



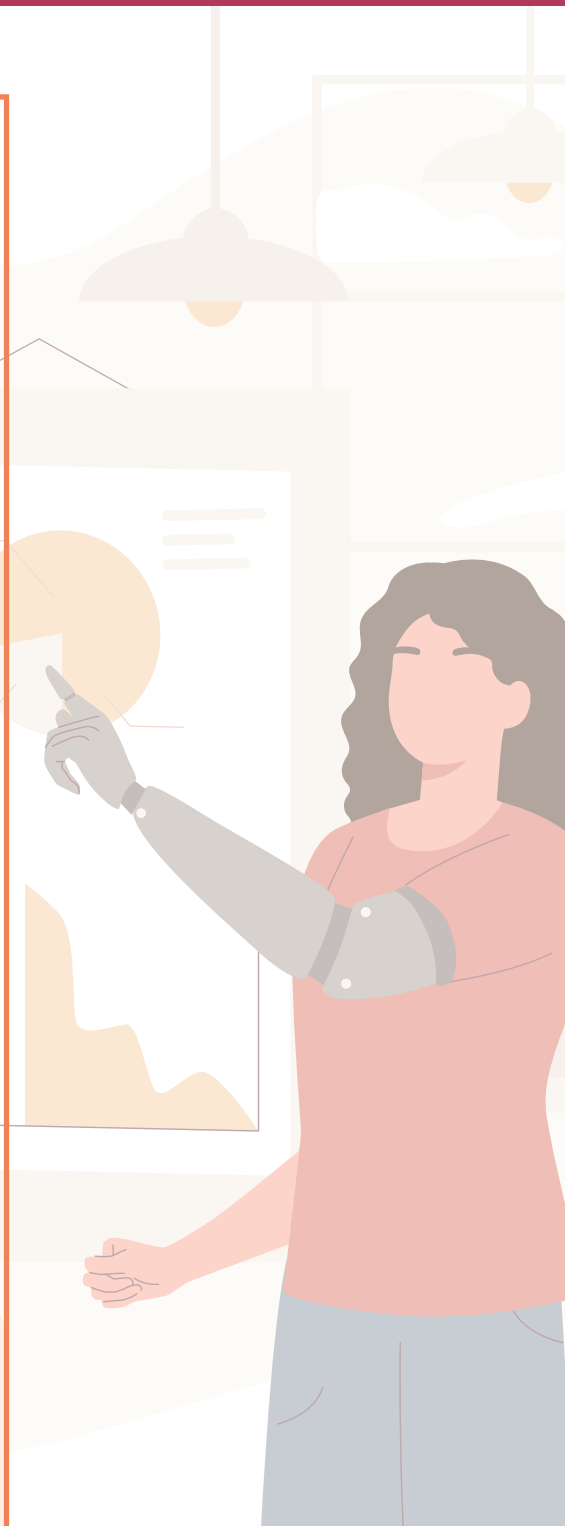
Status of women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region:

an analytical reading in view of the national reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30

Scope and methodology

Three decades after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as a global framework for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, Arab countries have made notable progress in several areas. However, this progress has not benefited all women equally. Women and girls with disabilities remain among the most marginalized groups, as they face intersecting forms of discrimination. Successive periodic reviews have shown that progress in protecting their rights and in integrating their diverse needs into public policies remains limited. Persons with disabilities, including women, do not constitute a homogeneous group with similar needs. Their needs vary, including the need for care or support. Despite relative improvements in the recognition of the rights of women with disabilities in laws and policies, shortcomings persist in implementation, resource allocation, and effective participation in decision-making.¹ This highlights the need for a deeper analysis of the situation of women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region, and of the responses implemented for their benefit at the national level.

The present summary draws on national reports submitted as part of the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30, which took place in March 2025 in 19 Arab countries. It addresses legislative measures, policies and programmes aimed at improving the status of women and girls with disabilities, focusing on three interrelated areas that form the core of international commitments: equality and non-discrimination; access to social and economic rights; and protection from gender-based violence. It also aims to provide a data-driven analytical reading of progress made, highlighting the patterns of interventions adopted, their level of coverage, and the structural gaps that still exist 30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²



Equality and non-discrimination: constitutional and legislative framework

Arab States have made significant progress with all acceding to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reflecting their international commitment to this demographic. However, national reviews indicate that explicit constitutional protection from discrimination based on disability remains limited in the region. Among the countries covered by the present summary, **the constitutions of only five address** the rights of persons with disabilities or provide for their protection from discrimination, namely Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia. The constitutions of **five other countries**, specifically Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Oman and the State of Palestine, indicate that the State shall care for persons with disabilities and ensure their rehabilitation and integration into society, but without explicitly prohibiting discrimination against them. At least **nine countries**, namely Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, rely on the general principle of equality before the law without specifically addressing persons with disabilities, thereby leaving the protection of this group subject to varying interpretative approaches.

9

countries

rely on the general principle of equality before the law without specifically addressing persons with disabilities

- Bahrain
- Djibouti
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Syrian Arab Republic
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

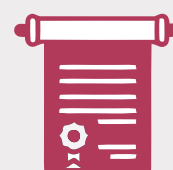


5

countries

whose constitutions address the rights of persons with disabilities or provide for their protection from discrimination

- Egypt
- Morocco
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Tunisia



5

countries

whose constitutions indicate that the State shall care for persons with disabilities and ensure their rehabilitation and integration into society, but without explicitly prohibiting discrimination against them



- Algeria
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Oman
- State of Palestine

At the level of ordinary legislation, **19 Arab countries** have adopted specific laws on the rights of persons with disabilities, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia,

19

countries

have adopted specific laws on the rights of persons with disabilities

- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Morocco
- Oman
- State of Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen



the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. However, these laws overlap in their focus on providing services, care and social benefits, without establishing a comprehensive legal framework to address direct and indirect discrimination. Moreover, most do not include a legal definition of discrimination or provide clear mechanisms for redress and accountability. Only nine laws address the empowerment of women with disabilities and their protection from discrimination and violence. Discrimination on the basis of disability is criminalized in only **three Arab countries**: Algeria, Djibouti and the State of Palestine.

An analysis of this data reveals a prevailing legislative pattern based on a social welfare approach rather than a rights-based approach. Prohibitions against discrimination are often found in labour or civil service legislation, as is the case in at least **four countries**, namely Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In contrast, such prohibitions are almost entirely absent from family law, personal status law and legislation governing political participation – areas at the core of substantive equality for women with disabilities. This disparity results in

3

countries

criminalize discrimination on the basis of disability

- Algeria
- Djibouti
- State of Palestine

4

countries

where prohibitions against discrimination are found in labour or civil service legislation

- Bahrain
- Jordan
- Saudi Arabia
- United Arab Emirates



fragmented protection that addresses specific manifestations of discrimination without tackling its structural foundations.

National policies and strategies

Reports indicate that approximately **18 Arab countries** have explicitly included women with disabilities in national strategies relating to

women, the family, human rights or poverty reduction. However, such inclusion has often taken a descriptive form, or has positioned

women with disabilities as a subcategory within “groups in situations of vulnerability”, without setting any clear operational targets, measurable indicators or timelines for this inclusion.

Limited financial commitment constitutes a principal weaknesses in supporting women with disabilities, as reports indicate that only **two countries** have explicitly announced such a commitment. Egypt allocated approximately 2.3 billion Egyptian pounds to support 435,000 women with disabilities under social protection programmes, while Tunisia allocated approximately 8.9 million Tunisian dinars in a single year to support persons with disabilities. Other Arab countries do not provide comparable data on allocated budgets or expenditure shares, reflecting the gap between policy adoption and effective implementation.

This reality indicates that the inclusion of women with disabilities in national policies remains largely partial, lacking follow-up and evaluation tools and failing to translate into long-term institutional commitments. It also reflects the limited integration of women with disabilities as political and human rights actors, rather than merely as beneficiaries of social protection programmes.

Many persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, receive assistance from care and support providers to preserve their dignity. This in turn requires that the dignity and rights of caregivers and support providers, the majority of whom are women, are safeguarded within relevant national strategies and legislation. A detailed review of national strategies concerning persons with disabilities in Arab countries reveals

18

countries

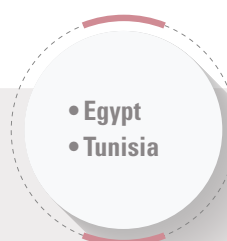
have explicitly included women with disabilities in national strategies relating to women, the family, human rights or poverty reduction



2

countries

have explicitly announced their financial commitment to support women with disabilities



shortcomings in the systematic, consistent and comprehensive consideration of the status and rights of caregivers and support providers.³ The need for assistance and support becomes even more pronounced in situations where persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities, assume caregiving roles for others, such as older persons, children or persons who are ill, thereby requiring supportive environments that take into account the specific nature of their circumstances.

Ensuring access to social and economic rights

In the field of education, **11 Arab countries** reported having adopted policies or programmes to promote inclusive education or to improve accessibility within educational institutions. These are Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait,

Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. However, reports indicate that segregated special education remains the prevailing model in most countries, limiting opportunities for full inclusion

in mainstream education and reflecting the continued treatment of disability as a specialized issue rather than as a structural concern within education systems.

Morocco is one of the few countries to have provided detailed data and statistics. More than 44,000 children benefited from hearing aids and assistive devices, and reductions of up to 50 per cent in university accommodation fees were granted to female students, including those with disabilities. However, the absence of comparable data from other countries makes it difficult to assess the actual impact of inclusive education policies at the regional level.

In the field of employment, **at least one country**, namely Oman, has imposed direct **legal obligations** on employers to recruit persons with disabilities. **At least one country**, namely Saudi Arabia, has regulated the **private sector work environment** and prohibited discrimination against this group. Reports indicate that approximately **12 Arab countries** have implemented programmes to support women with disabilities in entrepreneurship or to facilitate their access to finance, namely Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. However, the information available on the scale of uptake of these programmes, their sustainability and their impact on economic independence remains limited. Moreover, the reality of the economic participation of women with disabilities necessitates the adoption of different approaches.

In the area of social protection, at least **six countries provide** monthly cash benefits to persons with disabilities, namely Algeria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Kuwait is one of few countries to have clearly defined the amount of support, providing 300 Kuwaiti dinars per month to women who care for persons with severe disabilities. At least four countries, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Oman and the State of Palestine, provide benefits or free health coverage to persons with disabilities.

11

countries

reported having adopted policies or programmes to promote inclusive education



Oman

has imposed legal obligations to recruit persons with disabilities



Saudi Arabia

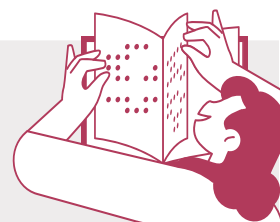
has regulated the private sector work environment and prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities



12

countries

have implemented programmes to support women with disabilities in entrepreneurship



6

countries

provide monthly cash benefits to persons with disabilities

- Algeria
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Morocco
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates

This pattern reflects the continued reliance on subsidies as the primary tool for intervention, without linking them to comprehensive economic empowerment policies.

In the health sector, **seven Arab countries** have adopted strategies or measures to improve women with disabilities' access to healthcare services, namely Djibouti, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic. However, the explicit inclusion of sexual and reproductive health services within these services, without discrimination against women with disabilities, remains limited and confined to only three countries: Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia. Most reports do not contain sufficient information on the adaptation of health information or medical facilities to ensure effective access for persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, particularly regarding communication, the right to informed consent and bodily autonomy.

3

countries

explicitly include sexual and reproductive health services within healthcare services provided to women with disabilities

- Jordan
- State of Palestine
- Tunisia



Kuwait

provides monthly financial support of 300 Kuwaiti dinars to women who care for persons with severe disabilities



4

countries

provide benefits or free health coverage to persons with disabilities

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Oman
- State of Palestine



7

countries

have adopted strategies or measures to improve women with disabilities' access to healthcare services

- Djibouti
- Jordan
- Morocco
- Oman
- State of Palestine
- Saudi Arabia
- Syrian Arab Republic



Protection from gender-based violence

Reviews indicate that only **two countries**, Iraq and Somalia, have explicitly included women with disabilities in strategies to combat violence, and that **three** have included them in various national legislative

2

countries

have explicitly included women with disabilities in strategies to combat violence

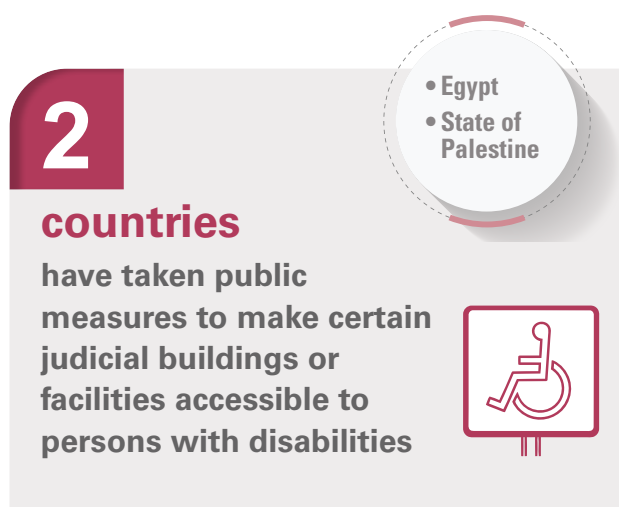
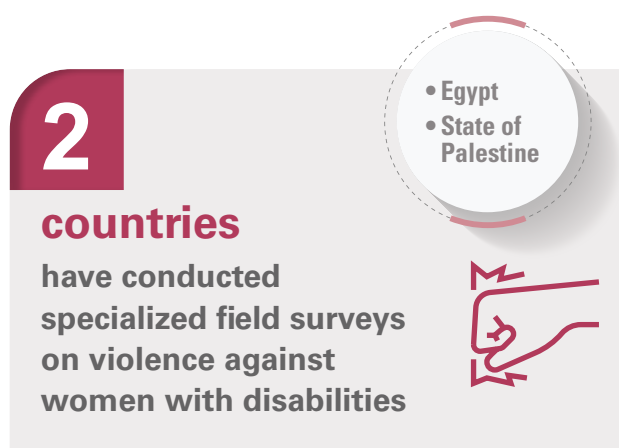
- Iraq
- Somalia



frameworks aimed at protection from certain forms of violence.⁴ Only two countries, namely Egypt and the State of Palestine, have conducted specialized field surveys on violence against women with disabilities, while two (Egypt and Tunisia), have prepared analytical studies in this area, reflecting the limited availability of systematic knowledge on the nature of violence experienced by this group.

With regard to services, only three countries, namely Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia, reported having established disability-sensitive shelters or referral mechanisms. Reports repeatedly indicate that the majority of existing centres and services are inaccessible, and that violence perpetrated within care relationships or institutional settings remains insufficiently recognized in public policies. Access to justice in cases of violence also remains limited, both in terms of reasonable accommodation and the provision of legal and psychosocial support.

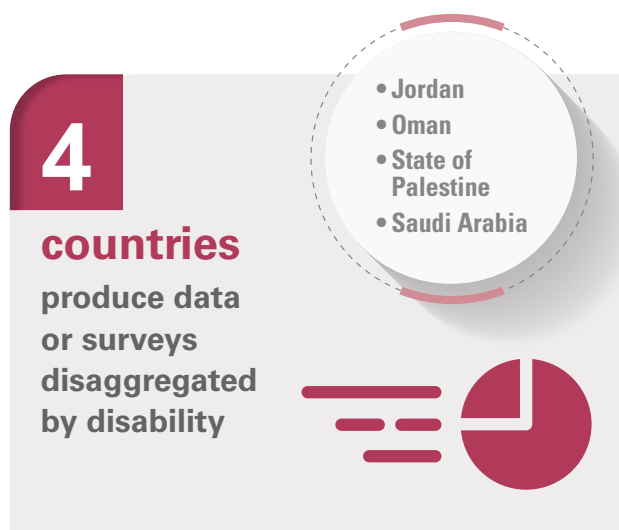
In the area of justice, **only two countries**, namely Egypt and the State of Palestine, have taken public measures to make certain judicial buildings or facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. Procedural reforms, such as facilitating the filing of



complaints, ensuring legal capacity and training justice sector personnel, remain absent or limited in most contexts. This shortcoming contributes to perpetuating the gap in access to justice, particularly in cases of discrimination or violence.

Data and monitoring

Four Arab countries, namely Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the State of Palestine, reported producing data or surveys disaggregated by disability. However, such data are not collected or used systematically and do not sufficiently capture the status of women with disabilities in contexts of conflict, economic crises or climate change. The absence of cross-classified data also limits the ability to monitor multiple forms of discrimination or assess the impact of policies and interventions over time.



Analytical summary

National reviews show that progress in the Arab region towards advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities, whether as providers or recipients of care and support, remains partial and uneven. The focus on the rights and dignity of caregivers and support providers for persons with disabilities, both women and men, remains insufficiently reflected in national strategies. Issues relating to persons with disabilities are no longer viewed solely as falling within the category of vulnerable groups, but are increasingly integrated into public policy, education, health, employment and economic participation, reflecting a gradual shift towards a more comprehensive approach. However, explicit constitutional and legal protection against discrimination remains the exception. Legislation concerning persons with disabilities largely focuses on care rather than equality, and national policies often lack adequate financing and measurable indicators. Ensuring access to social and economic rights, protection from violence and the production of data are areas characterized by structural gaps. Challenges remain in achieving inclusive access to education for women and girls with disabilities, their full integration into the labour market, and the narrowing of the digital divide between them and other groups. This reality reflects the persistent gap between the international commitments set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years after its adoption and the effective implementation of the principle of “leaving no one behind”.



Endnotes

1. United Nations General Assembly, Thirty years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: its potential for women and girls with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Heba Hagrass, April 2025.
2. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) is a global framework and action plan for women's empowerment and gender equality. Reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are conducted every five years by the Commission on the Status of Women to assess progress achieved and remaining challenges. These reviews are based on national reports prepared by member States, and regional reports prepared by United Nations regional commissions, all of which are consolidated into a global report. Each review cycle concludes with a final document reaffirming States' commitment to fulfilling their obligations regarding women's rights and setting priorities for action for the following five years.
3. ESCWA, Caregivers in the policy framework for older persons and persons with disabilities: A call for recognition and action, 2025.
4. Saudi Arabia, Law on Protection from Abuse; the Syrian Arab Republic, Law on Preventing and Combating Human Smuggling; Morocco, Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons.



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