



# Working toward disability inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Arab Region

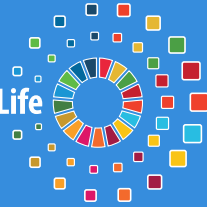


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# Working toward disability inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Arab Region

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# Key messages



Women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region serve as community leaders, mediators, service providers and grassroots advocates for peace. Yet national action plans on Women, Peace and Security often identify them as a homogenous “vulnerable” group in need of protection or “special services”, rather than calling for the active participation of women and girls with disabilities in peace and security mechanisms.

Women and girls with disabilities face significant barriers when engaging in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Arab region. These barriers include accessibility challenges; poor awareness of disability inclusion; a lack of data on the situation of women and girls with disabilities; limited capacity of organizations for persons with disabilities; and a scarcity of accountability mechanisms for disability inclusion.



The expertise of organizations of persons with disabilities, and especially organizations of women and girls with disabilities, is a resource that member States can use to engage more comprehensively, responsively and durably on issues associated with Women, Peace and Security. These organizations' expertise can also be useful in promoting inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding in the Arab region.

Disability inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda can be achieved by means of a twin-track approach, with efforts to mainstream disability throughout formal frameworks such as national action plans, as well as designing specific interventions for women and girls with disabilities, ensuring their full participation.



Disability inclusion in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a shared responsibility between international actors and organizations, national governments and local civil society.

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# Introduction



Many Arab States have strengthened their legal frameworks to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. Yet despite these efforts, persons with disabilities (box 1) continue to face exclusion from social, political, economic, educational, and cultural life.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true for women and girls with disabilities, who comprise 19.2 per cent of the global female population<sup>2</sup> and are at greater risk of isolation, exploitation and violence.<sup>3</sup>

Women and girls with disabilities often face multifaceted intersectional discrimination; however, they are not inherently “vulnerable”. Rather, it is the interplay of factors such as limited legislation and governance mechanisms, discriminatory attitudes, negative stereotypes, harmful social norms and practices, and a denial of opportunities that increase the vulnerability and risks of harm of women and girls with disabilities and impede the full realization of their human rights.

This is especially true during conflict or disaster, when women and girls with disabilities are significantly affected, or in post-conflict or transitional contexts, where their participation in conflict resolution processes, service delivery and aid, justice mechanisms and development processes is often overlooked or marginalized.<sup>4</sup>

The adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), and the ensuing resolutions that constitute the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, serve as a formal recognition of women and girls’ differential experiences during and after conflict. The WPS agenda comprises four pillars: Prevention, Protection, Participation, and Relief, Recovery and Redress. It is broadly aimed at ensuring more gender-equitable opportunities for peacemaking and peacebuilding amid conflict and transition. One of the key tools for translating and localizing the WPS agenda within a national context is the development of a national action plan (NAP).

This technical paper examines how women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region experience conflict, and reflects on what can be done to engage women and girls with disabilities in peace and security concerns, through NAPs on WPS and through other mechanisms. To ensure that the viewpoints of women with disabilities and the organizations that support them are represented, the paper incorporates the results of interviews held with seven regional and international disability experts and activists,<sup>5</sup> as well as responses to an online survey completed by 39 organizations for persons with disabilities (OPDs) in the Arab region.<sup>6</sup> These data were augmented with a review of literature on women with disabilities and the WPS agenda, as well as an analysis of the 10 available NAPs on WPS in the region.

## Box 1. Who is a person with a disability?

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Source: Article 1, CRPD.



## The normative frameworks on disability inclusion and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

“

*Society's limited view of people with disabilities strips them of self-confidence and their confidence in their ability to make the right decisions, and they are not recognized as individuals with the same capabilities and rights as others.*

”



### ● Association of Friends of the Palestinian Disabled, State of Palestine

Various normative frameworks require persons with disabilities to be engaged in peace and security concerns. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly article 6 on women with disabilities and article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, serves as a foundational text. The CRPD also complements other relevant international frameworks that promote gender equality and stress the active participation of women and girls in public life. These normative frameworks call for women and girls with disabilities to be engaged more closely in peace and in conflict contexts (for a full list, box 2). However, these frameworks are not explicitly referred to in the WPS agenda.

When women and girls with disabilities are recognized in the WPS agenda, it is often through the lens of victimization and vulnerability, focusing on their need for protection without calling for their active engagement

or leadership. This is underlined by the fact that the only explicit references to disability in the agenda are found in UNSCR 1960 and UNSCR 2106, both of which state that the “specific needs” of persons with disabilities must be taken into account when providing services for survivors of sexual violence, without further mention of their agency or engagement (box 3).

Such limited recognition is reflected in the international community's response to the WPS agenda globally and at the national level. Globally, there have been limited briefings by experts and activists with disabilities in front of the UN Security Council and other venues where global peace and security concerns are discussed and debated.<sup>7</sup> At national level, when States seek to implement the WPS agenda, women and girls with disabilities are rarely if at all consulted on the development of NAPs on the WPS agenda.



### Box 2. Normative frameworks mandating disability inclusion in the context of Women, Peace and Security

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
  - General Recommendation no. 18 recognizes the “double discrimination” women with disabilities face as a result of their social conditions, and it names them as a vulnerable group of special concern
  - General Recommendation no. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), especially article 23 on Children with Disabilities
- Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
- Women, Peace and Security agenda (2000), especially UNSCR 1960 and UNSCR 2106
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (2005)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), especially article 6 on Women with Disabilities
  - General Comment no. 3 on article 6: Women and Girls with Disabilities
- Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, including SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (2015)
- UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)
- Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2016)
- UNSCR 2427 on Children and Armed Conflict (2018)
- UNSCR 2475 on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict (2019)
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

### Box 3. Disability in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

“Reaffirming the importance for States, with the support of the international community, to increase access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and socio-economic reintegration services for victims of sexual violence, in particular in rural areas, and taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities...” UNSCR 1960 (2010).

“Recognizing the importance of providing timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence, urges United Nations entities and donors to provide non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence, **taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities...**” UNSCR 2106 (2013).

UNSCR 2475 (2019), which calls upon parties to armed conflict to protect persons with disabilities and to prevent abuses against civilians, as well as provide assistance to civilians with disabilities and ensure that they are represented in humanitarian action, poses an opportunity to advance the inclusivity of the WPS agenda and strengthen its response to the needs of women and girls with disabilities. In particular, the resolution calls upon Member States to “enable the meaningful participation and representation of persons with disabilities, including their representative organizations, in humanitarian action, conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding, and to consult with those with expertise working on disability mainstreaming”.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to UNSCR 2475, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities has discussed the protection and engagement of persons with disabilities in conflict through a series of reports to the General Assembly. These reports: (1) call for an intersectional approach to be applied to prevent conflict, and inform States and militaries about their responsibilities towards persons with disabilities during hostilities; (2) encourage States to engage with OPDs and ensure that applicable international humanitarian law recognizes the visibility of persons with disabilities and explicitly outlines States and conflict parties’ obligation to protect; and (3) discuss how post-conflict peacebuilding activities should incorporate the views of persons with disabilities and OPDs.<sup>9</sup>



## 2 Disability and conflict in the Arab region

“

*If women are always the victims in wars, what do you have when this woman also has a disability, and is limited in her movement and work? So, we are facing a complex situation of vulnerability: being a woman and being a person with a disability.*

”



### ● Al-Rumaisa Yacoub, disability rights activist, Yemen

Conflict may result in long and short-term disabilities, as well as the destruction of health facilities. Persons with pre-existing disabilities are further challenged during conflict: they may experience continued or increased harm, and a lack of necessary services. Conflict has also contributed to the prevalence of persons with disabilities in the Arab region (box 4). For example, Iraq is regularly acknowledged to have one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities in the world as a result of decades of conflict.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in Syria, 28 per cent of the population has a disability as a result of the civil war.<sup>11</sup> In Gaza, between 7 October and 7 December 2023, more than 5,000 people acquired a disability due to the war being carried out by Israel on the enclave,<sup>12</sup> with numbers expected to rise as the war continues. In a statement to the United Nations Security Council on the war in Yemen in 2020, disability rights activist Rajaa

Abdullah Almasabi highlighted that the “majority of people who have acquired disability during the war did so because of injuries from airstrikes, landmines and other explosive remnants of the war. But, in addition, the denial of humanitarian access has also created such chronic health conditions as malnutrition [...] Many people who had disabilities before the war have also acquired new, secondary conditions during attacks and displacement.”<sup>13</sup>

In such contexts, women and girls with disabilities face compounded discrimination due to existing social and cultural biases and other intersectional concerns. For example, deaf and hard-of-hearing women and girls may not be able to hear threats or alerts outside their home or shelter, forcing them to rely on family members for warnings and guidance. When able to seek safety, women and girls with

physical disabilities or who are blind or visually impaired may be less able to flee; escaping violence may mean leaving disability-related aids behind or becoming separated from caregivers. Women and girls with disabilities who rely on caregivers may experience compromised dignity and hygiene while fleeing or trying to access sanitation facilities. For example, in Yemen, internally displaced women and girls with disabilities living in camps struggle to gain access to water, sanitation, health and education because camps are not designed to accommodate them.<sup>14</sup> In such situations, women and girls with disabilities are at even greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence, harassment, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse, often because perpetrators believe it will be harder for survivors to fight back, report abuse or be believed.

Access to decent work and education opportunities and quality health care is commonly limited, among other challenges and protection risks, for women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region. For example, in the context of conflict and displacement, traditional gender norms and practices are often further

entrenched. In the case of Syrian refugees in Zarqa, Jordan, research found that families did not allow women with disabilities to work as a result of fears of abuse and exploitation.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, refugee girls with disabilities in Turkey have been denied the opportunity to access services and participate in activities because they lacked a male guardian's permission.<sup>16</sup> Women with disabilities who do seek out livelihood opportunities often struggle with stigma, such as in the Syrian Arab Republic, where they are less likely to be employed than men with disabilities (7 per cent and 62 per cent respectively).<sup>17</sup>

In the aftermath of conflict or transition, women and girls with disabilities have limited access to and participation in relief and recovery services, as well as justice and protection mechanisms, as a result of physical and social constraints. Furthermore, support services necessary for women and girls with disabilities, if they were previously available, may be disrupted or become inaccessible. This may include a lack of accessible and reliable information or of needs and services such as food and water, health care, and safe shelter.

#### Box 4. Disability and conflict in the Arab region

“This [Arab] region has increasing disability rates among the population because of exposure to repeated armed conflicts in addition to the current bombardment of the Gaza Strip, and all relief teams and international bodies must take this into account.”

Source: Heba Hagrass, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (OHCHR, 2023).



# 3 National action plans on Women, Peace and Security in the Arab region: where is disability?

“  
*The reality in Arab countries is that women with disabilities face multiple layers of discrimination and marginalization. In Lebanon and in other Arab countries, there is no the rights of persons with disabilities are poorly served by national plans and by institutions’ policies. The biggest gap and challenge are how to incorporate these rights into general frameworks.*  
 ”



## ● Sylvana Lakkis, President, Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities

Adopting NAPs for the implementation of the WPS agenda has gained momentum in the Arab region in the past decade, with more countries engaging in the process of implementing the agenda at national level. Women and girls with disabilities have meaningful knowledge, expertise and experience to contribute to the realization of the WPS agenda in their respective communities, countries and regions. However, an analysis of the 10 available NAPs on WPS and one regional action plan in the Arab region shows that, although some member States’ NAPs may make reference to national policies and legislation, or international conventions and treaties that include direct references to women and girls with disabilities and their rights, consultative processes for NAP development rarely include persons with disabilities,

and very few endorsed plans take account of issues related to disability.

As the figure shows, disability is referred to in several of the current NAPs in the region, but it is often under the Protection pillar, women and girls with disabilities often being labelled as a homogenous “vulnerable” group in need of protection from sexual and gender-based violence or in need of “special services”, which echoes the language of the WPS agenda, specifically UNSCRs 1960 and 2106. Among the other pillars of the agenda, such as Prevention, Participation and the Provision of Relief, Recovery and Redress, there is little mention of women and girls with disabilities except as beneficiaries. This is problematic given that, to ensure a disability-inclusive WPS agenda, women and girls with disabilities

must be actively included in all service delivery, policy development, relief and recovery, and peacemaking and peacebuilding interventions, as well as data collection.

Additionally, very few NAPs were drafted in consultation with women with disabilities or OPDs. Notably, some NAPs do not even mention women or girls with disabilities.



#### Djibouti (2017–2020)

There is no mention of women with disabilities.



#### Iraq (2021–2024)

Disability is only mentioned as a consequence of conflict.



#### Jordan (2022–2025)

The national participatory consultation involved women with disabilities, including in participation measures and decision-making mechanisms.

The NAP calls for the needs of women with disabilities to be included in decision-making frameworks for prevention and response to crises, climate change and emergencies.



#### Lebanon (2019–2022)

The NAP calls for a study on the protection needs of vulnerable women and girls, including women with disabilities, to identify existing and additional required protection services.



#### State of Palestine (2020–2024)

The NAP acknowledges that women with disabilities are not a homogenous group.

There is a focus on providing services (social, legal, psychosocial and health protection services) to “vulnerable” women, including women with disabilities.

The NAP calls for support and the funding of innovative relief and recovery initiatives for women with disabilities.



#### Somalia (2021–2025)

Disability organizations were consulted in preparation for the NAP.

The NAP promotes the economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods of women with disabilities.

The NAP calls to strengthen the protection of women with disabilities concerning sexual and gender-based violence and call for legal and constitutional reforms to prevent all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

The NAP promotes access to gender responsive services for women with disabilities.

The NAP calls for capacity development to build the resilience of women with disabilities.

The NAP advocates for and promotes the full participation of women with disabilities, among others, in all sectors of the NAP’s activities.



#### Sudan (2020–2022)

Women with disabilities are mentioned once, in need of protection from sexual and gender-based violence.



### Tunisia (2018–2022)

Under the Protection pillar, girls with disabilities in school have access to a special social officer who helps them with their “special needs” pursuant to Decree No. 1477–2006.



### United Arab Emirates (2021–2024)

There is no mention of women with disabilities.



### Yemen (2020–2022)

The “Disabled Fund” participated in preparatory workshops for the NAP, but there is no mention of women with disabilities in the NAP.



### League of Arab States (2015–2030)

Disability is only mentioned in connection with the planning and allocation of resources under Relief and Recovery.

NAPs are not the only way in which women and girls with disabilities and the organizations that support them can be engaged with the WPS agenda. Excluding them from formal processes and mechanisms is a

missed opportunity, both for disability inclusion and for ensuring a holistic and comprehensive realization of the WPS agenda and the human rights of all women and girls.



# 4

## Women and girls with disabilities, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Arab region: missed opportunities

“

*There are many actions that women with disabilities can take to enrich opportunities for peace and security. It depends on the extent to which there is political will to create spaces that have the elements of accessibility, openness to different voices, and respect for individual differences.*

”



### ● Shatha Abu Srour, Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, State of Palestine

Despite the barriers that exist, women and girls with disabilities across the region work as leaders, mediators, service providers and grassroots advocates for peace. Their absence from humanitarian response and relief and recovery efforts results in their needs and voices being overlooked during and after emergencies, further compounding harm. Due to this marginalization and isolation from formal processes, OPDs and women with disabilities are often left to initiate their own interventions, regardless of a country's engagement with the WPS agenda.

In April and May 2023, with the aim of shedding more light on the experience and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities within national efforts to inclusive processes, ESCWA reached out to women with disabilities and OPDs in the Arab region to better

understand their engagement in formal processes related to peacebuilding and the challenges they have faced in connection with policy formulation or the initiatives they were involved in that relate to the WPS agenda and its pillars. Broadly, and regardless of whether or not their country had a NAP on WPS, 82 per cent of respondents reported that neither their governments nor other relevant stakeholders had consulted with them or their organizations on any of the pillars related to the WPS agenda. Of those respondents who lived in countries where a NAP had been endorsed, 86 per cent of respondents (or their organizations) had not been consulted during its drafting or involved in its implementation. Notably, the vast majority of respondents (85 per cent) held a strong belief that women with disabilities faced different barriers from women without disabilities



when it comes to engagement with the WPS agenda. Some of the issues discussed with experts and OPDs from the region include:

- **Limited accessibility for women and girls with disabilities:** A significant concern among activists and OPDs is that women and girls with disabilities continue to face accessibility challenges. Accessibility can mean different things. For example, it can reflect access to opportunities, whereby institutionalized discrimination and the resultant barriers result in women and girls with disabilities being denied access to education and training, which in turn affects their knowledge of their rights as well as opportunities for their social, economic, and political participation, including influencing policy and actively participating in frameworks that have a bearing on their daily lives, such as the WPS agenda. It can also mean physical and communication accessibility, such as when women with disabilities are unable to travel or gain access to buildings or meeting venues, or when they are unable to actively contribute to discussions or engage with materials on the WPS agenda because of a lack of accessible formats.
- **Limited knowledge of initiatives adopted to ensure disability inclusion:** How disability is understood and how disability inclusion is dealt with in legislation vary across the Arab region. In many instances, State policy is not based on the human rights model of disability; instead, policies are highly reliant on the charity or medical models of disability. As a result, there are few frameworks and tools available at national level to ensure the inclusion of women with disabilities in policy creation and implementation of the WPS agenda. Such tools may include guides, training courses, and awareness and educational materials.
- **Limited resources for disability inclusion:** Many OPDs and women and girls with disabilities are unable to fully engage with the WPS agenda because it remains generally underfunded across the region. This has resulted in limited access to material, financial and human resources to ensure disability inclusion within WPS processes.
- **Limited data on the situation of women and girls with disabilities:** The lack of comprehensive and intersectional data on the status and situation of women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region, as well as the organizations that serve them, makes it difficult to assess their needs during and after conflict, which in turn impedes efforts to design responsive and inclusive policies and interventions in line with the WPS agenda and other normative frameworks.
- **Limited capacity of organizations for persons with disabilities:** Many OPDs do not have the knowledge, capacity or skills necessary to effectively engage with the WPS agenda at community, national and international levels, while the capacity they do have is not fully used. Consequently, they are chronically locked out of processes. This in turn creates a vicious cycle of marginalization and disempowerment.
- **Limited accountability mechanisms for disability inclusion:** There is little impetus for member States to ensure that their NAPs on WPS are disability-inclusive because the overall WPS agenda is not disability-inclusive. With no global accountability mechanism to ensure disability inclusion, there is rarely a mandate provided by the UN, donors, or other international organizations to ensure that women and girls with disabilities or OPDs can participate actively in the development and realization of NAPs on WPS, or in other relevant activities.

The issues and concerns discussed above result in national stakeholders missing the opportunity to benefit from the active participation of women and girls with disabilities. Including the expertise, knowledge and experiences of OPDs and women and girls with disabilities in decision-making processes will result in more comprehensive, more responsive and more durable NAPs on WPS which can, in turn, contribute to greater opportunities for peacemaking, peacebuilding and recovery in the Arab region.

The currently limited status of disability inclusion in NAPs on WPS in the Arab region confirms that women and girls with disabilities continue to face a variety of barriers to participation and the full realization of their

human rights. Despite these challenges, there is ample evidence that women and girls with disabilities in the region and the organizations that support them have independently engaged with the WPS agenda through

channels including peacebuilding mediation and initiatives, coalition building, conflict transformation, response and recovery, and essential service delivery, with positive results (boxes 5, 6, 7).

#### **Box 5. Women's mediation in Libya: the Libyan Women's Network for Peacebuilding**



Libya has been experiencing significant conflict, transition and division since 2011. In this context, many civilian-led initiatives have been founded with the aim of rebuilding the country's divided society. The inclusion of women with disabilities is still far from ideal in these peacebuilding spaces, but there are some positive examples. One example is the Libyan Women's Network for Peacebuilding. A founder of the Network is a Libyan activist with a disability, Laila Faitouri, who has mobilized women from different backgrounds in Libya to support local mediation and peacebuilding efforts through the Network. Another important initiative is the Libyan Network of Local Mediators, 2 of whose 32 members are persons with disabilities.

#### **Box 6. Responding to the Beirut port explosion: the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities**



In the aftermath of the devastating Beirut Port explosion on 4 August 2020, the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD), led by Sylvana Lakkis, provided aid to individuals with disabilities who had been affected by the explosion and raised public awareness of their needs. This included challenging Law 196/2020, which dealt with financial compensation for people affected by the explosion. The law provided for monthly compensation payments for the relatives of people who had been killed. But it did not provide for any cash compensation for people who acquired disabilities from the explosion. The LUPD argued that people with disabilities stemming from the explosion should receive a similar monthly income to relatives of the deceased.

The LUPD also supported around 500 injured people with cash, rehabilitation sessions, hygiene products, prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs and hearing aids. It also created income-generating jobs for women with disabilities through its "Access Kitchen", a community kitchen that prepared hot meals to areas affected by the explosion.

The LUPD is a member of Lebanon's Feminist Civil Society Platform and a signatory to the Platform's Charter of Demands, which called for a gendered disaster response plan to the explosion. The Charter was disability-inclusive, calling for equitable aid distribution and consultation processes and a focus on the provision of food security, shelter, livelihoods, legal aid and sexual and gender-based violence services.

#### **Box 7. Women's grassroots peacebuilding in Yemen: the Women with Disabilities Group for Peace**



In Yemen, over 21 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection. Amid conflict and displacement, as well as food insecurity and economic collapse, Yemenis struggle to cover their basic needs. Despite gaps in the inclusion of women in humanitarian responses and peacebuilding efforts, there is one notable example of a network of Yemeni women with disabilities who are active in their communities. After a

series of workshops held in Jordan in October 2022, the Women with Disabilities Group for Peace was formed for the purpose of the peacebuilding efforts. It was the first initiative that included women with disabilities in the peacebuilding process.

The group carried out advocacy efforts with the Yemeni government and with international and United Nations envoys to voice the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities, achieving important milestones to ensure that the humanitarian response in Yemen was disability-inclusive. Through local advocacy efforts with the Yemeni government, they were able to reactivate one of the clauses of the country's labour law to ensure an employment quota of 30 per cent for women with disabilities in the public sector. The Women with Disabilities Group for Peace also has a complaints and monitoring mechanism which allows it to receive reports of human rights violations against persons with disabilities, which it then works to resolve with the relevant authorities.



# 5 Disability-inclusive action on Women, Peace and Security in the Arab region

“

*[D]isability is not an obstacle to participation in peace and security processes. Peace and security, and the effective inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, represent an opportunity to promote social and economic peace.*

”



## ● Organization for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Libya

The Arab region has the opportunity to take the lead in disability-inclusive action on the WPS agenda. Along with ensuring the full participation of women and girls, disability inclusion can be achieved through a twin-track approach with efforts to systematically incorporate disability throughout formal frameworks such as NAPs and national legislation and policies, as well as designing specific interventions for women and girls with disabilities. These approaches require governments, essential service providers, international actors, academia and local civil society to: (a) recognize and value the knowledge and contributions of women and girls with disabilities to the WPS agenda; and (b) ensure continued engagement and leadership by women and girls with disabilities in efforts to rebuild communities and countries.

Ultimately, various instruments of international law (including article 3 of the CRPD and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)) oblige States to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are able to fully participate in society and have equal access to resources and opportunities. At global level, with the recent increased attention on persons with disabilities manifested in the creation and adoption of new international standards, there are ample opportunities to enhance the normative framework governing the WPS agenda and further develop links with UNSCR 2475, the CRPD and other relevant normative frameworks. At regional level, a revised regional framework on the WPS agenda that is disability-aware, participatory and inclusive will encourage all States to revise existing NAPs and cultivate good practices related

to disability inclusion, in partnership with women and girls with disabilities and OPDs.

As more States in the Arab region develop their NAPs on WPS, update their NAPs, or engage in WPS activities,

## A. Overall disability inclusion

Formally ratifying the CRPD and its Optional Protocol is a necessary step, but member States may also create and strengthen policy and legislative frameworks that ensure disability inclusion by documenting progress on the inclusion of women and girls through reports to international entities such as the CEDAW Committee, the periodic reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Voluntary National Review process for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and the national reports prepared for the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the implementation of the WPS agenda at national level. In line with these efforts, considering disability inclusion from the initial stages of any process can provide a basis for constructive inclusion, including participatory consultations and working committees. Additionally, systematically incorporating consideration of the needs and concerns of women and girls with disabilities into

member States may wish to consider the following recommendations on the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities.

legal reform and decision-making processes would enhance the inclusion process. In particular, member States can:

- Adopt and engage more closely with international normative frameworks that address the intersection of gender equality and disability inclusion.
- Ensure that NAPs on WPS are drafted in consultation with women and girls with disabilities and OPDs.
- Ensure that the policing and justice sectors, education and training institutions are aware of the needs of women and girls with disabilities, and that they respect those needs. To foster inclusive outcomes, ensure that NAPs and other national strategies make explicit reference to the particular needs of women and girls with disabilities and allocate sufficient resources for accommodating them.

## B. Disability-inclusive prevention

Developing frameworks and legislation that address discrimination on the basis of gender and disability, in compliance with international human rights standards, is a necessary step, in addition to improving intervention strategies in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, including by prosecuting and holding accountable those responsible for violations under international law. In particular, member States can:

- Ensure that legal frameworks, strategies and systems that work to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls use a disability lens.
- Ensure that intervention strategies and activities on sexual and gender-based violence take into account the priorities and needs of women and girls with disabilities.

## C. Disability-inclusive protection

Disability-inclusive protection involves the active participation of women and girls with disabilities, as well as OPDs, in all responses to sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency

and humanitarian contexts. This involves active engagement planning, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as a consideration of the protection risks, mitigation mechanisms,

and benefits of protection interventions. Through such engagement, member States can better understand how women and girls with disabilities have experienced past emergencies and identify the barriers faced and the coping mechanisms used. As a result, systems and services will be more responsive and accessible to women and girls with disabilities. In particular, member States can:

- Ensure that women and girls with disabilities are

directly involved in the development and maintenance of humanitarian response mechanisms.

- Ensure that OPDs are able to monitor, report on and advocate against all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
- Ensure that legal, justice and policing providers are aware of the diverse forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls with disabilities.

## D. Disability-inclusive participation

Participation can occur at national and regional levels, as well as within international post-conflict institutions and processes. It can also occur at all levels of decision-making in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, conflict management and resolution, and countering violent extremism. This should also include conducting awareness-raising with OPDs on the importance of engaging women and girls with disabilities in the WPS

agenda, as well as capacity-building opportunities for OPDs on the skills and knowledge needed to engage in the WPS agenda. In particular, member States can:

- Ensure the participation of women with disabilities at all levels of formal decision-making, conflict resolution processes and transitional justice mechanisms.

## E. Disability-inclusive relief, recovery and redress

Holding participatory consultations with women with disabilities to ensure that their perspectives on reconstruction processes are taken into account will increase coordination, implementation, reporting and accountability. Additionally, it is important to develop avenues for their increased education and vocational training, which may in turn have a positive impact on their livelihoods and economic opportunities and, ultimately, their participation. Upskilling will allow women and girls with disabilities to have full access

to and engagement with the WPS agenda and society at large. In particular, member States can:

- Ensure that women and girls with disabilities are directly engaged in government and donor discussions related to relief and reconstruction projects.
- Ensure that systemic discrimination against women and girls with disabilities is addressed through upskilling.

## F. Disability-inclusive data collection

Collecting high-quality data on women and girls with disabilities that is disaggregated by relevant variables is crucial, and monitoring and evaluation processes should use disability-inclusive indicators disaggregated by sex, age and disability. Reporting should be shared in accessible formats, and learning should be used to adjust policies and programmes to the benefit of women

and girls with disabilities. Data should be used to monitor the impacts of peace and security mechanisms and for developing appropriate participatory responses. In particular, member States can:

- Ensure the timely collection and dissemination of data on women and girls with disabilities.

## G. Disability-inclusive budgeting

Disability-inclusive budgeting is a key tool for providing support and funding for projects aimed at promoting the effective participation and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and OPDs in all WPS interventions, including equipping OPDs with the necessary financial, material and human resources. In specific, member States can:

- Ensure budgeting and targeted funding for disability inclusion in all aspects of WPS interventions and activities.



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# Endnotes

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- 1 For more information, E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/POLICY BRIEF.3.
- 2 UN Women, 2018.
- 3 Arab Organisation of Persons with Disabilities, 2020.
- 4 Cornelson, 2012, p. 108.
- 5 Interviewees were from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Libya, State of Palestine, South Sudan and Yemen.
- 6 Responses came from OPDs and individuals in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Palestine, Somalia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- 7 Ortoleva & Knight, 2012; Ruminowicz, 2023.
- 8 Resolution 2475 (2019).
- 9 A/76/146 (2021), A/77/203 (2022), and A/78/174 (2023).
- 10 United Nations Iraq, 2022.
- 11 HNAP Syria, 2021.
- 12 Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2023.
- 13 [S/PV.8753](#).
- 14 OHCHR, 2022.
- 15 AFPRD and IREX, 2016.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 HNAP Syria, 2021.



Although women and girls with disabilities often face multifaceted and intersectional discrimination, they are not inherently “vulnerable”. Instead, factors such as inadequate legislation, harmful social practices and the systematic denial of opportunities increase the risk of harm to women and girls with disabilities, and prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights. This is especially true during conflicts or disasters, the impact of which on women and girls with disabilities is particularly severe, and in the context of recovery work, where the potential of women and girls with disabilities to play a role in conflict resolution and development processes is often overlooked.

This paper examines how women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region experience conflict. It also considers what can be done to engage women and girls with disabilities in peace and security work, through National Action Plans to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda and through other mechanisms.

