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ESCWA

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Disability-inclusive Development in the Arab Region: Institutional Capacities and Partnerships

Project objectives

1. To strengthen **national** disability coordination mechanisms for inclusive and rights-based development.
2. To encourage the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in **national** policymaking processes related to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. To strengthen **cross-boundary** and **interdisciplinary** networks for disability inclusion and CRPD implementation.
4. To develop a **regional pool of knowledge and expertise**, using South-South and triangular cooperation to facilitate the exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

Focus will be placed on the participation of **women and girls** with disabilities. **Gender** issues will be identified in the work of national disability councils, and training will be provided to address knowledge and capacity gaps and support the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

Partners

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), League of Arab States, regional civil society organizations and United Nations entities, particularly the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Estimated three-year budget:
\$972,510

Background

In the Arab region, persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized. They have lower educational attainment rates and their access to social insurance schemes is limited. Participation barriers are even higher for those who face multiple disadvantages and compound discrimination, such as gender-based and disability-based discrimination.

Inequality is exacerbated in situations of armed conflict or natural disasters. In humanitarian crises, persons with disabilities have more limited access to assistance, services and livelihoods than persons without disabilities. They often face heightened protection concerns due to the breakdown of community structures and social cohesion.



Five-year old Zacharia expresses himself through sign language about running away from violence in Gaza. UNICEF/d'Aki (2014)

Institutional progress and implementation challenges

At its Summit held in Tunis on 22 and 23 May 2004, the League of Arab States adopted the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities, reaching a landmark agreement that established a series of principles and objectives to guide national efforts on disability. In December 2006, the international community adopted the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** and, to date, 21 Arab States have signed and/or ratified it. Together, these two frameworks have ignited a new level of impetus and commitment in the Arab region towards protecting the rights and promoting the participation of persons with disabilities.

A study conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in cooperation with the League of Arab States revealed that substantial progress has been made, especially in the development of legal and policy frameworks related to disability. However, it also indicated that institutional commitments and progress have not sufficiently translated into significant improvements on the ground. Below are some of the factors that contribute to this disconnect between policy and practice:

- **Institutional knowledge and capacity gaps** tend to limit governments' ability to implement the various legal and policy frameworks in place;
- **Participation of persons with disabilities** and the relevant organizations in policy processes is highly limited, and is often conducted in a non-inclusive or ad hoc manner;
- **Lack of data on disability**, coupled with limited monitoring capacities and tools, represent another significant obstacle, which hampers access to the targeted population.

Expected accomplishments

1. Strengthened capacity of national disability coordination mechanisms to formulate and put into effect policies in priority areas for the achievement of disability-inclusive development objectives and implementation of the CRPD and the SDGs.
2. Enhanced capacities and new modalities for the participation of persons with disabilities and DPOs in priority setting and policymaking for the achievement of disability-inclusive development objectives and implementation of the CRPD.
3. Strengthened monitoring capabilities among national disability coordination mechanisms and human rights institutions for an effective and consistent monitoring of the implementation of disability-inclusive development objectives and of CRPD.

The mandate of ESCWA

ESCWA has a longstanding engagement in disability issues. It played a critical role in the adoption of the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities in 2004 and has since then acted as a regional platform for promoting cooperation among member States and other stakeholders in the disability field. Currently, ESCWA is the main United Nations entity working on a regional level to promote disability-inclusive development and the implementation of the CRPD in Arab countries. Through its research and advocacy efforts, ESCWA has created a regional network of disability experts and practitioners, which includes representatives of governments, the League of Arab States, civil society and academia. This network will prove to be an important partner in the implementation of this project. Given its strong engagement in the Inter-Agency Support Group for the CRPD (IASG-CRPD), which it chaired in 2015, ESCWA will also leverage its strong links with other United Nations entities in order to bring in further expertise.

Geographic focus

Six ESCWA member States have been selected as target countries for this project: **Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia**. However, the project outputs and activities will be designed and disseminated to maximize the benefits for all 22 Arab countries.

Project activities

1. Strengthening capacities of national disability councils

While the roles and mandates of national disability councils vary across the region, they share some common characteristics which require capacity strengthening. In particular, implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Arab countries will require tailored tools and approaches, including in the area of disability. This project will help to assess and address institutional capacity needs, and provide tools for mainstreaming disability in development planning and in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the CRPD.

Activities will include:

- Capacity assessments at the national level, through research and consultative missions;
- Triangular cooperation to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices and lessons learned, including workshops and study tours;
- Tailored trainings to address capacity gaps and to build skills and knowledge on mainstreaming disability;
- Strengthening of a regional network of practitioners and experts.

2. Broadening partnerships with persons with disabilities and relevant organizations

Currently, persons with disabilities have few opportunities to engage in policy processes that affect their lives. Participation is central for the preservation of human rights and effective policy processes. This project will thus assist countries in establishing mechanisms for productive and inclusive dialogue with persons with disabilities and with disabled persons' organizations (DPOs), including those supporting women. Capacity-building services will be provided to DPOs, to broaden their participation in policy dialogues. The formation of specialized committees and the organization of regular consultation meetings will also facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and good practices between Arab and other countries.

Activities will include:

- Training for DPOs in rights-based advocacy and policymaking that includes disability issues;
- Research aimed at assessing existing capacities and mechanisms for the participation of persons with disabilities in the Arab region, and at identifying policy options and good practices at the global level;
- Forums bringing together stakeholders (such as governments, civil society, DPOs and international organizations) to identify national priorities and to establish or strengthen participation mechanisms for disability policymaking.

3. Strengthening data collection and monitoring tools

Strengthening data collection and monitoring tools represents an important step towards ensuring accountability, evidence-based policymaking and the implementation of international commitments, including the CRPD and SDGs. The project will help national disability coordination mechanisms strengthen their capacities in coordinating the relevant government ministries that support persons with disabilities. It will also promote participatory monitoring that involves persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

The project will also support government reporting on obligations regarding the CRPD and SDGs, while minimizing overlaps and administrative burdens. Activities will include regional trainings on effective monitoring for disability-inclusive and rights-based policies.