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SUPPORT TO EUROMED REGIONAL AGENDA ON DISABILITY

First situational assessment of
the social and economic inclusion
of persons with disabilities in the
Euro-Mediterranean region

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Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this work is to conduct a preliminary and partial situational assessment of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Mediterranean (Euro-Med) region.

The assessment will identify the status of social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities, the obstacles to full and meaningful inclusion in society, and the opportunities available for achieving the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD, or CRPD).

The assessment is intended to guide the UfM and the Spanish ONCE Social Group (GSO) in defining the guiding principles, priorities, objectives, and functioning of a potential future Euro-Mediterranean platform for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to address the underlying causes of discriminations and set the preconditions for more inclusive policy and program responses in the longer run.

Methodology

The report is based on a comprehensive review of official information and data from various secondary sources, including government reports, international organisations, academic research, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The data collection process involved examining statistical reports, policy documents, and case studies specific to the target country. The analysis is limited to the cases of Italy, Malta, Spain, Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan.

The selection of the countries has been driven by the following factors:

- Availability of recent data and information to produce a representative picture of the socio-economic inclusion of disabled people in the Mediterranean.
- Demonstrated political willingness to advance an agenda of disability rights and inclusion in line with the provisions of the CRPD and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the existence of good practices with potential for replication across the region.
- North-South Med balance

Overall, the report aims to answer the following research question: based on the existing data and information, what picture of the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Euro-Med region can be drawn?

Answering the question implied addressing the existing gaps in data and information about disability rights and socio-economic inclusion between the Mediterranean and Europe on the one hand, and the Asian and African shores of the basin, on the other.

Objectives

Preamble

Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalised and excluded groups in the Euro-Med region. They face significant barriers to social and economic inclusion, which limit their ability to fully participate in society and the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated their challenges and highlighted the need for urgent action to ensure their full inclusion. The socio-economic, cultural, and political heterogeneity of the region also contribute to the diversity of approaches to disability inclusion.

The Mediterranean region is known for its diverse cultural, historical, and environmental aspects. However, the region also exhibits significant socio-economic heterogeneity. One of the most significant factors that contribute to the socio-economic heterogeneity in the Mediterranean region is the vast disparity in income levels, primarily due to differences in economic development and access to resources.

Another factor contributing to the socio-economic heterogeneity of the region is the varying levels of education and literacy, with significantly lower rates in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. This lack of access to education limits opportunities for upward social mobility and economic growth.

The Mediterranean region also exhibits significant differences in labour market participation and unemployment rates. This disparity is largely due to differences in economic structure and labour market policies.

Finally, the Mediterranean region also displays significant differences in infrastructure and technology access, which is a particularly relevant factor in this historical phase of digital transformation.

Specific Objectives

In this context, the specific objectives of this report are as follows:

- To analyse overall data on disabilities and the employment rates and participation of persons with disabilities in the job market.
- To analyse the social protection systems in place to support individuals with disabilities.
- To draw initial and partial conclusions on the overall socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities.

To provide recommendations for improving socio-economic inclusion based on the analysis.

For the purpose of this analysis, the report is structured in three parts:

1. Overview on disability data
2. Access to employment
3. Social protection mechanisms

Every section includes elements referring to the gender gap and a synthetic conclusion section to continue guiding the analysis and the consultation phase.

Part I — Overview on Disability Data

The region's heterogeneous approach to disability inclusion is reflected in the different methodologies in use for disability data collection and analysis. Out of the six analysed countries, all but Lebanon have ratified the CRPD¹, which requires inclusive data collection and data disaggregation (art. 31). The use of the new International Classification Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and/or the Washington City Group Questions represents a non-exhaustive indicator of the alignment of data collection policies and mechanisms.

While on the European shores of the Mediterranean data collection systems appear to be more solid and reliable, on the Eastern and Southern sides information is more controversial.

The case of Lebanon is particularly revealing. The Lebanese government reports a 2% disability prevalence among its population. However, the data is not considered realistic since it refers to a strictly medical model which has not been updated since 1990. According to the most recent national survey an estimated 4.1% of females and 3.9% of males live with some form of disability. In 2022, the United Nations affirmed that “[d]isability in Lebanon remains under-researched and under-reported,” estimating the total number of persons with disabilities to be 900,000 (around 17% of the country's population).²

On the other hand, in Italy, the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) is working to incorporate and implement the new concept of disability in official statistics based on the introduction of the ICF in 2001 and following the beginning of the publication of statistical data on disability via a [dedicated website in 1999](#).

ISTAT collaborated with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) and with other statistical institutes and international organisations to design statistical and investigation tools on disability according to the ICF and the CRPD, formulating a series of questions that should be included in the censuses and national investigations. However, questions have only been introduced on an exper-

imental basis in the 2011 Population Census. To improve the statistical tools for analysing disability, ISTAT also actively collaborated with WG and UNICEF for the classification functioning in children, contributing to the design of the Child Functioning Module.

Since 2009, ISTAT has been working on a Disability Register whose objectives derive directly from Law 18/2009, with which Italy ratified the CRPD. The Register has three main purposes: (i) identification of individuals with significant health deficits; (ii) production of statistical information necessary for monitoring inclusion policies and compliance with the CRPD; (iii) creation of an accurate sampling base for ad hoc statistical investigations on disability. At the time of the preparation of this report, this register was not available³. Overall, Italy reports a 5.2% disability prevalence.

Morocco presents a very similar figure, 5.1%. However, the information dates back to the last census conducted in 2014 (the next one is foreseen for 2024). Morocco used the Washington Group Short Set (WGSS) in the most recent census to elaborate the survey. Every 10 years, the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality, and Family carries out a comprehensive study following national and international standards, which, has not yet led to the creation of a disability database.

The WG questions have also been in use in Jordan since the 2015 census, which estimated there was a disability rate of 2.7% for females and 2.8% for males (ESCWA 2018) of which 116,682 (46.39%) were female and 134,817 (53.61%) were male. However, the adoption of the questions by UNICEF in its Module on Child Functioning (2016) provides a different scenario, bringing the figure to an estimated 11.2%. In parallel, WFP estimates that 17% of refugee households include a member with disabilities. In 2016, the Jordanian Higher Council of Affairs of Persons with Disabilities stated that the official estimate of disability prevalence is 13%, which remains currently valid. The paucity of data on disability prevalence as well as the large number of refugees, otherwise partially inte-

grated in the community, may contribute to data uncertainty. In addition, it remains unclear how many persons with disability live in institutions. This is believed to be in the thousands as a result of the charity medical approach. These figures were not included in the census as they need to be reported by their own families.

The system is relatively more fragmented in Spain, though some level of data collection centralisation is carried out by the National Statistical Institute (INE), which in 2020 estimated there was a 9.7% disability prevalence. According to the data from the 2020 Survey on Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situations conducted by the INE, 58.6% of the 4.38 million individuals who reported having a disability are women. The prevalence of disability varies by age, with slightly higher rates observed in men up to 34 years old. However, from age 35 onwards, the situation reverses, and the gender disparity grows as age increases.

When examining disability rates per thousand inhabitants, women exhibit a significantly higher rate (112.1) compared to men (81.2). Regarding specific disability categories, women have higher rates in mobility (68.5), domestic life (57.8), and self-care (38.0). Conversely, men have lower rates in mobility (38.9), domestic life (31.8), and hearing impairments (24.2).

Approximately 79.5% of households do not have any individuals with disabilities. In 17.9% of households, there is one person with a disability, while 2.5% and 0.2% of households have two, three or more individuals with disabilities, respectively.

The case of the European Union

Unlike its member states and Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries, the European Union (EU) does not have a comprehensive regulatory framework for disability rights - in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity (art. 5 EU Treaty) - which gives the responsibility to act to level(s) of govern-

ment closer to the citizens (state or local governments). Nevertheless, the EU is a party to the CRPD as a regional integration institution. The CRPD is the first, and as of yet the only, Human Rights Convention ratified by the European Union. It should be noted also that while all 27 EU member states are parties to the Convention, only 22 have ratified its Optional Protocol.

At the normative level, the EU commitment translates into several norms, most notably Directives⁴, although the most recent overall policy approach to CRPD implementation resides in the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 adopted in March 2021. The Strategy aims to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in Europe and around the world by building on (i) the experience and results of the previous [European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#), and (ii) on a wide participatory process that involved all relevant stakeholders, most notably the continent's organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs or DPOs). On this basis, the strategy represents the EU's forefront policy document for the implementation of the CRPD and for social and human rights-based approaches to disability.

The objective of this strategy is to progress towards ensuring that all persons with disabilities in Europe, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation:

- Enjoy their human rights
- Have equal opportunities, equal access to participate in society and the economy
- Are able to decide where, how and with whom they live
- Move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs
- No longer experience discrimination

Addressing the risks of multiple discriminations faced by women, children, older persons, refugees with disabilities, and those with socio-economic difficulties, it promotes an intersectional perspective in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

¹ On 29 March 2022 the Lebanese Parliament approved a Law which authorized the Government to proceed with the ratification.

² UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework - CCA Report, 2022. Available [here](#).

³ In 2017, ISTAT said that the register would be published in 2018. In 2020, the data protection authority approved the project of the register. In an ISTAT hearing in 2021, the register is mentioned again, as if it were still in the planning phase. A [web-article](#) from November 2022 mentions the register again as if it was still under development.

⁴ A “directive” is a legislative act that sets out a goal that all EU countries must achieve. However, it is up to the individual countries to devise their own laws on how to reach these goals (source: https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/law/types-legislation_en)

Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Strategy's main priorities are:

- To guarantee accessibility allowing people to move and reside where they wish freely but also in order to participate in the democratic process.
- To ensure people have a decent quality of life and can live independently as it focuses notably on the de-institutionalisation process, social protection, and non-discrimination at work.
- To foster equal participation as it aims to effectively protect persons with disabilities from any form of discrimination and violence, as well as to ensure equal opportunities in, and access to, justice, education, culture, sport, tourism, and all health services.
- To demonstrate that the role of the EU is to lead by example.
- To promote the rights of persons with disabilities globally.

From this list, several flagship actions have been planned and/or pipelined:

- An EU-wide Disability Card in 2023 to facilitate the free movement of persons with disabilities.
- The creation of an "AccessibleEU" resource centre in 2023 (pushed back from 2022). This will help people exchange good practices on accessibility.
- A guide to good electoral practices to ensure the political rights of persons

with disabilities in 2023.

- The preparation of independent living guidance for member states in 2023.
- A quality framework for social services for persons with disabilities in 2024.
- The Disability Platform, which brings together responsible bodies at a national and EU level to implement the strategy.
- An initiative to increase the employment of persons with disabilities within EU institutions.

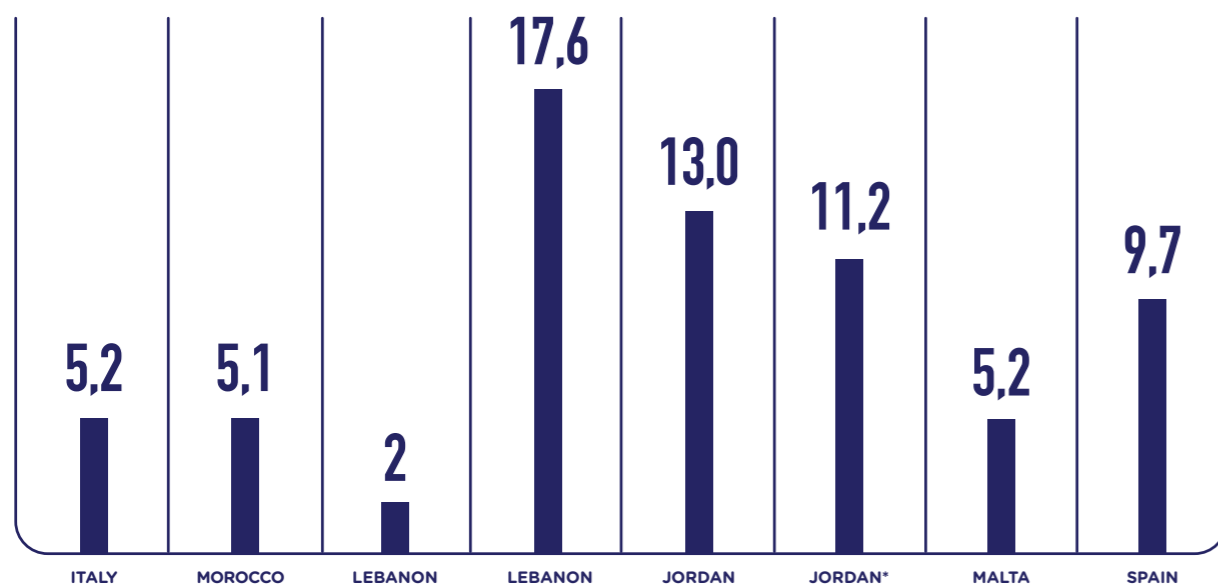
It being the result of a wide consultation process, the strategy was welcomed by organisations of persons with disabilities across Europe, and, in particular, by the umbrella federation European Disability Forum (EDF). Nevertheless, some points for improvement were identified, most notably the absence of EU-wide binding legislation to improve disability rights and address discriminations (the strategy has no actual legislative value), and of a related CRPD focal point at the EU Commission, and (ii) the absence of mutual recognition of social security benefits across the continent.

To overcome setbacks and respond to the requests of the disability movement, some EU member states have initiated internal legislative processes to uphold the human rights of persons with disabilities in their respective countries.

Summary of Part I

The data reflects some striking differences in collection methods. Since the early 2000s, for instance, Italy and Spain have shown a willingness to incorporate and implement the social and human rights-based approach to disability in official statistics, adopting, at least partially, the ICF and WCGQ methodologies. This has also been the case of Morocco, albeit more recently (2014). However, the advancements made in data collection and disaggregation as per art. 31 CRPD are not constant: Italy, for instance, introduced a Disability Register (and related data collection methodology) in 2009, but it is not yet fully available today. Elements of CRPD-compliant data collection are less evident or absent in Malta, Lebanon and Jordan. Significant differences have been identified in terms of accuracy, reliability and timeliness of data collection, a trend which equally impacts, among others, data on gender parity, access to employment, and social protection mechanisms.

% PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Part II — Access to Employment

All countries have legislations and/or national policies/strategies, mostly based on quotas which are seldom respected, even in countries with binding systems (Italy and Malta).

Data variation is notable and reflects different collection methods (i.e. data for Lebanon vary significantly depending on the source). Based on the analysis of the 2013 disability card records, 97,7% of registered persons with disabilities were unemployed, but other estimates vary from 78% to 86% (UNESCO, 2013, and UN ESCWA, 2020, respectively). Still, in 2020 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and others estimated that over 40% of persons with disabilities were self-employed, many of which are likely to be in the informal sector.

Figures are relatively similar in Morocco. In the North African country, the 2014 census found that more than 8 in 10 persons with disabilities (86.6%) were inactive, while 10.7% were employed, and 2.7% were unemployed. However, another 2014 government report, the Second National Study for Disability, found an unemployment rate of 67.75% among persons with disabilities. The same study also found that public sector efforts for the inclusion of persons with disabilities have only led 9.4% of workers with disabilities to occupy a function in this sector. The National Plan recommended initiatives to increase their employment, such as:

- Drafting of a law decree setting the employment quota for the civil service at 7%
- Including women with disabilities in the public administration
- Creating a regulation to establish the conditions and procedures for public competitions to incentivise the participation of persons with disabilities
- Improving working conditions
- Capacity building for public officials with disabilities

Differences also appear within more homogeneous contexts, as reported in the recent

Human Rights Report 7/2023 of the European Disability Forum (EDF)⁵. In Europe, Spain is in the lowest tier for employment (while having a median disability employment gap), while Malta and Italy are in the middle one. Italy is also one of the EU countries with the lowest disability employment gaps.

Italy was among the first countries to pass disability legislation to enhance employment with the Law on Disability for Employment Support in 1999. The norm introduced the targeted placement methodology, promoted by a disability employment quota, overcoming the previous mandatory placement which was configured as a mere compensation tool for persons with severe health conditions. According to official ministerial data, the country needs 360,000 employed persons with disabilities to comply with the provisions of Law L68/1999. Currently, 145,000 jobs are still "vacant/reserved," corresponding to 29% of the total quota. There are several reasons for this. Very often, persons with disabilities do not meet all the criteria; companies do not guarantee reasonable accommodation or there is no facilitation between supply and demand. A few examples of successful inclusion, at the local level, through dedicated projects implemented by local authorities and OPDs to facilitate meeting supply and demand, show a need for a different approach based on the active involvement of the person, equipment and activation of local networks and services, enhanced company responsibilities, territorial agreements, job analysis, and business services, among other factors. Only in a few cases are such services implemented. In addition, data shows that for every 100 persons employed with disabilities, there are 40 available job opportunities which, if activated, would create 500,000 jobs distributed between private companies (77.4%) and public organisations (22.6%), proving the need to rebalance political action by moving from the culture of regulatory compliance to the enhancement of the person.

The Spanish approach currently revolves around the 2020-2030 Strategy for the Social

Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. This strategy builds upon its 2012-2020 predecessor and sets out the goals and measures for promoting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. It emphasises the importance of accessibility, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination. However, and while Spain has implemented legislative measures and policies to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, there are still significant challenges to overcome. According to the EDF, the employment rate for persons with disabilities in Spain stood at 25.4% in 2019, a considerable employment gap compared to the general population. Persons with disabilities encounter various barriers when seeking employment, including stigma, lack of accessibility in workplaces, and discrimination based on their disability. These factors can limit their access to job opportunities and impede their career progression.

To address these challenges, Spain has implemented active employment policies and measures to enhance the skills and employability of individuals with disabilities. Such measures include sheltered employment, which in Spain is regulated by Law 20/2007 on Equal Opportunities, Non-Discrimination, and Universal Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities. The law recognises the importance of sheltered employment as a means of social integration and encourages the creation of these specific work environments. It sets guidelines to ensure that sheltered employment respects the rights and dignity of workers with disabilities, providing them with fair remuneration, social protection, and the opportunity for skills development (European Commission, 2021). However, it is worth noting that sheltered employment has been subject to debates and discussions regarding its impact on the full inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream employment. While it can offer valuable support and training, critics argue that it may perpetuate segregation and limit opportunities for individuals to access regular employment.

In Spain, efforts are ongoing to strike a balance between sheltered employment and mainstream inclusion. The focus is on enhancing the quality of sheltered employment programs, ensuring that they facilitate the transition to open employment, and promoting the rights and choices of persons with disabilities in deciding their career paths (European Commission, 2021).

Malta is a fascinating case in that despite having a very positive economic context, including persons with disability in the labour market remains a huge challenge. In 2018, the EU estimated that 42,5% of persons with disability were employed compared to 74,8% of the general population. This rate put Malta 8,2% below the EU average, which is still a significant increase from the 25.4% of 2015. Still in 2018, the rate produced an employment gap of 32 points, confirming the positive trend that can be identified in 2020 as the employment rate in Malta has increased to 47.1%, while the gap decreased to 29.4%. Nonetheless, it remains one of the highest in Europe where the average stands at 24.9%.

In Jordan, in 2017 OPDs and civil society presented the Shadow Report to the UN CRPD Committee, which included a demand to amend the DPRL and Article 13 of the Labour Law of 2010, deleting the phrase "provided that the nature of the work or disability allows this." The 2015 census reported a 1% rate in the public sector and 0,5% in the private sector. Positions are primarily in poorly paid jobs. Women appear the most marginalised, with an employment rate of 4.7%, while 5.5% are not employed and 89.3% are inactive, with little variation in urban areas. Men with disability have an employment rate of 27.8%, while 14.3% are unemployed and 57.9% are inactive.

⁶ ILO data highlights need for disability disaggregated labour force surveys and investment in data systems, ILO, 21 April 2023. Available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/ilo-data-highlights-need-for-disability-disaggregated-labour-force-surveys-and-investment-in-data-systems/> (visited on 13 September, 2023)

UNEMPLOYMENT % AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ITALY	JORDAN	LEBANON*	MALTA	MOROCCO	SPAIN
48,40%	81,00%	87,23%	52,90%	86,60%	73,10%

⁵ The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe, available [here](#).

Summary of Part II

The data evidence significant differences between countries. However, the underemployment of persons with disabilities appears to apply to the entire region. While few successful practices emerge, the general trend highlights marginalisation from the job market, albeit with nuances.

Even in more performing economies such as Malta, data show the difficulty of fully implementing Article 27 CRPD, in line with what the ILO notes. This indicates that persons with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing decent work and achieving economic independence. In its reports, the ILO stresses the need for inclusive policies and practices that eliminate discrimination, create equal opportunities, and ensure reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the workplace.

In addition, the ILO noted that several state parties to the CRPD do not collect population-level data on disability status, hampering efforts to disaggregate labour market indicators, indicating that disability inclusion can be strengthened only through investment in national data systems. When it comes to collecting data on persons with

disabilities in the labour market, the ideal practice is for governments to incorporate disability status questions within routinely executed labour force or other household surveys, thus allowing disaggregation by type of disability (in addition to gender). However, this approach is not consistently implemented across the Mediterranean region, with labour data collection issues going well beyond disability disaggregation: in Mediterranean Africa, for instance, only Morocco carries out regular household surveys, albeit without disability status (ILOSTAT, 2022). Where they exist, data constantly show “stark disparities between persons with, and without disabilities.” For instance, persons with disabilities are often NEETs and experience significantly lower levels of remuneration (ILO, 2023)⁶.

To guarantee the right to work, it is crucial to foster an inclusive labour market that values and supports the employment of persons with disabilities. International reports, notably from the ILO, highlight the benefits of inclusive employment, such as improved productivity, enhanced diversity, and reduced poverty rates. The ILO also emphasises the role of employers, trade unions, and governments in creating inclusive workplaces and providing necessary support and vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, alongside sound data collection and monitoring to track progress and ensure effective implementation of policies and programs related to the employment of persons with disabilities.

Part III – Social Protection Mechanisms

Access to employment presents varying figures. The trend is even more evident when discussing social protection measures, also affected by data collection inaccuracies.

This is particularly evident in Spain. In the Southern European country, an aggregate figure of 1.6% of the overall public spending is dedicated to disability inclusion policies (around 7% of the social protection budget is dedicated to persons with disabilities). However, the figure requires a more consolidated analysis. The lack of reliable data is, in large part, due to the progressive devolution of responsibilities and powers to local administrations, most notably the Autonomous Communities (2nd tier of government in Spain): nowadays, the Autonomous Communities have been transferred the responsibilities and services previously managed by the Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales (IMSERSO) and are responsible for awarding the entitlement to non-contributory pensions and other social benefits. Although allowing services to be brought closer to the citizens, the regionalisation of the system disrupted the financial tracking system, previously ensured by IMSERSO. The percentage provided is based on 2018 and 2020 data but needs to be reviewed and consolidated (IMSERSO, 2020).

The centrality of local authorities is also evident in Italy. For persons with disabilities, the Italian welfare system provides forms of economic support, and interventions are divided between welfare or social security depending on the type of financing. In 2017,

the expenditure for persons with disabilities was 23 billion Euros for 4.3 million services in the welfare sector and 14 billion for the payment of 1.4 million pensions in the social security sector. Local authorities, and in particular municipalities (i.e. the third and lowest tier of public administration), get the lion's share of expenditures for social services, which increased from 1 billion and 22 million euros (2003) to over 2 billion and 5 million (2018). In total, local authorities cover 83% of the cost of the social services, but they address only a small fraction of care needs. The remaining 17% is paid by the National Healthcare Service (13%) and users (4%). Still, existing data allows one to trace only the amounts that authorities spend, be it for the direct provision of social care services, or in the form of integration of families and users' personal budgets through pensions or other indemnities.

Malta has one of Europe's lowest social protection spending quotas (around 3% for persons with disabilities), regulated by the Social Security Act Chapter 318. In 2016 the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE) was equivalent to 20.1% of the population, or 85,000 persons. While the rate is aligned to the European average of 22%, persons with disability and elders are more at risk. Data on persons with disabilities need to be extrapolated. However, since AROPE measures the risk of monetary poverty, the severe material deprivation rate or resource poverty and the low intensity rate, persons with disability are expected to fall in the category. Women

are the object of the highest pension gap in Europe (40% in 2019).

In 2020, EU member states spent approximately €276 billion on disability benefits overall, accounting for 7.64% of the total spent on social protection benefits. This share is almost equivalent to the percentage of total expenditure spent on survivor benefits (6.2%) and family benefits (8.3%). Since 2010, the share of social protection expenditure on disability benefits in the EU has remained stable.

The share of total social protection expenditure spent on disability benefits varied significantly among EU Member States in 2018. The highest share was observed in Denmark (15.43%), followed by Luxembourg (12.02%), Estonia (11.37%), Luxembourg (10.4%), Croatia (10.26%) and Sweden (9.96%).

At the other end of the scale, the member states that spent the lowest share of social protection expenditure on disability benefits were Malta (4.0%), Greece (4.03%), Cyprus (4.17%) and Slovenia (4.65%).

The situation is also fragmented in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. In Morocco, the 2017-2021 Action Plan assumed the theme of social protection as a priority axis and encouraged the coverage of costs and expenses related to the loss of autonomy of persons with disabilities. However, according to the last 2014 census, two out of three persons with disabilities do not benefit from any social protection (65.9%).

On the contrary, Jordan is recognised in the region as a pivotal country in the promotion of social services. Article 6 of the Constitution provides for the social protection of persons with disabilities, ensuring access to basic social and health services. The country also worked on an extensive de-institutionalisation plan and on an innovative National Unified Registry (NUR) Platform. The NUR started as a System Integrator that aims to establish a back-end solution to connect multiple government databases using the National ID widely used in Jordan. The first phase of the system was concluded in 2019 by connecting more than 30 databases including those from the Civil Status and Passport Department, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development, the Social Security Corporation, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Department of Land and Survey, and the Drivers and Vehicles Licensing Department.

The data is used to enhance the targeting of the Cash Transfer Program and verify the information of other assistance programs, such as the Bread Subsidy Cash compensation using administrative sources connected to the platform. The Second Phase of the NUR started in 2022, aiming to establish a unified intake channel to serve as a front-end registration form for Social Protection Programs in Jordan. The front-end form will build on the success of the Registration Platform of the Cash Transfer Program, which is currently being integrated with the back end. The end goal of the NUR system is to become the

single gateway for people in Jordan who are seeking social assistance.

Progress is also proved by the 2019-2025 National Social Protection Strategy's three pillars (decent work and social security, social assistance, and social services), specific programs, and the expenditure on social assistance. The National Aid Fund (NAF) is articulated in six (6) programs which include cash transfers to families living below the poverty line and families with members with disability. In 2019, 3,5% of the GDP goes towards social protection. The beneficiaries are entitled to free health care and to receive insurance cards.

The situation in Lebanon is more acute. Even before the country's recent economic crash, persons with disabilities did not benefit from financial support. It is thus evident that weak institutional capacities, which have hindered the implementation of Law 220, are reflected in the weak and fragmented social protection system that is incapable of providing much-needed support to persons with disabilities.

Social protection is accessible through the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), which covers 32% of the population linked to employment (mostly in the formal public sector) where the presence of persons with disabilities is very limited. 60% of MoSA resources support the 132 segregated institutions hosting a variety of persons, from children to elderly people. The National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) also confers extremely poor coverage to around 1.5% of the Lebanese population, 11.4% of which are households with disability (ILO 2022).

Several schemes have been put in place since 2020 to respond to the emergency situation. In December 2021, with the support of ILO, UNICEF and EU, the MoSA launched a cash

assistance program for 20,000 persons with disabilities living in Lebanon who were to be provided USD on a monthly basis, while the World Bank has also intervened. Nevertheless, problems with targeting have been reported due to the lack of an adequate government poverty mapping system.

A visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights took place in April 2022, with a subsequent report presenting the extreme situation affecting the country.⁷ In 2022, 80% of the population was living below the poverty line and the currency had lost 95% of its value as prices had increased by 200. The cost of fuel increased by 2,000, impacting workers' ability to commute and children's ability to go to school. The collapse of the local currency particularly affected the most vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities without a dollar account or with a salary in local currency such as those in the public service.

In 2023, 90% of the population was estimated to live below the poverty line. Persons with disabilities are in a situation of extreme risk, as are the estimated 1.5 million refugees. To address the dire situation, a new program entitled the National Disability Allowance was launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs, with the support of the EU, UNICEF, and the ILO in April 2023. The program will provide 40 USD to disability card holders for 12 months. Priority will be given to young people aged 18 to 24 to support them in transitioning from education to the labour market.

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Olivier de Shutter, on his visit to Lebanon (A/HR/50/38/Add.1)

SOCIAL PROTECTION / RISK OF POVERTY

ITALY	JORDAN	LEBANON	MALTA	MOROCCO	SPAIN
32,10%	NA	NA	20,10%	NA	34,60%

Summary of Part III

Social protection mechanisms differ significantly between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The differences are largely determined by the economic and financial possibility of public expenditures.

In this context, it is crucial to strengthen collaboration and exchange on social protection mechanisms specifically tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean region. Emphasis should be on the importance of providing adequate financial support and disability-related benefits to ensure a decent standard of living for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the ILO emphasises the need to enhance accessibility to social protection programs and services considering the diverse needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean region. The ILO also encourages collaboration among governments, civil society organisations, and relevant stakeholders to develop comprehensive policies and strategies that promote the social protection of persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean region, insisting that disability benefits need to be compatible with income from employment.

Part IV — Women and Girls with Disabilities

While equal opportunities for women and girls with disabilities have improved over the years, notably in the access to employment, gaps remain a reality on both shores of the Mediterranean, in particular with respect to pay and salaries.

In the European Union, data shows that both women and persons with disabilities, analysed separately, continue to face discrimination in employment, whether it relates to access to employment or equal pay for equal work. In the EU, 29.5% of women with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 27.4% of men with disabilities. Women with "severe" disabilities are even more impacted as 33.9% of them are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 32.2% of men.

Women with disabilities have less access to full-time employment than men with disabilities, women without disabilities, and men with disabilities. Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy have the lowest full-time employment rate for women with disabilities. In Italy, women with disabilities receive less than 48% of the social benefits despite accounting for over 51% of persons with disabilities in the country.

The status of women and girls with disabilities in Europe is thus not only worse than that of women without disabilities, but also worse than that of their male peers. This situation is due to a combination of factors including stigma and discrimination, as well as unpaid work.

This situation is also dire in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, echoing global trends. In Morocco, women with disabilities are particularly marginalised: 79.5% have no level of education (25% more than men), and only 11.4% have some form of permanent, temporary professional occupation (official statistics).

In Jordan, 40% of women and girls with disabilities are illiterate compared to 32% of men. However, for those that have entered the educational system, tertiary level fees are 25% of the total. Still, the female employment rate is 5.2% (14.6% among women without disabilities). 5.5% are not employed and 89.3% are inactive, with some variation in urban areas.

In Lebanon, there is a dearth of both official and unofficial data regarding the situation of women and girls with disabilities. The 2022 Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty report points out that women in the country have one of the lowest rates of participation in the labour market at 29.3%, but no disaggregation by disability was available. In 2021, UNDP also pointed at increasing violence against women and girls with disabilities but lacked any detailed information. However, informal support appears to be of particular importance in Lebanon, which has a long and fierce tradition of civil society movements.

Although this report focuses on the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities, and, as a result, highlights gender gaps in terms of access to employment and social

⁸ Human Rights Council, 47th Session, Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. Statement by Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights (5 July 2020)

protection measures, the denial of the rights of women and girls with disabilities goes far beyond these spheres. As acknowledged by the UN Human Rights Council in 2020, "far too often, women and girls with disabilities experience discrimination, exclusion, isolation and denial of their dignity and autonomy, both in public and within their own families. They are also denied access to public spaces at community, national and international levels."⁸ However, there is an absence of data on gender disparities affecting women and girls with disabilities. Even data related to gender-based violence (GBV) is in short supply globally, as is the case in the Mediterranean context. At the global level, UN Women acknowledges that

women and girls with disabilities are three times more likely to experience gender-based violence, including by family, intimate partners, caregivers, and institutional facilities. According to the UNFPA's "We Decide" initiative, between 40% and 68% of young women with disabilities experience sexual violence before the age of eighteen. Overall, the data denotes patterns of embedded structural and systemic forms of discrimination as well as in social norms, cultural values, and traditions.

- **In the EU, 29.5% of women with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 27.4% of men with disabilities**
- **The full-time employment rate for women with disabilities is 14% in Italy and 15% in Spain**
- **In Morocco, women with disabilities are particularly marginalised: 79.5% have no level of education (25% more than men), and only 11.4% have some form of permanent or temporary professional occupation.**
- **In Jordan, 40% of women and girls with disabilities are illiterate compared to 32% of men.**
- **Women in Lebanon have one of the lowest rates of participation in the labour market at 29.3%**
- **Globally, 23% of women with disabilities are at risk of poverty compared to 16% of women without disabilities.**
- **Only 20% of women with disabilities are employed full-time employment, while 28% of men with disabilities and 48% of women without disabilities are. Additionally, 15% of women with disabilities have tertiary education, compared to 18% of men with disabilities and 29% of women without disabilities.**

Summary of Part IV

There is an urgent need to promote the equal rights of women and girls with disabilities in the Mediterranean region. Gaps in access to employment and social protection measures, salaries, and much more still prevail, exacerbating the risks of exclusion and poverty among women and girls with disabilities. Globally, 23% of women with disabilities are at risk of poverty compared to 16% of women without disabilities. Only 20% of women with disabilities are employed full-time employment, while 28% of men with disabilities and 48% of women without disabilities are. Additionally, 15% of women with disabilities have tertiary education, compared to 18% of men with disabilities and 29% of women without disabilities. Furthermore, 9% of women with disabilities report unmet healthcare needs, with figures showing 8% for men with disabilities and 3% for women without disabilities.

While discrimination may vary according to the social and cultural context and can manifest itself via legal systems or social constructs, data and statistics, though insufficient, still highlight a dire situation

which will take years to overcome. As mentioned previously, the Mediterranean region lacks a detailed region- or country-specific analysis of gender gaps involving women and girls with disabilities, including GBV or other factors of marginalisation. However, the absence of or inaccuracy of data should not constitute an excuse for inaction. The information available in international and independent reports, alongside the content of the CRPD's General Comment N° 3, is sufficient to demand addressing the numerous barriers women and girls with disabilities face in most areas of life.

To bridge the gap between the provisions of the CRPD and the prevailing reality, transformative equality is essential. This involves (i) converting existing structures, practices, and institutions to create new models that better accommodate persons with disabilities and (ii) modifying or transforming harmful norms, prejudices, discriminatory attitudes, and stigma. Objective and subjective solutions must be applied using a gradual approach to achieve lasting change. To achieve progressive success, the gender dimension should be incorporated into all actions of a disability rights/inclusion agenda in compliance with CRPD Committee's General Comment (GC) 4.

Part V — Emerging Topics

Besides employment, social protection and gender equality, new topics and priorities have been emerging in the global, regional, and national debates around disability rights. In particular, and in part as a result of the consultation phase (see below, part VI), inclusion in the fight and adaptation to climate change as well as emergency response, were identified as the most important ones.

Fight against and adaptation to climate change

Persons with disabilities disproportionately experience the harshest effects of the changing climate and environmental degradation. The Mediterranean region is among the world's areas most impacted by the climate emergency, although no specific data on its effects on persons with disabilities are available. Nonetheless, these two factors create the need for particular attention to the condition of persons with disabilities.

The 2020 UN Human Rights Council's "Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change"⁹ analysed the impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities from the standpoint of six thematic fields: health, food security, adequate housing, water and sanitation, livelihoods and decent work, and human mobility. It suggested a "disability-inclusive, human-rights

based approach to climate change" would be necessary. The operational framework is based on seven principles spanning from normative adaptation to meaningful participation, from accessibility to international cooperation to achieve results. The Council also highlighted good practices that have potential for replication. Among these, Jordan's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is mentioned, guaranteeing that persons with disabilities enjoy a "barrier-free legislative environment based on equal opportunity, equality and non-discrimination, including in relation to climate change protection" (IV.49). Italy's Verona Charter on the Rescue of Persons with Disabilities in the Event of Disasters is cited for its ability to address the topic via a multidimensional approach, which takes into account the various types of disability and degrees of vulnerability (IV.52).

Despite the UN Human Rights Council's report and the increased interest in the consideration of disability rights in response to climate change and inclusive disaster risk reduction, to date the rights of persons with disabilities have received limited attention in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (IDA, 2021)¹⁰. In particular, when it comes to the response to climate emergency and natural disasters, persons with disabilities face social exclusion and discrimination not only with respect to the absence of dedicated and accessible instru-

ments, but also due to perceived and real gaps in education. In turn, persons with disabilities are generally excluded from response mechanisms, and face forms of discrimination, thus pushing them into isolation and making them experience feelings of undervaluation as members of society, increasing their insecurity and vulnerability to risk.

Adequate and inclusive responses must pass involve persons with disabilities and their organisations in all phases of the response to climate change and disaster risk reduction and management, integrating the disability justice movement and policies with climate justice. Climate change is a disability rights issue and persons with disabilities shall not be excluded from the decision-making of response mechanisms.

In principle, inclusive policies and processes should at the very least: Ensure meaningful participation as per CRPD art. 4.3 and GC7, supporting data collection and monitoring in accordance with the disaggregation principles laid down in art. 31 of the Convention.

Investment in disability inclusion and accessibility to make them cross-cutting topics mainstreamed in all climate change-related policies and actions.

Spearhead and streamline initiatives that underline the intersectionality of climate

change and disability rights, investing in the support for and capacity reinforcement of OPDs.

Ensure adequate and accessible communication channels in line with the language of the Convention. Communication needs to encourage inclusion from the get-go and not just in the disaster response mechanisms.

Emergency response to humanitarian crises, including conflicts

The Mediterranean region is plagued with conflict and human tragedies. Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the consequences of war, while refugees with disabilities may face a lack of access to assistance and protection, to medical care and insufficient access to technology that could make communication and mobility easier, in addition to having to deal with problematic and often inaccessible asylum processes. Persons with disabilities face potentially fatal obstacles such as a lack of accessible shelters, inclusive evacuation plans and humanitarian corridors, and information and treatment. The situation is especially alarming for vulnerable populations, including children and women with disabilities, as well as persons in residential facilities.

⁹ Human Rights Council Forty-fourth session 15 June–3 July 2020, Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/44/30)

¹⁰ For further reference, see here: <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/climate-change>

¹¹ Rights of persons with disabilities during the war in Ukraine - Summary of monitoring report. Available at <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-during-the-war-in-ukraine-summary-of-monitoring-report/>

¹² For more information: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/content/thematic-focus-migrants-disabilities>

¹³ A New Pact on Migration and Asylum is a set of regulations and was agreed between the European Parliament and the Council in December 2023. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

¹⁴ See, for example: Toolkit on the inclusion of refugees with disabilities (EDF, 2021) available at <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/toolkit-inclusion-of-refugees-with-disabilities/>, and Strategic Collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency (IDA, 2020) available at <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/idp-art11>

Overall, and although the international normative framework has broadly recognised the importance of addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in the fields of human rights and development, persons with disabilities have been historically overlooked in the context of conflict and migration, including migrant workers and refugees with disabilities.

In a February 2023 report analysing the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on persons with disabilities¹¹, the European Disability Forum, Ukraine's National Assembly of People with Disabilities, the League of the Strong, and the Kharkiv Institute of Social Research, identified six (6) main action points, spanning from ensuring the accessibility of shelters and transfer services to inclusive communication mechanisms. In addition, references to the universal design in the reconstruction strategy, to happen in "full consultation of civil society, including meaningful participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations", were highlighted. It should be noted that in the last 30 years, only 6% of peace treaties mention disabilities (OHCHR, 2023).

Spaces for improvement concerning respect for and protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities are also evident in the response to the humanitarian crisis linked to the flow of refugees and migrants

in the Mediterranean. The 2020 European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum¹³ does not adequately include disabilities and therefore fails to comply with Article 11 of the CRPD and Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In 2016¹², the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Union noted that:

Overall, there is a lack of formal procedures to identify migrants and refugees with disabilities, although some tools to support identification are available.¹⁴

Identification is most likely to take place during health screenings, encouraging a medical approach to disability identification, and staff responsible for these tasks are often not sufficiently trained.

Identification of persons with disabilities often relies either on information provided by individuals themselves, or the presence of a 'visible' disability, leaving individuals with invisible impairments unnoticed.

Some persons with disabilities fear that their disabilities may affect their status as asylum applicants.

In turn, there are no systematic data on the numbers of persons with disabilities among arrivals or a breakdown per type of disability.

Summary of Part V

Even with just the brief and incomplete information provided in this section, the rights of persons with disabilities in the response to climate change, disaster risk reduction and emergency and humanitarian issues have been widely overlooked. Even in recent years, with the tragic surge in natural and man-made disasters, advancements in the implementation of CRPD art. 11 have been insufficient.

The Mediterranean region is one of the world's main epicentres of the negative impacts of climate and humanitarian emergencies. As mentioned, tools and practices are available for replication and improvement. Yet, a coordinated effort involving governments, civil society (and notably OPDs), UN agencies and other supranational actors and/or regional integration organisations (such as the EU) appears as the only viable option to ensure a direct response to current and future emergencies. Because of the regional scale of the said phenomena and their complexity, uncoordinated or sporadic actions are almost certainly destined to fail.

Part VI — Consultation Phase

As indicated in the methodological section, this preliminary assessment adopts a mixed methodology using both desk research and consultation tools. At the time of drafting this report, two main types of consultations took place:

1. A webinar addressed to OPD representatives from the Arab Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD) and the European Disability Forum (EDF) (June 5th)
2. An in-person workshop in Casablanca, Morocco, involving governmental representatives from the six target countries and the EU, with the participation of international experts and OPD representatives.

The full reports of the two sets of consultations are annexed to this draft report.

Webinar, 5 June 2023

The webinar, organised by UfM and GSO, addressed representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities from members of AOPD and EDF.

The consultation aimed to:

- Present the process for the definition of the EUROMED Regional Agenda on Disability Rights

- Present the preliminary results of the desk research on the socioeconomic inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Mediterranean
- Collect feedback and inputs on the desk research
- Capture persons with disabilities' priorities on topics for the analysis and the agenda
- Make note of recommendations on the disability movement and the required agenda

Key questions addressed during the webinar

The webinar's discussion revolved around the following questions:

- What are the thematic priorities that should be addressed at the Mediterranean level to foster disability inclusion? What issues must be addressed first?
- What type of agenda does the Mediterranean disability movement need and for what specific purpose? To influence what? What type of information is being sought? (e.g. prevalence, data on situation, case studies on how to include, etc.)
- Are there any national or local good practices that can be replicated and/or reinforced at the regional level?

Summary of contributions

What are the thematic priorities that should be addressed at the Mediterranean level to foster disability inclusion? What issues must be addressed first?

Giampiero Griffo, Italy and EDF: Social protection mechanisms are still linked to “fixing the impairments” and on data evaluating persons based on the medical approach.

Employment practices remained mostly segregated.

Abdelmajid Makni, Morocco and AOPD: In Morocco, social protection mechanisms are still addressed at the families and not at persons with disabilities themselves. This is also due to poor assessment practices and problems of accessibility to measures.

Recent studies on the financial efficiency of social protection mechanisms show lack of coordination of policies and public bodies.

Nawaf Kabbara, Lebanon and AOPD: Art. 11 and response to emergencies are a priority, with only 5 Med countries with legislation on inclusive response mechanisms. Social protection is also a priority.

Ahmad Allouzi, Jordan: Inclusion in climate change adaptation is central.

In addition, we need more thorough data and information mechanisms.

Finally, working to make measures binding is essential as there is a critical lack of action after legislation is passed, especially with access to employment: persons with disabilities do not go to work, they just collect allowances. According to a 2015 study, 79% of persons with disabilities in Jordan never leave their houses.

Nadia Mohammad, Egypt and AOPD: The demographic and economic contexts of the Arab region play against social protection mechanisms. We must take this into consideration to reinforce the social protection systems.

What type of platform does the Mediterranean disability movement need and for what purpose?

Giampiero Griffo, Italy and EDF: In this framework, international cooperation, the centrality of persons with disabilities, and mechanisms such as emancipatory research, peer counselling (case of Palestine) are key.

Moaffak Al-Khafaji, Iraq and AOPD: We need a platform to focus on the response to crises and catastrophes, as per art. 11.

Nadia Mohammad, Egypt and AOPD: In the Arab region there is little or no access to AT for persons with disabilities, nor is there to cultural and informative contents to support inclusion. I hope the future platform can take all this into consideration.

Marion Steff, EDF: We need to ensure a strong OPD representation in the future platform, from both EDF and AOPD. We should leverage the Euro-Med Disability Rights Network to build the participation.

Are there national or local good practices that can be replicated and/or reinforced at the regional level?

Giampiero Griffo, Italy and EDF: Examples of emancipatory research & peer counselling in Palestine (AICS).

Nawaf Kabbara, Lebanon and AOPD: There are interesting de-institutionalisation efforts in Jordan.

Summary of the outcomes of the webinar

Besides substantially validating the desk research and providing additional elements to pinpoint the analysis, participants drew attention to emerging topics, notably those connected to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency responses to man-made and natural disasters.

In-person workshop, 24-25 July

Please refer to Annex II for complete information on the workshop.

The workshop further reinforced the conclusions of the desk research, adding the following elements for the consideration of the UfM and its stakeholders.

Access to employment

Currently, more data and information are available than a decade ago. However, it remains the subject of concern, in terms of:

- Overall participation to the labour market
- Percentage of NEET youth with disabilities compared to youth without disabilities as there are twice as many NEETs with disabilities

The objective, as per art. 27 CRPD (and GC8), is to create "regular employment", i.e. employment in the regular job market with decent and fair work conditions. However, it is indispensable to look at the working conditions of persons with disabilities in the informal market, which represent a significant and partially uncharted portion of the Mediterranean job market.

Similarly, there is a need to shift the focus from large firms, which are normally able to comply with quota or other anti-discrimination or employment promotions laws, to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) representing the vast majority of the Mediterranean's economic fabric. The digital, green and care economy sectors also play an increasingly important role and should receive more attention from a disability inclusion standpoint.

Social protection mechanisms

The difficulty analysing, planning, and implementing social protection schemes is a result of the looseness of the CRPD definition of social protection (art. 28) and its tendency to permeate other rights, such as art. 12 on legal capacity or art. 19 on independent living. This reflection leads to questions regarding whether there can be, at the regional level, a Mediterranean definition of social protection. Are we referring to the same thing across the Mediterranean region?

Another important reflection concerns the role of OPDs, which often act as substitutes for the state in providing services to persons with disabilities, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Oftentimes, the implementation of mitigating measures was either shallow or plain wrong, limited to covering basic needs. In turn, OPDs and other organisations had to provide concrete support to persons with disabilities, acting as substitutes for social protection schemes, care, and support services. It remains unclear, however, how OPDs use these experiences and knowledge in covering social protection gaps for advocacy and/or strategic objectives.

Women and girls with disabilities

Building on the principles of "transformative equality" (refer to Part IV above), intersectionality appears to be key to reinforce a cross-cutting disability dimension into the debate on gender equality. In addition, this effort should be coupled with the promotion of the LGBTIQ+ rights agenda, regardless of the controversy it sparks across the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

Annexes

The annexes are available upon request in a digital format.

Annex I – Online Consultation, 5 June

Annex II – In-person consultation workshop, 24-25 July

Annex III – Desk research full report by country



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