



Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



# UfM I CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

26-27 JANUARY 2022

## Final Report



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## Final Report

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Social & Civil Affairs

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# Foreword

**The UfM I Conference on Disability and Social inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean region**, which takes place almost one year after the adoption of the EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, should serve to promote awareness on the needs of the persons with disabilities. It is also a tool to promote economic and legislative measures to foster an actual improvement in the quality of living of those affected by a disability. The aim of the conference is to discuss rights, challenges, and limitations of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is an opportunity to bring together national and regional policy makers, civil society actors, and experts to share adequate recommendations, policies, and practices for post-COVID agendas and recovery programmes in the region.

We believe that countries and civil society organisations should cooperate to open up routes to economic empowerment and financial inclusion so that people with disabilities can enjoy decent work and achieve financial independence. This will mean creating more and better jobs, providing social protection, ensuring the necessary skills training, and making workplaces accessible.

Indeed, if there is one thing that this crisis has taught us in the last two years, it's the crucial importance of "inclusion": inclusive societies are the way forward and we shall work

day-by-day to promote the involvement of marginalised groups in the public and economic spheres.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities accelerated regional recognition of disability as central to human development and social justice initiatives. Moreover, in line with the principles set out in EU Agenda for the Mediterranean adopted last year. The UfM is putting efforts in ensuring the full enjoyment of rights for persons with disabilities and the collection of relevant disaggregated data which are essential to promote better legislation.

However, there is still a long road ahead of us to achieve the goal of full inclusion for people with disabilities.

“

**Today is an important day for the countries of the Mediterranean region: we are sharing the goal to improve the living conditions of the persons with disabilities and to ensure that social inclusion and equality are the essential conditions for all citizens.**

**Patricia Sanz**, Second Vice President of Equality, Human Resources, Institutional Culture and Digital Inclusion, ONCE Social Group

That is why the UfM is fully committed to contribute to this challenge. Indeed, in the recently adopted UfM Youth Strategy 2030, the full empowerment of people with disabilities has been particularly stressed. And in close cooperation with ONCE, the UfM is



**H.E. Nasser Kamel**,  
Secretary General of the  
Union for the Mediterranean

“ **We are aware of the impact of disability; we know that in many countries, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean area, living with a disability implies that one is excluded from education, employment and social protection. We are all aware that we are facing a complex issue and that a lot has to be done to see things change.**

H.E. **Nasser Kamel**,  
Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean.



**Patricia Sanz**, Second  
Vice President of Equality,  
Human Resources,  
Institutional Culture and  
Digital Inclusion, ONCE  
Social Group

currently supporting a pilot project in Morocco to facilitate the economic inclusion of women with disabilities in the Tourism sector.

The regional cooperation that we are launching today is a crucial tool to promote regional policies and to share best practices. Equality can be reinforced only by ensuring that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is enacted. The Convention is a splendid document that shall guide our action.

Articles 5 and 9 of the Convention refer to the accessibility and to the fight against all forms of discrimination and we are glad to report and monitor all the steps undertaken by National Governments in this respect. Art. 6 of the Convention refers to the social inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and this is another crucial element to foster inclusive societies.

Art. 24 and 27 state that persons with disabilities have the right to study, receive an education and enter the labour market without discrimination.

We think that it is essential that Governments and citizens share the

objective to ensure accessibility: alliances and synergies go well beyond the domain of disability to embrace equality.

ONCE is fully committed to continue working on several regional projects in the Mediterranean region, putting persons with disabilities at the core of our interventions, to improve their living condition and the access to their human rights. We would like to stress three main topics of intervention:

- The importance to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the labour market: employment is not a goal but an instrument to ensure social inclusion.
- The importance that persons with disabilities have access to tourism destinations and enjoy their free time in full equality.
- The importance of the inclusion of women with disabilities. Their living conditions are worrying; they have limited access to employment and health services, and they are also subject to an increasing number of cases of violence.



## Opening remarks

**HELENA DALLI, Commissioner for Equality, European Commission**, in her pre-recorded message pointed out that persons with disabilities should be able to participate equally in all areas of life. This means living independently and in the community, learning and working in inclusive environments with accessible spaces and services. And still, despite the progress made, many obstacles remain. Discrimination is too often a reality. Removing those barriers is what the new European Commission strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities is about. Presented in March 2021 the strategy sets the scene for the EU disability policy and for tangible action in the 10 years to come. It is aligned with the United Nation's Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities and supports its implementation within the EU and beyond. Among its priorities are some of the key themes of today's conference, namely; accessibility as enabler of rights, autonomy and equality, and employment as the best way to ensure economic autonomy and social inclusion.

Commissioner Dalli illustrated the 2022 key activities planned, in particular the launching of a resource center and cooperation framework to increase coherence in accessibility policies and facilitate access to relevant knowledge.

She also underlined the need to pay particular attention to women and youth with disabilities, to better support civil society organizations in order to ensure that representatives of persons with disabilities can participate in all relevant processes.

She recalled that the strategy foresees also relevant engagements with the EU partner countries notably, with the EU's broader development cooperation agenda and our neighborhood policies. The EU supports concrete programs and projects for persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean region. From professional training in Algeria to strengthening the national the national council of persons with disabilities in Egypt, the setting up of a strategy for inclusive education in Jordan, to improving access to healthcare in Lebanon and the promotion of democratic participation and social protection in Morocco.

**IOANNIS VARDAKASTANIS, President, Euromed Follow-up Committee of the European Economic Disability Alliance, President of the European Disability Forum**, reminded that it is crucial to bring together persons with disabilities and their organisations and all relevant stakeholders from both shores of the Mediterranean region since persons with disabilities represent 15% of the pop-



**Helena Dalli,**  
Commissioner for Equality,  
European Commission



**Ioannis Vardakastanis,**  
President, Euromed  
Follow-up Committee of  
the European Economic  
Disability Alliance,  
President of the European  
Disability Forum



**Nawaf Kabbara,** President,  
Arab Organisation of  
Persons with Disabilities  
(AOPD)

ulation of all countries of the Mediterranean region and 15% constitutes the largest minority of any society. He highlighted that the European disability forum has been working in the region through two very important projects for more than 7 years and collaboration with other stakeholders in the Arab world continues through the participation in the International disabilities alliance .

He shared two key messages . The first refers to articles 4.3 of the Convention of Persons with Disabilities, demanding that the state parties that have ratified the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities involve and consult with representative organizations of persons with disabilities on a regular basis. Bringing persons with disabilities and their organisations at the table of decision-making, breaking down the barriers of exclusion and discrimination in the decision-making system of any society and the other messages is an essential tool to promote more inclusive societies.

The second overarching message he mentioned is stated in article 33.3 of the Convention which concerns to the national implementation of the Convention and its monitoring mechanism. The full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the economy, in the labor market and in the civil society will be possible only if the decision-making processes will take their rights on board.

**NAWAF KABBARA, President, Arab Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD)** highlighted the importance to collect disaggregated data on national and regional level based on agreed and shared terminology. He stressed the need to work on more disaggregated data with a specific focus on intersectionality. He also underlined that , when analysing the condition of persons with disabilities, especially women, the studies should embed the role played by the family in the Arab countries to cover the gaps left by the public institutions.

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## Day 1, 26 January 2022

# Round table 1: Human rights and accessibility

Human rights and accessibility have not always walked hand in hand. The aim of this roundtable was to explore how accessibility can be reshaped in order to ensure a universal fruition of human rights.

Moderated by: **JAVIER GÜEMES**

**IMMACULATA PLACENCIA PORRERO, Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion at Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission,** pointed out that accessibility is a tool to access human rights. Accessibility shall be accommodated with reasonable accommodation. The intention is that persons with disabilities, through accessibility and reasonable accommodation, have equal access to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Accessibility is meant to be translated into practical measures, such as devices on transports, technical specifications for buildings and web communications. The horizontal measure is the European Accessibility Act which creates obligations for manufacturers, importers, service providers to deliver services and products that are accessible.

The funding legislation is distinguished in 2 segments: procurement and EU funds co-managed by Member States. These two are subject to the prerequisite of accessibility in order to be disbursed.

The EU strongly suggests that countries, also those outside of the European Union, use EU developed standards to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities in order to facilitate the access to technical knowledge.

**ABDELMAJID MAKNI, President of the Fès-Meknès Regional Commission on Human Rights, Morocco,** referred to the need to reduce or eradicate the elements which do not allow persons with disabilities to obtain accessibility. New technologies and ICT play a crucial role in this regard. With specific focus on MENA countries, he suggested that awareness campaigns are promoted in order that persons with disabilities are made aware of their rights. He also highlighted the importance to work on accessibility principles at regional level in order to ensure mobility.

He highlighted the importance of ensuring an efficient data collection system on all aspects related to disabilities, especially post crisis/emergency, which can allow the monitoring of the ongoing activities and ensure the implementation of better policies, based on data and evidence.

**FEDERICO MARTIRE, Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Manager & Deputy Director Program Unit, International Disability Alliance,** referred to



**Javier Güemes,** International Relations Director, ONCE Social Group



**Federico Martire,** Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Manager & Deputy Director Program Unit, International Disability Alliance



**Suvad Zahirovic,** Director, IC Lotos, Information Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Tuzla, Bosnia

the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on the lives of people with disabilities, highlighting that the pandemic exacerbated inequalities, increased the number of those who seek mental health support, a demand which remained often unanswered because of the shutdown of the services. He also pointed out that people with disabilities encountered barriers in the use of online services, thus excluding them from the participation of on-line school and telework.

He strengthened the importance of reinforcing the capacities in developing response mechanisms which are inclusive, fostering a close cooperation and consultation with representative organizations. In order to do so, studies and research post Covid shall collect experiences of persons with disabilities and disaggregated data shall be presented.

### Practical dialogue - Accessing European finance on disability projects

Funding opportunities are a crucial tool to promote accessibility, but they are sometimes difficult to identify.

**CAROLINA SERRANO,** presented the European Social Fund Plus. The European Social Fund (ESF) has been a bulwark of support to people across the EU, investing in the social future of European citizens for over six decades. The new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will remain the main EU instrument for investing in people – tackling the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting high employment levels, building social protection and developing a skilled and resilient workforce ready for the transition to a green and digital economy.

Coming into force on 1 July 2021, the ESF+ Regulation supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, jointly proclaimed by the European Council, the European Parliament and the Commission as the EU's compass for responding to social challenges in Europe. Through supporting actions in the areas of employment, education & skills and social inclusion, the ESF+ supports individuals, regions and Member States to face distinct challenges – from recovering from the current pandemic to meeting the EU's targets for employment, social inclusion, education and climate. The ESF+ integrates the former European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), allowing funding to be used in an efficient and coherent manner as possible.

**SUVAD ZAHIROVIC, Director, IC Lotos, Information Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Tuzla, Bosnia,** referred to the difficulties that organisations of persons with disabilities encounter when accessing funds. These problems mainly refer to the lack of personnel, administrative and financial capacity and to the fact that these organisations are often not recognised as part of the civil society community or not fully engaged in policy discussions. He also pointed out that EU projects targeting disability are not enough. He argued that organizations participate mainly as partners, with some lacking the leadership capacity to put forward a successful bid or proposal.



## Round table 2: employment of persons with disabilities

**ANTONIA PAVLI, Researcher, Observatory on Disability Issues of the National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece**, provided an outlook of the measures undertaken by Greece to promote job opportunities for people with disabilities. She highlighted that the state laws to promote job opportunities for people with disabilities had very limited impact: this was determined by the lack of calls for positions both in the public and private sector. Despite foreseeing quotas for persons with disabilities, these laws were not successful. In 2021 the law 4765 was published: it reforms the opening of positions in the public sector. Selections will be held at least every 2 years, at least 12% of positions will be reserved for persons with disabilities (with at least 50% of certified disability), while 5% of the positions will be reserved to family members.

Two crucial elements in the legislation are the principles of reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination. Unfortunately, the principle of reasonable accommodation does not apply to horizontal domains, such as health and education, and it is therefore limited to the occupational domain.

Ms. Pavli addressed that the current legislation is still weak as data reveals that there is a growing gap in participation in the job market for

persons with disabilities, a high rate of persons with disabilities who are inactive, and also a high rate of persons with disabilities with no work experience.

**VIRGINIA CARCEDO, Secretary General, Inserta Empleo**, focused on best practices and recommendations developed after Covid 19 pandemic, such as the Inserta model for employment mediation for persons with disabilities in Spain. She reminded of the impact of Covid 19 on the job loss for persons with disabilities - who were already in a disadvantaged situation. This was included in the reports developed during the pandemic. These reports present a very negative outlook of the perception of persons with disabilities with respect to how their lives were impacted by Covid.

**GEORGE KHOURI, Vice-Chair, National association for the rights of persons with disabilities in Lebanon**, discussed the employment situation of persons with disabilities in the Arab world. 7-10% of the population in the Arab countries have a disability, despite the fact that official data account for only 5%. Unemployment among persons with disabilities is extremely high, while mitigation measures are almost inexistent. Despite quota (for instance in Lebanon), employment lags behind and progress has been halted by Covid 19 lockdowns.



**Antonia Pavli**, Researcher, Observatory on Disability Issues of the National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece



**Virginia Carcedo**, Secretary General, Inserta Empleo



**George Khouri**, Vice-Chair, National association for the rights of persons with disabilities in Lebanon



**Stefan Trömel**, Senior Disability Specialist, International Labour Organisation (ILO)

### Practical dialogue: social protection of persons with disabilities

**STEFAN TRÖMEL, Senior Disability Specialist, International Labour Organisation (ILO)**, pointed out that the Arab region has the lowest level of coverage of social protection for persons with disabilities. He stressed the importance to promote a shift in the perception of social protection for persons with disabilities: instead of providing an allowance for persons with disabilities, the focus shall become the need to include them in the active labour market, enabling them to earn an income. Right now, social protection is seen as a replacement of employment and this perception must change. A major role in this shift shall be played by disability organisations, which should be strengthened so that they can contribute to promote fair policies in the field of social protection.

**MARIA DEL MAR LOGROÑO NARBONA, Technical Consultant, Citizenship Education, UNICEF MENA Regional Office**

**Jordan**, gave a presentation on the rights to social protection for persons with disabilities in Jordan. The focus is the need to find long term solutions to reduce poverty in Jordan. This goal can be achieved only if persons with disabilities are included in the labor market and become financially independent. She reminded that health coverage for children from 6 to 18 years of age is not provided for. This constitutes a major problem for this segment of the population and for their families. A serious problem in Jordan is caused by the scattered universe of social protection providers. This scenario creates a lot of confusion among the citizens. As a result, there is the urgent need to create a robust system which can become the sole interlocutor for persons with disabilities, regardless of their age and employment status.

## Round table 3: gender perspective – disability agendas, violence against women with disabilities

### **ANA PELÁEZ NARVÁEZ, Vice-President, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),**

pointed out that gender is a key feature to be discussed with facing disability. This transpires from the fact that women are more likely to have a disability on account of their lower economic and social status which leads to violence and discrimination.

Women with disabilities are under-represented in the political, economic and social spheres. They are more likely to be illiterate, unemployed and not supported by the health system.

The pandemic has exacerbated this critical situation: women with disability, having limited access to information, information devices and education, are left behind and do not access information. This leads to isolation and to the impossibility to ask for medical and income support.

The pandemic has witnessed a dramatic increase in cases of violence against women and girls, particularly with disabilities.

### **ANNA DORANGRICCHIA, Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs, Union for the Mediterranean,**

referred to the work which UfM is leading on gender equality. She pointed out that the lack of disaggregated data remains a big challenge.

This means that there are no policies or practices implemented and that the interest on this topic remains limited. Despite governmental commitment in this field, a lot needs to be done. Gender and disability are sometimes considered as a double disability: this has negative repercussions on women with disabilities who are not empowered to enter the labour market, education and, as a consequence, they are excluded from leadership positions.

When referring to violence against women with disabilities, she stated that there is an urgent need to promote capacity building to health providers who treat victims. They shall receive training on how to deal with physical and emotional damages done by violence. Cooperation between the public sector and civil



**Ana Peláez Narváez,**  
Vice-President, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



**Anna Dorangricchia,**  
Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs, Union for the Mediterranean



**Isabel Caballero,**  
Coordinator, Fundacion CERMI Mujeres



**Patricia Sanz,** Second Vice President of Equality, Human Resources, Institutional Culture and Digital Inclusion, ONCE Social Group

society organizations is paramount to ensure a common approach to deal with victims of violence.

**ISABEL CABALLERO, Coordinator, Fundacion CERMI Mujeres,** highlighted the link among the universal human rights, the elimination of every form of discrimination and the fight against violence against women and girls, including domestic violence. It is not possible to discuss one of these topics without looking at the bigger picture. This, in itself, lays down a road map to develop comprehensive measures to fight discrimination.

**PATRICIA SANZ, Second Vice President of Equality, Human Resources, Institutional Culture and Digital Inclusion, ONCE Social Group,** referring to violence against women and girls, pointed out that they are more likely to be victims, but less likely to report cases of violence to the authorities. Victims with disabilities are less likely to be believed. Moreover, not being financially independent is an element which does not allow them to break

free from a violent and domestic environment.

There is a strong need to promote broad public campaigns to raise awareness that victims of violence, especially those with mental disabilities, enjoy the same rights and need to be protected and listened to. These awareness campaigns shall target persons with all types of disabilities, visual or audio impairment, for instance, in order to reach the marginalized and most vulnerable groups.

## Day 2, 27 January 2022

# Persons with disabilities in tourism sector

**IGOR STEFANOVIC, Technical Coordinator at Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility, World Tourism Organization,** advocated for accessibility in the Mediterranean basin, in the post-pandemic era, when so many sectors are striving to stay afloat and recover. Tourism is still sorely affected but is also fighting back.

Accessible tourism is about millions of users, with most of us likely to develop some specific access requirements throughout our lives, due to longer life expectancy, health conditions or simply pregnancy or overweight conditions. Mr. Stefanovic argued that there is no such thing as a "standard human being" as we come in all shapes and sizes. Even though significant advancements have been made in the last decade, the list of pending items remains long, especially in emerging and transitioning economies, some of them situated in the Mediterranean region and adjacent countries.

Accessibility concerns the whole tourism value chain. Adapting, for example, a hotel, having no allergy-free menus or accessible local

transportation to the airport or a local museum, disrupts a tourism experience. It causes discomfort, frustration and a lack of confidence in destination's ability to embrace all kinds of customers. If, to this, we add false advertising on accessibility, clients suffer to a much greater extent.

The number of end-users of accessible tourism service is constantly growing, in developed and emerging economies alike. By 2050, one out of six people will be aged 65 or more, while in Europe and North America this figure may reach 25% of the population. Globally, almost half of the persons aged over 60, already have disabilities. Accessible Tourism for All is a major business opportunity. Accessible destinations and companies are tapping into an immense market potential and becoming more competitive.

**GIAMPIERO GRIFFO, Technical Coordinator, Italian Observatory on the conditions of persons with disabilities,** discussed the standards of accessibility of tourism services and destinations. He referred to the new trend of adventure tourism, meaning tourism



**Igor Stefanovic,** Technical Coordinator at Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility, World Tourism Organisation



**Ivanka Jovanovic,** Executive Director, National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS)



**José Luis Borau,** Head of Department, Physical, Environment, Accessibility, ONCE Foundation

targeting remote destinations or destinations with limited accessibility. Services provided to persons with disabilities allow them to enjoy of these remote places.

**NAWAFF KABBARA, President, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD),** presented the Moroccan project supporting accessible tourism. The focus is to promote transparent, credible and accessible information on accessible tourism. Each country shall offer this kind of information for travelers with disabilities. He stressed that when it comes to the definition of accessibility, it has a different connotation for a person who has visual impairment compared to another person with movement impairment. He also referred to the actual cost of tourism services which are more expensive for persons with disabilities. This additional cost falls on the person with disabilities. In order to address this inequality, there should be a form of compensation or return on investment for those entrepreneurs who decide to make their services accessible.

**IVANKA JOVANOVIC, Executive Director, National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS),** presented Serbian best practices applicable to accessible tourism, starting from the assumption of the universal right to travel and enjoy touristic services, the laws on preventing discrimination against persons with disabilities and the law on construction and urban planning, all of which are interlinked and find a practical implementation in the daily life of the citizens.



**Alberto Durán,** First Vicepresident of Institutional Coordination, Solidarity and External Relations, ONCE Social Group

**JOSÉ LUIS BORAU, Head of Department, Physical, Environment, Accessibility, ONCE Foundation,** referred to the creation of a common standard for accessible tourism, the ISO 21902, in the region, to serve as a basic resource to expand the criteria that countries with such a big dependence on this economic sector should take into account in order to become more inclusive. This standard can be applicable to the public sector, transports, urban and rural spaces.

He stressed that it is crucial to promote this new standard in the aftermath of the pandemics since tourism is again opening new opportunities. The standard has already been validated by more than 100 countries and there are no geographical limitations to its application. Nonetheless, there is the need to promote awareness campaigns to widespread the knowledge and application of this standard.

**ALBERTO DURÁN, First Vice-president of Institutional Coordination, Solidarity and External Relations, ONCE Social Group,** expressed his satisfaction in being able to join this first Conference on Disability. He pointed out that including discussions on disability in the agenda of international and regional organisations is one of the main targets of ONCE. The work undertaken by the UfM on promoting gender equality through a participatory approach shall be directed towards the rights of persons with disabilities, adding that there is a huge hope that this approach will be successful.

He underscored that ONCE has always been active in the fight against dis-



crimination of persons with disabilities: the main targets of the actions of ONCE are the equal access to education, employment and the elimination of physical, mental and technological barriers.

ONCE shall not forget that solidarity guides its actions: solidarity towards vulnerable groups, regardless of their nationality and their status. Europe

cannot exist without a clear and shared social inclusion policy.

**ANTÓN LEIS, Director, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID),** congratulated this first conference on disability targeting the Mediterranean region, focusing on equal access to the labour market and on accessible tourism, while keeping in mind that

the gender perspective remains a transversal topic. He highlighted disability issues are mainstreamed by the Spanish Cooperation in regional projects, in partnership with ONCE, and equal opportunities remain high in the agenda of Spanish government.

He reminded that persons with disabilities still face numerous discriminations and barriers, despite

the steps forward made in the last decades but there is still room for improvement and there is a long way to reach equality. He concluded his intervention by recalling that progress needs to be made on a Mediterranean level in order to become a best practice to be exported also in other regions.





## Key conclusions

The different panels provided insights, data and good practices, which highlighted both challenges as well as possible solutions when it comes to the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities.

**Regarding social inclusion**, participants presented an overview of the situation in their regions and countries, expressing the great impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the relevance to be included in the recovery programmes. For instance, the easing of access to EU funds, such as the Global Europe programme, is crucial for DPOs and entities working for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. In this regard, there was a general agreement that the European Union should include, among the priorities of the future ministerial conference on disability, specific funding for cooperation projects aimed at the improvement of the situation of persons with disabilities within the Mediterranean region. Also, there was a call to expand the application of accessibility standards developed by standardisation and normalisation agencies within the region.

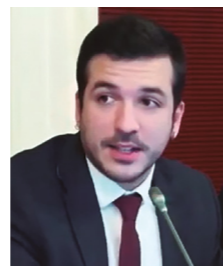
**In the area of employment**, COVID-19 has impacted dramatically the job market, especially with respect to persons with disabilities. Although there is a huge lack of effective data on employment rates in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the involvement of persons with disabilities in the job markets remains extremely low.

It was stressed that national governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) should cooperate to open up routes to economic empowerment and financial inclusion, so that persons with disabilities can enjoy decent work and achieve financial independence in line with the provisions of article 28 UN CRPD. Specific measures in national and local recovery plans should be adopted in order to ensure addressing negative consequences of the pandemic on persons with disabilities. Different participants showed examples of such cooperation, such as the Inserta programme in Spain, or the relevance of the Social Economy enterprises in improving social and labour inclusion rates. Regarding social protection, there was a general discussion agreeing on the need to improve national environments so as to step forward into inclusive systems, working proactively towards the social and labour inclusion of persons with disabilities, rather than the charitable models still working in many countries.

**In the area of tourism**, the call for an accessible and inclusive tourism strategy in the region was launched. The strategy should tackle areas such as access to information, training of professionals, restoration, cultural and leisure premises, hotels, built environment of tourist destinations, local transport but also avoid direct discrimination in access to services (such as pools or sport facilities) among other actions. The strategy should be implemented in cooperation with persons with disabilities as



**John Paul Grech**, Deputy Secretary General of the UfM in charge of Social and Civil Affairs



**Álvaro Couceiro**, International Strategic Planning Officer ONCE Social Group



**Jahda Abou Khalil**, General Director Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD)



**Joan Ramón Riera Alemany**, Councillor for Children, Youth and the Elderly and President of the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities, IMPD - Barcelona City Council

well as their representative organisations. Finally, there was also a call for the implementation of the new international standard for accessible tourism, the ISO 21902, in the region, to serve as a basic resource to expand the criteria that countries with such a big dependence on this economic sector should take into account in order to become more inclusive.

**In the area of gender and disability**, the debate highlighted that compared to men without disabilities, women with disabilities are: three times more likely to be illiterate; two times less likely to be employed and three times more likely to have unmet health care needs. In terms of possible solutions, among others, speakers stressed the improvement of legal frameworks; the adoption of concrete policy and financial measures to ensure full political and economic participation of women; the designing of capacity building programmes for DPOs, CSOs and private sector as well as the need to invest on education and raising awareness. Participants could, as well, explore practical models for the detection of violence suffered by women with disabilities, sharing good practices and calling for disability-inclusive systems of protection against gender-based violence.

**A cross-cutting issue** which emerged prominently is the urgent and clear need for data collection and disaggregation, as recalled in article 31 UN CRPD. In order to fuel policies and drive actions, a major effort in gathering and using better data and evidence to understand and address the scale and nature, of challenges faced by persons with disabilities, is required. Data gathering and anal-

ysis demands not only political commitment, but also the mobilisation of financial resources. In this regard, the role of national bodies remains crucial in achieving this objective. Lastly, there were mentions of the need to support underrepresented and/or the most vulnerable groups of persons with disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, mental health or deaf blindness, among others. There was also a clear call to launch a structured dialogue between civil society and governments in the region to ensure a relevant set of commitments to tackle the needs of persons with disabilities and contribute to the full achievement of their rights. It was underlined that sufficient resources should be dedicated, and strong commitments through international cooperation made to ensure enhanced international funding for DPO capacity-building as well as disability-inclusive and accessible emergency response plans.

**The Union for the Mediterranean was invited to set-up a regional dialogue platform between the national governments and relevant organizations of persons with disabilities in order to agree on a regional agenda on disability.**

The League of Arab States offered their premises in Cairo to host the 2nd annual Euro-Med Conference on Disability in 2023.

The International Disability Alliance called on the UfM to join the Global Disability Summit scheduled in a virtual format on 16 and 17 February. [www.globaldisabilitysummit.org](http://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org)



# The Conference in Numbers

**+20**  
High-level speakers

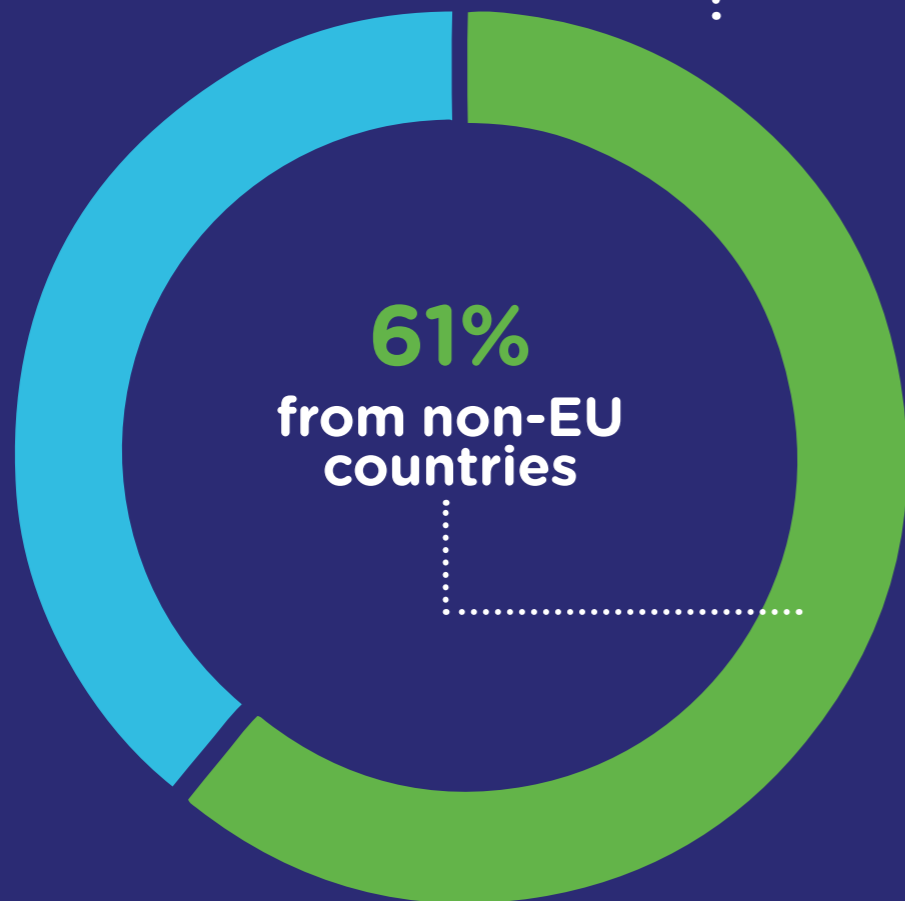
**+300**  
participants

from **+30**  
countries

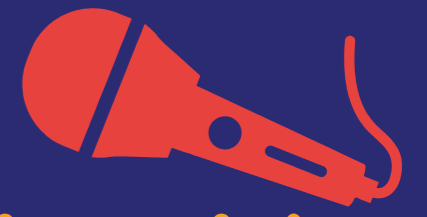
A balanced attendance

**47%**  
women

**53%**  
men



More than **20** media articles and radio pieces across the region



**38%**  
civil society

An inclusive Conference with interpretation in...

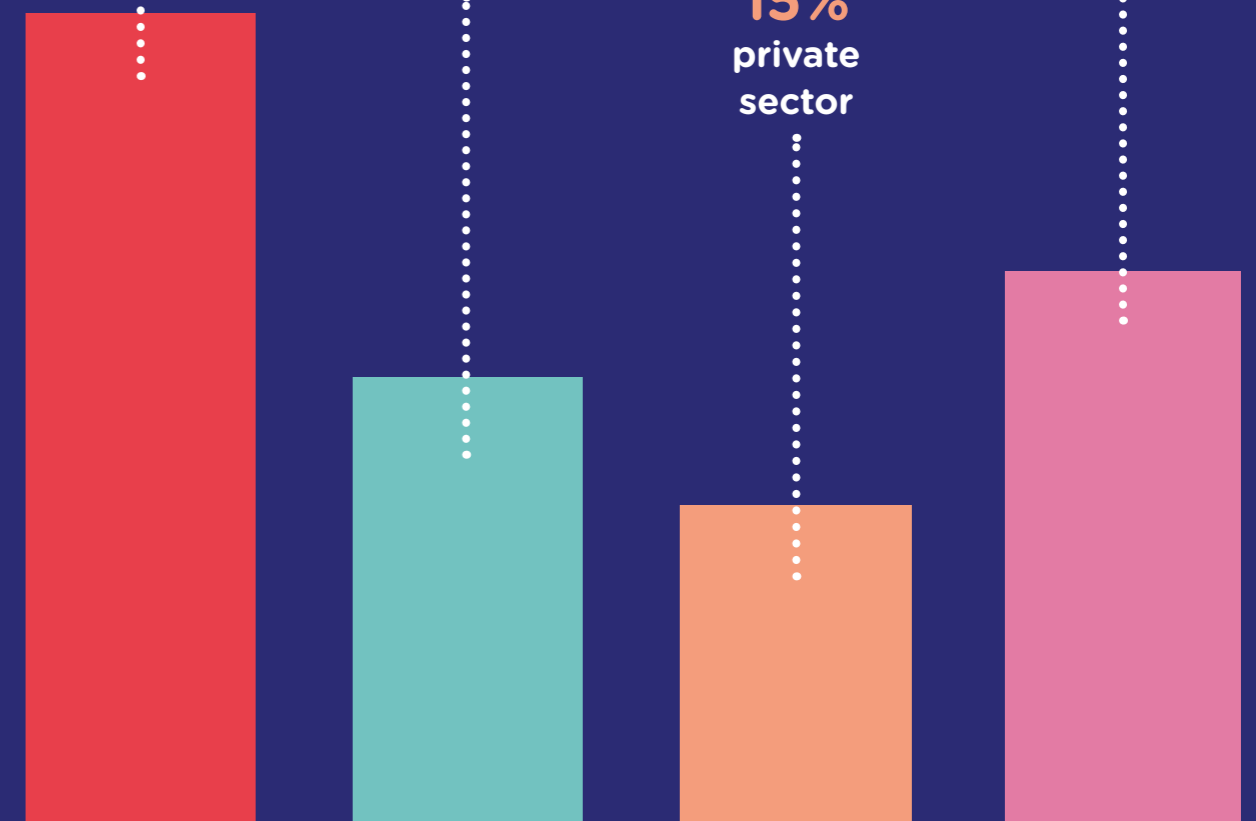


- Sign language
- English
- Castellano
- عربي

**21%**  
local and national governments

**15%**  
private sector

**26%**  
others











Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



# UfM I CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

26-27 JANUARY 2022



[ufmsecretariat.org](http://ufmsecretariat.org)



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