy is that 35% of school age children with disabilities do not join any regular school.

Students benefiting from resource-equipped rooms comprise an extremely small group. Some say that their accommodation is an obstacle to inclusion because teachers are not trained to deal properly with students with disabilities. The result is many dropouts. Some just stay at home, not bothering to attend school. Few join special institutions. This sum is no real inclusion being implemented.

The Palestinian Child Law, the law on the rights of persons with disabilities and its regulations and the Law of Education include explicit texts affirming the right of persons with disabilities to education, and to have educational facilities that meet their specific needs. Although the Ministry of Education is the official entity (of the State Party) with oversight on the education sector, it lacks special policies targeting students with disabilities.

The 2011 census showed that 53.3% of persons with disabilities are illiterate. Official data shows a failure among the three stakeholders in the education process (UNRWA, the Government and the private sector) in properly addressing suitable physical environments for children with disabilities. For example, bathrooms in over 60% of UNRWA schools and 63% of government schools are inaccessible to students with physical disabilities and not suitable for other students with disabilities. Schools in general lack ramps for students using wheelchairs.

This prevents them from accessing the school and classrooms. Government schools are the least fit and accessible, with the lack of ramps among 53.3% of them. They are also the least rehabilitated, with no reasonable accommodations available in most of them. The Ministry of Education data indicates the need for more work at different levels to include thousands of students with disabilities by providing suitable and accessible environments and devices. The unavailability of such conditions creates difficulties for thousands of students with disabilities.

There are no strategies that consider the type and degree of disability as well as the level of difficulty it creates in teaching. Those in charge lack proper understanding of inclusive education and the needs of children with disabilities. Lack of adequate funds in the education budget is the biggest impediment, among the many limitations, which affect education quality and outputs. It is also obvious that restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation thwart the development of education quality.







The PNA educational policies seem incapable of satisfying the requirements of fair and inclusive education.

This results from its incapacity to counter a myriad of challenges imposed by occupation, and simultaneously handle a complex environment, including the need to repair policy defects, allocate priorities to adequately fill gaps created by problems such as overcrowded classrooms, dropouts, and the special needs of students with disabilities. What is discussed above in the case of Palestine applies to all other countries.

Recommendations on SDG4

Below are a few recommendations to help steer the implementation of SDG 4 towards compliance with the CRPD.

-  Run campaigns to raise awareness about the right of persons with disabilities to education as stipulated by the Convention. The campaign outreach should be directed to all relevant stakeholders, including government departments and political decision makers.
-  Lobby the ministries of education and universities to train teachers on inclusive education;
-  Repetitively launch awareness and advocacy campaigns to explain the human diversity concept so that people without disabilities can come to understand disability as a natural part of human diversity;
-  Run lobbying activities to rehabilitate the school buildings so that students with disabilities may be able to join mainstream schools that will be made accessible.
-  The Laws of Education need to be amended to allow for inclusive education and the new human rights concept stipulated in the CRPD.



SDG 5 - Gender equality

Persons with disabilities are exposed, both within and outside their homes, to “all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects.” Persons with disabilities experience discrimination in “all matters relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships, on an equal basis with others.” Women and girls with disabilities, however, are subject to multiple forms of discrimination, and fall victims to all the forms of exploitation, violence, and abuse.

They are, therefore, in greater need of appropriate forms of gender and age-sensitive assistance and support. Such forms need to be granted to all persons with disabilities, their families, and caregivers. Women and girls with disabilities, however, have a greater need to be provided with information and education on how to recognize, avoid, and report instances of exploitation, violence, and abuse. This constitutes a part of the measures to ensure the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls with disabilities, as set out in the CRPD.

Arab women and girls, in many aspects of life, are subjected to the many forms of exploitation, violence, abuse, and discrimination mentioned in the related Convention articles (in particular, Articles 6, 16, and 23). However, Arab women and girls with disabilities experience much more severe forms of abuse. They are more likely than males with disabilities to be kept isolated and homebound. Every year, stories about young girls and women with disabilities being raped circulate. Some of these victims of rape die as a result of forced abortion -- which is not accepted in Arab culture.

This happens more to women with intellectual disabilities. Women with other disabilities also fall victims to sexual harassment; they may be strictly confined to their homes, where they may be treated as servants charged with doing tedious house chores. Families that have educated women with disabilities may on average constitute around a third of the number of educated persons with disabilities.

Under 20% of women with disabilities in their productive age (18-64 years old) join the labor market. Many of these working females are either informal workers or self-employed. Most Arab women are not equal to men in terms of inheritance. However, Arab women with disabilities are subjected to harsher cruelty in this respect. Arab culture ordinarily requires male guardianship over women or a male chaperone. Such guardians may be any male relative, not just fathers and brothers. Moreover, a majority of Arab females with disabilities do not enjoy legal rights. This is the reality of the Arab women with disabilities: to be contrasted with the aspirations of the CRPD. How should they participate in the implementation of SDG 5?

Frankly, gender equality is an ideal that is far from being achieved in the Arab region. For starters, women are mostly housebound. A large proportion of women in the surveyed Arab countries do not attend schools. Then, for a large percentage of Arab women, their basic skills are limited to housework and domestic service. The majority of these women have never exercised real self-governance and personal financial management.

They do not have any real-life experience outside the boundaries of their households. In the case of women with disabilities, the situation seems grave. Women and girls with disabilities are subject to double discrimination. They also do not stand for or get considered for OPD leadership positions, except in rare cases.



They are deprived of education, and rarely do they get employed. The list of inequalities and miserable living conditions that the vast majority of these women suffer goes on and on.

Disability-related literature in the Arab language may reveal that Arab women with disabilities are exposed to double discrimination. They are also vulnerable to negligence, marginalization, and exclusion. Yet, a small number of women with disabilities in almost all Arab countries are empowered and seem distinguished, having overcome huge barriers and obstacles. No matter, gender equality is considered confined to specific aspects, e.g., equal wages for specific classes of jobs in the public sector.

Otherwise, “gender equality” is a proposition that would be considered a wrong attitude and a defective definition of equality and equal opportunities. This does not necessarily indicate the extent of discrimination and inequality. Discrimination starts with the treatment of females within the nucleus of the family. Next is the parental decision to have their daughters attend school, allowing them to spend so many years to complete secondary education and graduate from college.

Inequality also means limited, or non-existent opportunities for women with disabilities to join the labor market and gain the ability to work certain jobs. Except in extremely rare occasions, women with disabilities also find that inequality and discrimination impact their attempts to satisfy their health, education, and personal needs, as well as emotional and social self-fulfillment.

What are the real conditions of Arab women with disabilities? Is it possible to accurately measure the extent of discrimination and inequality in the Arab countries as reported in the responses by OPDs?

The situation is unsatisfactory. In all surveyed countries, it is neither reassuring nor encouraging. On gender equality, it is difficult to even start a comparison as to which country is doing better. It is also futile to talk of an ideal situation. Idealism in this respect requires gender equality in legal terms and social practices. When speaking of one country, it does not signify that the country is better or worse off than the others. The information presented below is based on the responses of the Bridge trainees.

Mauritania provides equal opportunities for women and men with disabilities in many fields, such as appointments to public sector jobs, equal salaries, etc. However, this is partial and superficial equality. It may benefit only a minority of fortunate, elite women with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations or facilitation to occupy political positions do not take women with disabilities into account.

Mauritania encourages persons with disabilities, contrary to what the CRPD stipulates, by assigning a 5% quota for jobs in the public sector through competitions. However, women with disabilities do not count in the 50% of positions occupied by persons with disabilities in the public sector. The report does not indicate whether women with disabilities have received any of the 200 land lots allocated by the government to persons with disabilities.

In next door Morocco, the gender equality notion seems enshrined in legal text. The preamble of the 2011 constitution includes the CRPD terms and rules. Article 34 of this constitution contains a clause that conditions the state to “carry out prevention and treatment measures for handling the fragile conditions of certain groups of women, mothers, children and elderly people.”



However, the response of the OPD unclearly indicates gender equality for females and males with disabilities in the daily life and practices of Moroccan society. A noticeable disparity between the legal text and a social reality that does not satisfy gender equality may be disappointing. However, in this society, inequality is a fact. The community does not accept the terms of equality, even if it was enshrined in law.

Article 3 of the new framework Law No. 13.97 stipulates that males and females with disabilities are equal. However, no discernible examples exist of that equality, either in education, funding small businesses or any other case. Therefore, this remains a mere legal concept that seems impossible to put into practice.

The ambiguity on gender equality contrasts with the frankness apparent in the OPD report of Palestine, which focuses on discrimination and inequality in daily life. However, the salient objections against any purported gender inequality and confirmation of discrimination seem vindicated by the fact that OPDs, including those constituting women with disabilities, were not consulted about the needs of persons with disabilities to be mentioned in the national report on SDGs.

However, a big number of proposals by OPDs constituted of women with disabilities, have not been cited. It is unclear how much the needs of persons with disabilities in general, and women with disabilities in particular, are incorporated in the government policies in order to realize the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

However, the PNA government report emphasizes the fact that persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities, experience continuous social marginalization and exclusion. Neither does it dispute that Palestinian women with disabilities experience double discrimination and marginalization, which is apparent in women's limited participation in and benefiting from education, employment, and inclusion in public life.

The OPD report of Palestine draws attention also to a clear socioeconomic gap between women in general, and women with disabilities in particular. The government report on the SDGs alludes to the difficulty persons with disabilities face, and how women with disabilities in particular, encounter problems in acquiring healthcare.

It also mentions how persons with intellectual and psychological disabilities are almost totally deprived of healthcare. Lacking in the government report is clarification on the number of families headed by women with disabilities, among the 19,000 families headed by persons with disabilities and receiving cash transfers from the Ministry of Social Development.

It is striking that the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities far exceeds the already high average of joblessness in Palestine, which in 2018 reached 32.4%. Back in 2013, the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities was 80%, according to a survey carried out by the independent association of human rights. Unemployment of males with disabilities was 78% and 83% among women with disabilities. The percentage for female workers without disability does not exceed 14%.

In Tunisia, however, it is possible to speak in relatively more realistic terms about gender equality, legally and socially. Legally, the 2014 constitution in Articles 20 and 46 is explicit with respect to complete gender equality. It underlines that the State guarantees equal opportunities for women and men in all fields. This enables Tunisia to move far ahead of other Arab countries with respect to realizing, protecting, and guaranteeing women's rights. Acquired women's rights are explicitly mentioned in the law of personal affairs enacted and enforced since 1957.



The state seeks legally and realistically to equate the number of men and women (50% of either sex) in the membership of elected boards of organizations. However, prevailing conditions would not allow exact parity, despite the country enjoying a significant level of gender equality as regards job opportunities and work positions. Nevertheless, regarding women with disabilities, questions remain. Suffice it to say that a strong foundation to build on the interests of women with disabilities exists.

Unfortunately, the situation is different for lot of women in the remaining Levant countries; namely, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. In Lebanon, under 50% of females with disabilities are allowed to attend school. According to surveyed data and undocumented information sources, the proportion swings between 30% and 45%. As for women with disabilities joining the labor market and getting permanent jobs or starting their own small businesses, the rate is lower than those attending school. The same trend goes for accessing social benefits and healthcare.

The reason is rooted in society's expectations on traditional marriage. Parents tend to hide daughters with disabilities, in fear that their sisters without disabilities would otherwise not find husbands. Against this backdrop, it is unfortunate that Law No. 220 never mentions women with disabilities, nor does it explicitly mention men with disabilities. Although it is considered progressive and rights oriented, the Lebanese law enacted more than six years before the CRPD has not given any consideration to women with disabilities, who clearly are in dire need of positive reinforcement and affirmative action, as contemplated by CRPD Article 27 (h). Women with disabilities are historically much more deprived of their basic rights than their male counterparts.

Perhaps the same condition is worse among Jordanian and Iraqi women with disabilities. However, both country reports have not broached the topic in a detailed manner. It is worth noting that the OPD report of Iraq cites that Article 14 of the constitution bans discrimination against women and guarantees gender equality.

However, it does not mention disability as one of the causes of discrimination. Females with disabilities in Iraq, just as is the case in Lebanon, should statistically account for over 50% of the disability cases. However, women holding disability cards in Lebanon comprise over 45% of the total number or 110,000 cases at the beginning of 2019. The common factor is that women with disabilities in the Levant do not get what they deserve in terms of health, education, rehabilitation, and social services. Men with disabilities in the same countries are slightly better off in this respect as a result of many social factors.

Nevertheless, the possibility of women's inclusion and full participation in their communities seems relatively slim. This is because illiteracy levels for disabled females is much higher than among males with disabilities. They also do not get the basic services of rehabilitation and education. Therefore, chances of these women receiving intermediate, secondary, and college education are much smaller. This leads to much slimmer chances of having stable job opportunities.

The new Jordanian law on the rights of persons with disabilities, which is said to be CRPD compatible, does not guarantee specific treatment of women with disabilities. This applies to the same laws in the region, despite legislators being cognizant of the discrimination and gender inequality affecting females with disabilities in particular.



In Algeria, the Basic Law does not refer to women with disabilities. According to that law, the state is committed to encouraging women's political participation. However, the state does not seem to consider women with disabilities in this respect. Disability activists emphasize the need to strictly apply the protection of the rights of women with intellectual disabilities because of the extreme difficulty to enjoy life with parents not daring to let them show themselves and be active in community.

Many persons with disabilities are not officially registered in government departments. The attitude of guardians applies in particular to girls with disabilities, who suffer from their parents not only being shy to show them in public but insist on hiding them from society.

This multi-faceted and cross-sectional discrimination, in addition to exclusion from all walks of life, is what women and girls with disabilities face also in Sudan, as well. Sudanese females with disabilities are undoubtedly less fortunate than their male counterparts as regards attending school and participating in OPDs, as well as joining the labor market at both local and national levels. There is no proper inclusion of women with disabilities into the Sudanese disability movement.

As proof, the country's OPDs do not have a noticeable number of women leaders. Women with disabilities comprise 21% of OPD members, and 26% of OPD leadership positions. The latter is a relatively high rate in comparison to member rates, which indicates weak participation of Sudanese women with disabilities in the country's OPDs. This applies to almost any other country in the Arab world, particularly any of the ten surveyed countries.

What about the situation, participation, and role of women with disabilities in Egypt, which many consider the model of change in the Arab world?

The report of the national strategy to empower Egyptian women discusses gender equality, women empowerment, and violence against women. Although the report is based on Article 53 of the 2014 constitution, which cites discrimination on the basis of disability, the strategy does not mention women with disabilities. The report focuses on achieving protection for most of the groups deserving of care.

In its review of Egypt's commitments, it also ignored the rights of persons with disabilities — as articulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Universal Declaration of Eliminating Violence against Women. When evaluating women's participation in the legislative process, the report did not consider the possibility of women with disabilities running for Parliament.

The report also debates how women with disabilities reaching the prescribed 3% quota in public sector jobs by 2030 would be possible, without any mention of them. In presenting how the neediest women may resort to court, the report considers poor women and populations in deprived areas without referring to women with disabilities who may be classified among the neediest.

However, the report overestimates the services offered to women with disabilities in all the stages of their lives. It overlooks mothers of children with disabilities. These observations illustrate another inconsideration for women with disabilities. Reports show that women with disabilities in all Arab countries—perhaps with the exception of Tunisia—are less fortunate and much more miserable than their male counterparts with disabilities. This surely negates gender equality and worsens discrimination and disparity.

Recommendations on SDG 5

- ✓ Through community-based rehabilitation activities focusing on women, raise awareness of the rights of girls and women with disabilities to equal treatment and non-discrimination, just like their male counterparts. Use also debate groups;
- ✓ OPDs need to work on urging girls and women with disabilities to attend school and join vocational and centers for adult education;
- ✓ Increase the female members of OPDs, and the percentage of women occupying leadership positions in them;
- ✓ Encourage employers to allow females with disabilities to join the workforce at their firms and have them paid equal wages (i.e., equal with male workers) for work of equal value.

SDG 8 - Economic development and employment

Persons with disabilities experience real integration within society when their work quality becomes the product sought after. In many cases and against the right to reasonable accommodations, persons with disabilities in the Arab world get encouraged at first, only to be disregarded and neglected soon afterwards, because their speed may be slow and, in few cases, their products may be a little more expensive.

Reports speak of limited employment chances for persons with disabilities in both public and private sectors. The reports, unfortunately, do not analyze work contracts and their underlying terms. Among the most important factors in full inclusion of persons with disabilities, perhaps, is the possibility to get a job, start a business, or be able to pick a job of their choice among different public and private sector employers without any social or material barriers.

The CRPD stipulates that persons with disabilities need to work on an equal basis with others. This includes the right to join any work freely chosen or accepted in a “work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible to persons with disabilities.” Discrimination on the basis of disability is not formally banned by most rights laws, but exclusions do exist. The Lebanese law, for instance, penalizes employers for refusing to employ persons with disabilities and rewards those accepting persons with disabilities.

However, it does not address the “conditions of recruitment, hiring, employment, continuance of employment, career advancement, and safe and healthy working conditions [...] including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value [...] protection from harassment and the redress of grievances.” Cases of persons with disabilities reaching the highest ranks of the hierarchy are unheard of.



Persons with disabilities in the Arab world are not enabled to “have effective access to technical and vocational guidance programs, placement services, and vocational and continuing training.” Mostly, reasonable accommodation is not provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace.

In the Arab world, the participation of persons with disabilities in economic development is clearly not effective and full. Employability among persons with disabilities is simply scant and mostly non-existent. This is why country reports lack information about the link between the CRPD and SDG 8, which seeks the provision of full and productive job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

As previously stated, unemployment rates among persons with disabilities are so high that the employed among them make for only a tiny minority. Such conditions unfortunately deprive them of any real chances to experience economic development or empowerment. Thus, they are left behind and not considered competitive in the labor market. Thus, the report cannot explain achievements made on SDG 8 or what is possible.

In Iraq, for example, the few government officials with oversight on the rights of persons with disabilities refer to “rights” only with reference to preventive care and general service delivery by the state. This does not help achieve inclusion and participation in a real and broad sense. Such an attitude implies the difficulty — if not the impossibility — of reducing the rate of joblessness in their ranks, facilitating their employment, and finding diverse jobs for them. This is why it is almost impossible to speak of effective and full participation in social, economic, administrative, cultural, and political life.

It is hard to assess the level of involvement by persons with disabilities in economic development, save for verifying the rate of joblessness in their ranks. In any of the Arab countries, only a meager proportion joins the labor market. Even with diverse jobs in the market, the majority of them suffer from inability to land job opportunities. Perhaps the 2013 findings of the workforce survey in the PNA territory are the most indicative of the ineffective and minimum participation of persons with disabilities in the economy.

A survey carried out by the independent association of human rights revealed that 80% of Palestinians with disabilities are unemployed. That average in other Arab countries may be plus or minus a few points only. Perhaps this extremely high rate in Palestine and other Levant countries is explained by six extra years of rising insecurity, economic turbulence and living hardships. Those fortunate to have even simple jobs cling to them lest they lose their fragile financial security.

Egypt does not seem to have a clear picture of persons with disabilities with effective and full participation in the labor market to counter dismal living conditions and endeavor to realize SDG 8. The country’s large number of persons with disabilities who require academic rehabilitation and vocational training is substantial. In Egypt, a picture of the large number of persons with disabilities who need academic and vocational rehabilitation is remarkable. Among them is a sizable number of people nearing middle age, 35 years and older.

This group includes persons who were working before they got a disability; some of them are now kept away from their jobs, forced to stay at home, and not always by choice.



The upshot of it all is that their already weak—or rather inexistent—limited participation in the economy is worsened. In a country of ninety-eight million people, holders of senior positions, like college professors, who have disabilities would be in the tens, not even hundreds.

Moreover, contrary to what the CRPD stipulates, the new Law No. 10, an update of a previously inadequate law on disabilities, still allocates only 1% of all public sector jobs to persons with disabilities. Assuming the quota was already met, what chance do the rest have? The new law offers no provision at all for persons with disabilities not covered by the 1% quota rule.

In next door Sudan, the civil service law of 2007 allocates at least 2% of all public sector jobs to persons with disabilities. However, it is apparent that the law itself discriminates against certain categories of persons with disabilities. It breaks down job opportunities by the type of disability applicable for the role and the nature of the position.

This condition is essentially incompatible with the CRPD rules, which encourage comprehensive inclusion and full enjoyment of all the rights of people with disabilities on an equal basis with others. However, the employment rate of persons with disabilities seems minimal even in urban areas. For those living in rural areas, where most people are farmers or pastoralists, it is survival of the fittest.

Lebanon's Law No. 220 of 2000 on the rights of persons with disabilities, which was drafted in the 1990s, set at 3% the employment quota for persons with disabilities in the public sector and private firms with over thirty employees. However, 20 years after the law was enacted, it is observed that the law is not enforced, both in the public and private sectors.

This raises questions on whether radical change is possible merely by hurriedly passing laws without public participation or awareness campaign among stakeholders, schools, colleges, government departments, the media, and all key social institutions.

In 2017, the National Association for the Rights of Disabled People in Lebanon (NARD) ran a field survey on how much private companies apply the quota system stipulated by Law No. 220.

The survey included eighty industrial, commercial, and financial firms in Lebanon's two biggest cities, Beirut, and Tripoli. The findings showed that 17 years after the law came into effect, only thirty of the 80 firms partially applied the notion of employing persons with disabilities. Firms that hired these persons did it not out of respect to the law, but out of pity or "fear of God's commandment to care for the weak and the disabled."

A good example is one firm that employed one person with a disability, out of one hundred employees in its ranks. The number of employed persons with disabilities in most of these firms is estimated at 0.9%, far below the stipulated 3% quota. Among the firms surveyed, two large commercial banks employ over five thousand persons. However, the total number of persons with disabilities employed by two banks surveyed is only eighteen individuals, or about 0.3% of the staff. Had they strictly followed the law and applied the quota, they should have employed no less than 150 persons with disabilities.



By contrast, an industrial firm with a staff of 240 workers employs forty persons with disabilities. This is equivalent to five times the stipulated quota. Another industrial firm with a staff of sixty workers employs six persons with disabilities, or three times the quota. Unfortunately, these two examples are extremely rare. One must keep in mind that firms employing persons with disabilities receive incentives for meeting and surpassing the quota. It may be disputable, therefore, to state unequivocally that Lebanese persons with disabilities contribute measurably to economic development in their country. The notion that job opportunities are open to them may be an exaggeration. Only 3-4% of persons with disability cards and of working age are found to join the workforce and are fully productive.

The unemployment rate among all persons with disabilities is undoubtedly high. This is due, first, to disabled persons relatively high rate among the population (around 12%) and second, to the increasing overall unemployment rate. However, the global unemployment rate is not as alarming, according to the condensed economic survey of select eighty countries around the world carried out by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2019. Law No. 20, nevertheless, is a legal attempt to cure the problem of unemployment among persons with disabilities.

It treats violence and abuse on the basis of disability as a violation of human rights. The law also makes deprivation of work and training punishable offences. It sets out a number of guaranteed protections against violence and abuse. It is still unclear whether such a sound rights approach would help in the short and medium term to improve the contribution of Jordanian persons with disabilities to their national economic development, as well as improve their chances to secure jobs.

As for northern Africa, the situation with respect to their contribution to economic development as well as full and effective employment seems similar to those of Egypt and Sudan. This is evident in the continued pursuit among many OPDs in these countries to shore up the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities by increasing training and advocacy. The latter implies frequent follow-ups to secure scarce jobs for only a few persons with disabilities. To start a business, they sometimes need to partner with third parties. In some cases, third parties may help finance the business.

On their part, Morocco does not set any quota to guarantee public sector jobs for persons with disabilities. However, a quota, if intended, may be implicit. For many years, the state provided income support for persons with disabilities through the Social Solidarity Fund. From November 2017 to October 2018, this funded 1,013 income generating projects. The Government also encourages inclusion of persons with disabilities in vocational trades. All of this, however, does not necessarily translate into markedly active roles and contribution by persons of disabilities in sustainable development.

A few Mauritanian disability activists express relief about incentivizing persons with disabilities to participate in economic development. One such incentive is reserving 5% of every twenty or more positions in the civil service for persons with disabilities, provided that recruitment is competitive. Implementation is still in the preliminary stages, but the country appears oblivious of the applicable stipulations of the CRPD, which the country ratified about seven years ago. The Mauritanian government also supports funding of income generating projects for persons with disabilities, through OPDs and other NGOs.



The state also apportioned two hundred land lots for persons with disabilities to build their own homes. The question is: are these initiatives sustainable, even for ten or twenty years?

The executive order 14/214 issued in Algeria in 2014 specifies ways to allocate jobs and financial contributions and assistance with special equipment that persons with disabilities may require for work. However, some six years later, no human capital, e.g., special commissions, has been deployed to implement this initiative. Such commissions would also assist employers willing to employ persons with disabilities. However, no action means implementation of the executive order is a difficult mission.

Article 27 of the order stipulates allocating 1% of all staff positions to persons with disabilities. If none are employed, a firm must pay a fine to a special fund for the “protection and promotion of persons with disabilities.” The cabinet approved the measures to implement this article a few years ago already. However, the Prime Minister has not signed off on them. Therefore, the fund as well as the implementation of the relevant article in executive order fourteen stays suspended. This lack of commitment to the rule of law limits persons with disabilities’ access to jobs and their contribution to economic development.

In Tunisia, the Tunisian Association for Defending the Rights of Persons with Disabilities demand their right to inclusion in the labor market and to operationalize and improve the laws for this. The Association also demands raising the quota for persons with disabilities in all institutions from 1% to 2%. According to the May 2016 proposed amendments for the Directive Law of 2005, the quota should be raised, red tape should be cut, and additional incentives, such as tax exemptions, be granted to private firms employing persons with disabilities. Furthermore, Tunisia has ratified the International Covenant of Marrakesh to facilitate access to literary and musical works by persons who are visually impaired.

From the above, it is unfortunately clear that in the current context, access to work and employment for persons with disabilities in the Arab world is impossible without major reforms. Many barriers and impediments continue to prevent persons with disabilities from effective and full participation in economic activity and facilitating their productivity. Disabled persons joining the labor market is also greatly hampered by exclusion and discrimination. Because of entrenched negative attitudes, many Arab persons with disabilities of working age lack skilled vocational training as well as opportunities to join the labor market.

For as long as they are prevented from competing on an equal basis with others and the quality of their work is not sought after, it remains a tall order to get them fully included in society.

Recommendations on SDG 8

- ✓ Access to work and employment is impossible without the following and other proposed major reforms. The proposals require concerted effort and coordination among all stakeholders.
- ✓ Lobby politicians, governments, and other stakeholders to amend labor laws so as to give persons with disabilities equal employment opportunities, in open, inclusive, and accessible work environments;
- ✓ Work to ensure that vocational and professional training opportunities are always open to persons with disabilities;
- ✓ Seek to have trade unions allow working persons with disabilities join them as full and active members and encourage these persons to apply for union membership.

SDG 11 - Accessibility or Sustainable towns and human settlements

It is true that no real effort is exerted by all governments in the Arab countries surveyed to assure accessibility. They do not attempt to make public buildings, private buildings used by the public, sidewalks, transport means and other commonly utilized facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. All of this, in addition to the lack of reasonable accommodations, seem to contribute further to the exclusion, isolation, and marginalization of persons with disabilities in Arab societies.

As for accessible technology products, one can talk of a good effort made on the international scene by information technology (IT) firms and telecommunication giants. However, maintenance and service for such technologies accessible to persons with disabilities seem regularly unavailable throughout the Arab countries surveyed.

SDG 11 is dependent on the dimensions of the accessibility concept, particularly those directly relating to accessing public and private buildings designed for public usage, as well as the convenient and safe usage of transport means by persons with disabilities. This Goal speaks of turning towns and human settlements into communities that are inclusive, safe, durable, and sustainable for everybody.

In the objectives under this goal, persons with disabilities are clearly and properly mentioned. By focusing on the right and sound links between the CRPD and the SDGs, and specifically the bridge connecting CRPD Articles 2, 9, 18, 19, 20, and 21 and SDG 11, it is essential to draw attention to safe accessibility to all kinds of buildings, roads, sidewalks and public places, including cultural and artistic centers, archaeological sites, places of worship, hospitals, health centers, sports grounds, etc.

An inclusive community is one that seeks to “ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and occurrence of natural disasters.” This is what CRPD Article 11 stipulates.



Unfortunately, Arab persons with disabilities seem to not have access to any kind of basic protection in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. The Covid-19 global crisis has made this negligence obvious. No government in the Arab countries has tried to address how to help these individuals by providing certain precautions specific to each type of disability.

It is still difficult to tell whether families headed by or including persons with disabilities receive any special assistance from governments that distribute financial aid to needy families. This should be at least an indicator of the degree to which persons with disabilities have access to information from government departments (Articles 9 and 21). It would also be an indicator of how much the concerned government departments take into consideration the circumstances of persons with disabilities (Article 11).

Arab countries appear distinctly lax and unwilling to apply the minimum standards of accessibility. Rather, they may be deemed reluctant to strictly adhere to their own construction codes and laws on the rights of persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, most laws do not tackle access to information and their usage as stipulated specifically by CRPD 2, 9, and 21. The status of accessibility in the surveyed countries is highlighted by the data cited in the country reports of OPDs.

Lebanon and Palestine are distinguished by having the oldest two laws on the rights of persons with disabilities. Both laws handle accessibility to built-in environments. Each of them uses its own special terminology to express the concept. Palestine's Law No. 4 uses the term, "harmonization."

Lebanese Law No. 220 uses the term, "environment rehabilitation." Law 220 stipulates that the minimum standards of environmental rehabilitation or accessibility shall be adopted. These standards, however, were introduced to the Lebanese code of construction 11 years after the enactment of Law No. 2020. Unfortunately, eight years after their adoption, modifications in the construction code are not adhered to.

While the Palestinians complain of the disability card not being issued so far, for example, they would feel relatively relieved if the considerable number of government and UNRWA schools respected the harmonization or accessibility concept. For example, 46.7% of government schools have ramps for wheelchairs. The percentage is a little higher for UNRWA schools (almost 50%).

Bathrooms are considered rehabilitated for use by students with wheelchairs in 37% of government schools, and 40% in UNRWA schools. It is unclear, however, how suitable and accessible these ramps are. Applying the minimum standards in the necessary architectural rehabilitation does not signify real accessibility. This concept is in fact novel to international human rights instruments, but well known to architects for a long time. Perhaps, the level of accessibility referred to is not in fact useful for the large majority of students with disabilities.

The situation is much worse in the case of students with physical disabilities. They encounter greater difficulty in moving around as the Ministry of Education and most school administrations fail to make simple investments that make their mobility easier, even when such arrangements are not costly. Palestinian students with disabilities suffer lack of access to public buildings, such as government departments, autonomous administrations, service firms or institutions, theatres, restaurants, sports grounds, and touristic establishments and lack even simple reasonable accommodations.



These are exactly the circumstances under which their Lebanese counterparts live. Despite the preliminary detail set out in the minimum standards of accessibility stipulated by Law No. 220 for the interest of persons with disabilities, particularly persons using wheelchairs, actual implementation has not made any significant progress.

The minimum standards were introduced into the construction code by way of a special annex approved by officials at the beginning of 2012. In 2007 NARD ran a field survey on accessibility to public buildings and private buildings designed for public usage in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. NARD showed that under 5% of these installments may be considered accessible but are not fully accessible.

Unfortunately, a tour of facilities such as schools, hospitals, hotels, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, and government department buildings show that this small percentage has not satisfactorily improved – to say nothing of information inaccessibility to people with visual, hearing, intellectual, and multiple disabilities. As mentioned before, this is not dealt with by the Lebanese and Palestinian laws. Perhaps part of the CRPD dividend has raised the interest of international firms in making their diverse products accessible, as is the case with mobile phones and computers, for example.

Tunisia is credited for having ratified the Marrakesh Convention. It provides persons with disabilities with the chance to access literary and musical works. Nevertheless, the country may be blamed for continuing to keep persons with disabilities excluded and marginalized from properly utilizing public transport, which lacks guidance for persons with sensory and physical disabilities.

According to the Tunisian Association for Defending the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, these guidelines would include voice instructions at bus or train stations, direction charts and elevators to lift wheelchairs and their users into buses. The Tunisian Parliament on 16 January 2019 transferred the responsibility for access to economic development and inclusive communities down to local authorities, which is constituted by elected local and provincial councils.

Back to the Levant countries, Jordan has taken many measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities in certain areas, such as guaranteeing their accessibility to bank services, with independence and privacy. This follows decades of discrimination that prevented their enjoyment of such rights on an equal basis with others. Implementation of the plan to “correct the conditions of existing buildings and public facilities” started in February 2019.

It is noteworthy, that individual and collective lobbying efforts already succeeded in having ramps built alongside 75% of all staircases at the Jordanian University, in addition to some short staircases being turned into passageways, and twenty-one accessible bathrooms built on the campus. As a result, most of the buildings are now accessible to persons with disabilities, especially those with physical disabilities. These persons, particularly persons using wheelchairs, no longer need to depend on others to get to higher floors.

They are no longer forced to fast or delay drinking water to avoid going to the bathroom. All of this, however, does not imply that persons of all types of disability enjoy accessibility in all its aspects inside the campus of the Jordanian University.



The situation may not be markedly different in Iraq. The lack of reasonable accommodation and full accessibility is the stumbling block that prevents persons with disabilities from enjoying their right to independent and safe mobility on an equal basis with others. If Iraq is still in the early stages with respect to putting the CRPD into effect, it is almost certain that accessibility remains a far-fetched goal.

With its absence, however, it is impossible to get these persons fully included in the different aspects of life. They cannot go into fields of production so that society may utilize their huge diverse potential. They would not be limited to always asking for assistance from others and depending on them to meet simple needs.

In Sudan, it is regrettable that no comprehensive national strategy is in place to provide access to built-in environments as well as to information technology. Sudanese disability activists blame the Government, and perhaps society as well, for the weak commitment to enforcing disability laws and policies in an organized manner.

This situation is not reassuring, and similar to what prevails next door in Egypt, where accessibility is not properly available in all dimensions of life. Both countries lack serious commitment by the central government and local authorities to make buildings, roads, and sidewalks properly accessible. Assigning this initiative to local authorities in a vast and largely rural country like Sudan is crucial. Urban areas host only 26.3% of the population, while around 66.7% of the Sudanese live in rural areas, and 7% are nomads.


Although over four years have passed since the issuance of Mauritania's executive order No. 90/2015 on accessibility to buildings, communications, and information technology, it has not yet come into effect. Thus, the participation of Mauritanian persons with disabilities in daily life continues to be limited.

The situation in Morocco is not noticeably different from that in its southern neighbor, even if one or two big Moroccan cities may enjoy having properly equipped means of public transport that suitably serve persons with disabilities. It is also unclear whether a large number of public buildings or private ones designed for public use are rehabilitated to be fully accessible.

Algeria has not sufficiently implemented accessibility laws. The National Control Commission does not delegate to local representatives. However, local accessibility committees have the responsibility of expressing local accessibility needs to the national commission and observing law implementation at the local level. The Algerian accessibility standard is criticized for not considering the accessibility needs of persons with intellectual and psychological disabilities. "Accessibility" seems to be understood simply as providing ramps for persons using wheelchairs.

In the absence of the right safety and all-inclusive standards, it seems almost impossible to correctly speak of the right adoption of reasonable accommodation and accessibility in Arab countries and communities, particularly those surveyed. If the vast majority of homes of persons with disabilities are not equipped to be easily and safely accessible with full independence, how can other buildings be accessible?

The Algeria report makes clear that the country's schools for the visually impaired have potholes and physical hazards on sidewalks. Staircases lack rail guards. How would one expect, then, to find rehabilitated sidewalks, building entrances and staircases, or elevators installed for proper use by persons with disabilities, particularly users of wheelchairs as well as those who depend on crutches and prostheses to move around?



Moreover, what is true of buildings applies in a more drastic way to public transport, especially big buses, high vans, and trains. Also, international airports around the world are often equipped for use by persons with disabilities at a considerably high degree of safety and ease. Not so with domestic airports or aerodromes outside capital cities.

Recommendations on SDG11

- ✓ Work with government departments as well as with members of parliament and political parties to ensure accessibility to public buildings, places of worship, workplaces, etc.;
- ✓ Lobby for making Arabic-speaking websites accessible particularly to persons with visual and intellectual disabilities;
- ✓ The disability movement needs to channel the different views of persons with disabilities and amplify their various complaints about inability to access surrounding environments and ICT systems, and make them available in easy-to-use formats;
- ✓ Work by governments to ensure persons with disabilities are always included in the lists of vulnerable groups in need of help in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies;
- ✓ The disability movement needs to lobby all stakeholders in relief work to give more attention and higher priority to persons with disabilities during emergencies.

SDG 16 - An inclusive community for everybody

Without the Arab countries having the basics that are needed to achieve the previous goals, it is almost impossible to speak of an inclusive community or society. Poor, illiterate, and unemployed men with disabilities are marginalized and excluded. These dire living conditions are experienced to a higher degree by women with disabilities even if they are literate, employed, or self-employed. Unfortunately, the reports confirm that this situation is prevalent in all of the countries surveyed.

Questions may be raised, therefore, concerning the specific stipulations of SDG 16. It stipulates the “encouragement of establishing peaceful communities with no one marginalized in order to realize sustainable development allowing all to access justice, and build institutions that are efficient, accountable, and inclusive of everyone at all levels.” Unfortunately, Arab societies seem far from achieving this remote goal. Arab culture is steeped in centuries of tradition and customs. Traditional and conservative Arab societies not only seem unready to accept effective and full inclusion of all their members and groups as stipulated by SDG 16, but they also appear baffled by the terminologies.



SDG 16 has direct and indirect links with CRPD Article 13. The Article deals with access to justice, which is not allowed to a large number of persons with disabilities, particularly persons with intellectual and sensory disabilities. These persons lack legal capacity and cannot be dealt with as witnesses. In addition, they are unable to sue other people with or without disabilities. Unlike the CRPD, the laws on rights have not paid any attention to this issue.

However, Lebanon has repealed parts of its law governing employment, which previously prevented persons with any impairment from getting hired. But it has not dealt in detail with discrimination on the basis of disability. Nevertheless, Article 97 of this law enacted in 2000 exempts persons with disabilities from legal fees should they file a lawsuit against any party denying them employment because of their disability. Jordan's new law sounds compatible with the CRPD. Yet, it does not directly handle discrimination on the basis of disability.

It does, however, ease the access to justice, while it seeks to ban some old practices; for example, those that previously hindered persons with disabilities from performing bank transactions. Almost all laws on the rights of persons with disabilities fail to take fully into account the rules of Article 13 of the Convention.

An inclusive community is one that fights human trafficking. Laws on the rights of persons with disabilities in the Arab countries do not directly tackle the rules of Article 16, which are discussed in detail in SDG 5. However, Jordan's Law No. 20 outlines some measures to fight such practices. A Moroccan law also nominally addresses this problem. The penal laws in other Arab countries tackle the problem of freedom from exploitation, violence, and abuse, which can be considered in relation to human trafficking.

Another condition for an inclusive community is the recognition of the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others. It is stated that States Parties shall take effective and appropriate measures "to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community." In all the surveyed Arab countries, the enjoyment of this right is limited to few persons with different disabilities.

The majority of persons with disabilities spend their whole lives in their parents' house, and/or with siblings. Under the prevailing circumstances, living independently seems unachievable in the current society. The inclusive community envisaged by SDG 16 would be a desirable ideal for persons with disabilities everywhere in the Arab world, but it will not be realized easily or quickly.

The majority of Arab societies undoubtedly enjoy a considerable degree of civil security and peace. This does not necessarily imply that they pursue inclusion, or that they prevent marginalizing any of their members, even if they seek to achieve "sustainable development." As for allowing everyone to go to court, this is one of the ideals whose full achievement is most doubtful, because persons with disabilities are already isolated and excluded from most aspects of life in their communities. Inclusive societies embrace strong institutions, which serve everyone, at all levels.

Based on the above, it is hard to consider the surveyed Arab societies as inclusive communities. Schools are not inclusive, health care services are mostly inaccessible to persons with disabilities, who also find it almost impossible to find jobs, much less accessible workplaces.



Mostly, these persons are the poorest of the poor, who are unable to take full part in communal life. Evaluation of the five goals studied so far may be considered complete. However, an analytical review shows that persons with disabilities are not considered during planning. Even if data may refer to them and count them, perhaps just to satisfy some government policy or to seem politically correct, even if reports may assert that communities care for persons with disabilities, findings show that these communities continue to exclude, marginalize, and isolate them, as well as many other disadvantaged or underprivileged groups.

Consider, for example, the concept of accessibility as it links to the goals of quality education or full and productive employment in SDG 4 and SDG 8, respectively. It is almost impossible for most persons with disabilities in Arab societies to fully achieve these ideals, because of inadequate access to schools, workplaces, and various buildings as well as information and communication technologies.

Achieving SDG 16, which in part seeks to provide access to justice for all, including persons with disabilities, has its own measure of challenges. Drafters of this goal realized the importance of achieving sustainable development. The question, however, is whether institutions may actually be inclusive to all. Perhaps, they suffer from declining efficiency, i.e., they are generally unaccountable. It is remarkable that country reports do not discuss inclusive society. An example is the Tunisia report, discussed above, which says that parliament transferred the responsibility of establishing inclusive communities to local authorities. However, the report does not elaborate on how these authorities implement the task.

Lebanon's report makes a short presentation on the limited inclusion of persons with disabilities within their communities. A small number of Lebanese persons with disabilities run for elected positions of councilor in local authorities, but only few win elections. At least two persons with disabilities ran for parliament and experienced general elections. Some OPDs network with local or national NGOs in a few areas.

They also run awareness seminars advocating the rights of persons with disabilities and exploring better ways to serve these persons and fully and include them in community life. The Lebanese report, however, shows reservations about what constitutes full and proper inclusion. School inclusion experience is often limited to a few cases.

It can sometimes be a collective experience, though it affects small groups on a narrower scale, i.e., minimal numbers in a group of the legally classified four types of disability. It also clarifies the reason for hesitation; that workers with disabilities are a minority. Hence, in the comprehensive unemployment rule affecting persons with disabilities of working age, they are the exception rather than the norm.





In Egypt, persons with disabilities experience a new kind of social inclusion. The law stipulates that parliament must have nine members with disabilities, and that at least one should be a woman with disability. In the current parliament, this person is a well-known disability activist and a former member of the board of AOPD. Dr. Heba Hagrass is a member of two other national councils.

Throughout its modern history, Egypt has known many distinguished persons with disabilities who became popular stars in the literary and artistic fields. They constitute unparalleled, individual success stories, not necessarily evidence for full social inclusion.

In view of the prevalent unemployment rate of persons with disabilities that affect at least 80% of persons with disabilities and considering the loss of independence and ability to positively impact their daily lives and their immediate family environment, it is difficult to speak of their proper inclusion in the community.

Unemployment prevents their independence and makes self-reliance almost impossible. They thus would not be able to lead an independent, dignified and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, even marriage for some persons with disabilities does not automatically imply real social inclusion. Rather, marriage may astonishingly trigger exclusion of these persons and their partners. Effective and proper inclusion is supposed to mean, above all, voluntary participation, and interaction of the whole society with persons with disabilities who enjoy full and effective inclusion in their community.

Recommendations on SDG 16

-  Work to ensure access to justice for all persons with disabilities;
-  Lobby the parties concerned to lawfully take the necessary measures that would have persons with disabilities gain their legal capacity;
-  Run advocacy campaigns to urge governments and communities to accept independent living of persons with disabilities, and to help them fully enjoy this right;
-  Lobby for giving priority to persons with disabilities to secure housing units in public housing programs.

SDG 17 - Partnerships with international organizations and agencies

Cooperation with international organizations, no matter how limited, may be helpful for effecting change. Such partnerships may be entered into at the level of state relationships, individual civil society organizations or groups of NGOs. Most reports show how such partnerships are sought after by OPDs in the countries concerned.

However, they do not state clearly how similar partnerships with the governments may be of greater benefit to persons with disabilities.

SDG 17 outlines various objectives. It is a big umbrella with the following targets under it: finance, information and communications technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic issues, including policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring, and accountability.

CRPD Article 32 on international cooperation alludes to these dimensions without specifying them in detail. It concludes that international cooperation should include or affect persons with disabilities who must utilize such cooperation, including international mutual development programs.



Furthermore, international cooperation helps to facilitate cooperation in the field of research and provision of technical and economic assistance. The multi-stakeholder partnerships should not be confined to governments but include international organizations and agencies.

The national level should consist of civil society, private firms, and NGOs, including OPD. Noticeable are the detailed explanations in country reports. It is apparent from these reports that officers do not pay enough attention to the multiple levels related to achieving this goal.

In Egypt, government authorities allow the opportunity for foreign government agencies and international NGOs to work inside the country within the field of development in general, and on the development of people with disabilities as well as their individual and group capacities in particular. This sort of activity opens the way to establish serious and important partnerships between the Egyptian government, civil society, and many international organizations and agencies.

Egyptian OPDs are involved in signing up cooperation agreements to implement their own projects that seek to develop community capacities by empowering individuals with disabilities. The interested organization may be confined to those affiliated to the United Nations as well as many international NGOs in addition to Arab regional government and non-government organizations.

In neighboring Sudan, many partnerships with foreign and international NGOs are noticeable. These partnerships provide technical expertise and funding to many Sudanese OPDs, which also receive funding from Sudanese donors as well as limited government sources. Big INGOs provide support to initiatives proposed by Sudanese OPDs seeking to meet the need for a national organization or an umbrella federation to coordinate the work and cooperation between local and national organizations.

The state of Mauritania endeavors to implement the policies of empowering persons with disabilities but lack the united efforts and capacities and strong international cooperation in accordance with SDG 17 and CRPD Article 32.

Observers have the same impression with the circumstances in next-door Morocco. However, a few differences may be noticed. In Morocco, the state “is a partner to service providers and OPDs as well.” Also, government authorities sign agreements with international organizations. However, the Morocco report does not specify whether the organizations are special agencies affiliated to the United Nations or INGOs.

The situation in Algeria appears to be different from its two neighbors. However, it does not mean that Algerian persons with disabilities are unable to utilize the services provided by some INGOs. These organizations invite Algerian persons with disabilities to attend training courses and participate in research seminars and many conferences.

They are involved in many activities of regional and international organizations on disability affairs. In the three cases mentioned above, an important partnership between civil society and government is apparent. However, it is not stated whether the partnerships are strong enough to deliver sustainable development goals. Partnerships with international organization agencies in Tunisia appear to be on relatively equal footing with its three North Africa Arab neighbors.



In the Levant, it is clear from Iraq's report that IADO depends on its own regional and international partnerships. This does not include partnerships between the Iraqi state and the special international organizations and agencies, especially those of the United Nations and other international umbrella organizations.

As for Jordan, the report mentions nothing about SDG 17, despite the important presence and activity of international organizations in the kingdom. The activity of many of these organizations targets Jordanians as well as Palestinian and Syrian refugees, who number about one million. INGOs are known for their interest in many Jordanian and Palestinian OPDs and, to a relatively smaller extent, in their Lebanese counterparts. It should be noted, however, that in the 10 Arab countries surveyed, international organizations -- particularly multilateral organizations -- seek to enter into partnerships only with state bodies.



CONCLUSION AND OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the Arab societies surveyed, persons with disabilities remain a relatively marginalized and isolated group, despite the enactment of laws on their rights and affairs. Vigorous complaints abound for not including them properly, effectively and in a comprehensive manner within their communities at the local and national levels.

These complaints revolve around education, comprehensive healthcare, joining the labor market, accessibility to the built-in environment as well as to information and communication technologies. With respect to fighting poverty, special attention is paid to the impact on women with disabilities as compared to men with disabilities.

Overall, persons with disabilities are encouraged and supported to start their own small businesses and join cooperatives. However, favorable conditions for such initiatives are largely lacking. This negatively impacts the quest for full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities.

Among the very first prerequisites for an inclusive society is a commitment to enforce a country's own laws on the rights of under-represented and marginalized groups, as well as a commitment to apply such laws. This is wanted in many Arab societies. Nevertheless, it is possible to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities, first, through their own initiatives and, second, by society's commitment to enforce measures and procedures that allow real and comprehensive inclusion.

The CRPD was formulated to ensure that the rights of all persons with disabilities are upheld and fulfilled with the firm conviction that all persons with disabilities participate fully in their communities. Nevertheless, it is difficult to speak realistically about this without pursuing effective links between the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda with its 17 goals in general and, in particular, the seven goals discussed in this report.

This is why the report lists a number of practical proposals to conclude discussion. These proposals should provide momentum that hopefully leads to persuasive and effective interaction between society and persons with disabilities. The proposals, outlined in the recommendations below, could provide the means for effective and full participation of these persons in the practical life and development of society.





Their success would depend on strong involvement and partnerships among all parties concerned in the disability movement: civil society; government departments, and special institutes as well as municipalities and trade unions, members of parliament, and political parties.

The more important ones are as follows:

Recommendations to government stakeholders

Recommendations on SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

- Ensure the rehabilitation of health institutions, so that they are accessible to persons with disabilities of all types.
- Rehabilitate and train all personnel in such institutions to properly treat patients with disabilities on equal basis with others.

Recommendations on SDG 4: Education

- The States have a responsibility to support and implement awareness campaigns on the rights of persons with disabilities to inclusive education as stipulated in CRPD Article 8 (awareness raising). These campaigns should raise awareness about the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education as stipulated by the CRPD Article 24 (education). Campaigns should also seek to dismantle stigma and discriminatory attitudes about persons with disabilities and harmful practices against persons with disabilities. Campaigns should seek to elevate the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities and promote messages around disability as an integral part of human diversity. Campaigns should include all relevant stakeholders, including persons with disabilities and their families, governments, and political decision-makers within the education sector.
- Ministries of Education should amend education laws to comply with the CRPD and ensure policies on education promote access to inclusive education on an equal basis with others in line with CRPD Article 24 (education).
- Ministries of Education and universities should direct resources to training teachers on inclusive education.
- States should progressively plan to refurbish schools to be fully accessible to students with disabilities.
- States must work to properly rehabilitate schools and related facilities, whether they are public or private establishments or buildings designed for public use, to ensure accessibility for students and visitors with disabilities.



Recommendations on SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Support and resources need to be allocated for community-based rehabilitation, specifically targeting women and girls with disabilities.
- States have a responsibility to support and implement awareness raising campaigns on the rights of women and girls with disabilities to equal opportunities and non-discrimination as stipulated in CRPD Article 8 (awareness raising) and CRPD Article 6 (women with disabilities). These campaigns should seek to dismantle stigma and discriminatory attitudes about women and girls with disabilities and harmful practices, including gender-based violence.
- Ministries of Education need to address access to inclusive education and vocational training for adult education for girls and women with disabilities as a priority.
- Ministries of labor must encourage both public and private employers to recruit and hire women with disabilities and ensure they are paid equal wages for equal work as stipulated by CRPD Article 27 (work and employment) and CRPD Article 6 (women with disabilities). This can be done through employer incentive programs and targeted recruitment outreach programs to women with disabilities.

Recommendations on SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic

- Governments must amend labor laws to ensure access to work and employment on an equal basis in open, inclusive, and accessible work environments as required by CRPD Article 27 (work and employment).
- Ministries responsible for labor and vocational training issues, must ensure resources are allocated to ensure vocational and professional training opportunities are always inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Trade unions must allow working persons with disabilities to join them as full and active members and be supported to apply for full union membership.

Recommendations on SDG 11: Accessibility

- The government, as well as members of parliament and political parties, must put in place and implement accessibility standards to ensure access to all public buildings, places of worship, workplaces, services etc.
- Ministries responsible for information and communication must put in place and implement accessibility standards for Arabic-speaking websites to be fully accessible, particularly to persons with visual and intellectual disabilities, in line with CRPD Articles 9 (accessibility) and 21 (freedom of expression and opinion and access to information). Government bodies responsible for information and communication must ensure information and communication including ICT systems are available in accessible formats such as easy-to-read and screen-reader or e-reader friendly program.



- Governments must include persons with disabilities in the lists of vulnerable persons in need of support during situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.
- Stakeholders in disaster and risk reduction and mitigation planning must prioritize inclusion of persons with disabilities during emergencies and work with OPDs to learn how to better address their needs in times of disasters and emergencies.

Recommendations on SDG 16: An inclusive community for everybody

- Ministries of Justice and government bodies representing disability issues must work to ensure access to justice is achieved for all persons with disabilities on an equal basis both in laws, policies, and practices and in line with CPRD Article 13 (Access to justice).
- Ministries of Justice and other relevant government bodies must take measures to ensure that persons with disabilities gain their legal capacity as required by CRPD Article 12 (Equal recognition before the law).
- Governments have a responsibility to carry out awareness raising on the rights of all persons with disabilities to live independently in the community under CRPD articles 8 (Awareness raising) and 19 (Living independently and being included in the community).
- Governments must ensure that persons with disabilities can fully exercise their rights to live independently in the community through secure and accessible housing units in public affordable housing programs.



Recommendations to the disability movement

- Ensure deep and confident grasp of the new human rights notions proposed by the CRPD, such as discrimination on the basis of disability, reasonable accommodations, accessibility, legal capacity, access to justice, personal integrity, etc. Work according to their implications and seek to make all people aware of and sensitive to them.
- Promote links between Articles of the CRPD and monitor the active and real involvement of all persons with disabilities in many various aspects of economic activity and social mobility. This is the case, for example, with Article 18 (liberty of movement and nationality), Article 19 (living independently and being included in the community), Article 20 (personal mobility), Article 24 (education), Article 25 (health), Article 26 (rehabilitation), Article 27 (work and employment), Article 28 (adequate standard of living and social protection), and Article 32 (international cooperation);
- Gain knowledge of the 17 SDG goals and the linkages between them—and even each one of them—and articles of the Convention and rules (as is the case with the following goals: 4 (quality education); 8 (economic development and employment); 11 (sustainable cities and human settlements) and 16 (inclusive community). As previously emphasized, pay attention to direct and indirect links between each of these goals and the CRPD rights.
- Have the disability movement remind governments about states that have already ratified CRPD Article 32 (on international cooperation) and the role of persons with disabilities in the SDGs. Article 32 discusses such cooperation, along with its arrangements, with persons with disabilities who benefit from the program and operations decided and run by the cooperation agreements. The movement needs to send letters to international organizations and agencies, especially UN organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNIDO, FAO, etc. The letters should be linked to agreements and memoranda of understanding between the different country governments and any of these development organizations and agencies working in developing countries.



Recommendations to civil society and NGOs

- Encourage the individual participation of persons with disabilities in all rights and advocacy initiatives as well as in development processes both locally and internationally. Seek to emphasize the need to have participation take place at all levels with the different concerned authorities.
- Demand urgently and continuously the need to implement inclusive education with the relevant parties among education faculties and teacher training colleges in order to have disability and special education issues incorporated in teacher training programs.
- Pursue equal opportunities for women and men with disabilities to get nutrition, health care, education and employment, while taking care to prioritize women with disabilities. Men with disabilities throughout the Arab countries receive more benefit from different services by a margin of 10% to 40%.
- For civil society, OPDs need to increase women members with disabilities and the percentage of women occupying leadership positions in their organizations.

General Recommendations

- Prioritize persons with disabilities when introducing relief measures and technical assistance.
- Include persons with disabilities in social protection and poverty reduction measures.
- Include persons with disabilities in relief measures, assistance during emergencies, natural disasters, conflict, and war.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions and basis for report

Question No. 1:

How committed is your country to implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)? What has been implemented so far? What is not yet implemented?

Question No. 2:

Do you have refugees with disabilities? How many are there and what are their nationalities?

Question No. 3:

What is the status of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPD) in your country? How many are there? What role do OPDs play in formulating and implementing laws and policies?

Question No. 4:

Has disability been included among the sustainable development goals in your country? Please highlight the following topics:

- a. Poverty and social protection, linked to SDG 1.
- b. Inclusive education for all, linked to SDG 4.
- c. Equality between men and women, linked to SDG 5.
- d. Economic development and employment, linked to SDG 8.
- e. Accessibility, linked to SDG 11.
- f. A society inclusive of all, linked to SDG 16.
- g. Partnerships with international organizations and agencies, linked to SDG 17.