**Maat for Peace’ submission on “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Support Systems to Ensure Community Inclusion”**

**Introduction**

Persons with disabilities face more obstacles than others to achieving communication with communities and sharing information, ideas, services and feelings with members of society, which stems mainly from multiple obstacles that limit their ability to move freely and safely without the help of others, in addition to the difficulty of engaging in activities specific to their daily lives. Persons with disabilities also suffer frequently from marginalization and inequality, particularly with regard to obtaining the right to basic services in societies such as the right to have work or decent education. On top of these violations is the lack of facilities and utilities necessary to the integration of persons with disabilities into society, whether in public offices, buildings, institutions, and transportation. All this is even exacerbated by the poor governmental capacity-building support programs for persons with disabilities to help them face and handle the various societal challenges, especially in light of the prevalence of hurtful stereotypes, particularly in developing societies, which view disability as a stigma that impedes persons from communicating effectively with different members of society, which makes many people with disabilities vulnerable to being left behind.

In the meantime, many Arab States recognized the importance of achieving the social integration of persons with disabilities by providing all facilities and launching initiatives aimed at overcoming barriers that limit their ability to understand and share information with people within society. In addition, these initiatives aim to improve those persons’ access to educational services and provide them with the support needed to perform their daily activities easily. They also raise the capacities of persons with disabilities, family members, and society to overcome obstacles that limit persons with disabilities’ effective communication with the community.

On the other hand, there are still many challenges hindering the process of social integration of persons with disabilities in many countries in the Arab region. Top of these challenges is the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the exacerbation of wars and conflicts that increase social isolation for people with disabilities, in conjunction with the prevalence of negative stereotypes of disability among members of societies. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights submits this report to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to discusses Arab States' efforts to achieve the social integration of persons with disabilities by highlighting strategies, plans and initiatives that have achieved community communication for persons with disabilities or help them move freely without the help of others and to carry out their daily activities at ease. On the other hand, Maat highlights the challenges that Arab States face to promote community integration of disabled people.

**Improved participation and** **community integration of persons with disabilities in the Arab world**

Recently, many Arab States have seen significant progress in attention to long-term initiatives, policies and government programs aimed at promoting the social integration of persons with disabilities into society. **At the level of the elimination of barriers that limit effective communication with other members of society**, the Egyptian government has funded more than 150 projects to develop multiple technological applications aimed at enhancing the capacities of persons with disabilities, including the ability to understand others and facilitating the exchange of information and ideas with them. In addition, information provided on official government websites can be accessed now through the Optical Disability Speaking Program, such as sign language interpretation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In this regard, the UAE government provides the UAE Sign Language Dictionary for the deaf, which combines the UAE local sign language terminology and documents it in a unified dictionary, with the aim of integrating persons with disabilities into society by strengthening understanding between them and members of society, as well as ensuring the continuity and expansion of sign language within UAE society.[[2]](#footnote-2)

On the other hand, many States have begun to **promote affordable transportation for persons with disabilities**. In Saudi Arabia, the government's Salman Center for Disability Research has developed many plans and prepared guidelines to equip transportation and public places to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities. Such guidelines target decision makers and those responsible for infrastructure construction, to inform them and attract their attention to persons with disabilities so that they can consider their special needs in the design of the constructions.. The Government has established special parking areas to persons with disabilities in all places, with the aim of removing obstacles[[3]](#footnote-3). In the UAE, specifically in Dubai, the Government has established public transport system in line with the rights of persons with disabilities[[4]](#footnote-4). In Egypt, the government, in cooperation with civil society organizations, continues to implement activities related to the Disability Challenge Pavement Initiative to build and pave ways to support the disability challenge throughout Egypt and provide them with safety and security.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Meanwhile, many governments attempt to **facilitate the daily activities of persons with disabilities by removing physical obstacles in health and education establishments leading to their involvement in all community activities**. In Egypt, social rehabilitation offices for persons with disabilities provide many compensatory tools for persons with disabilities, such as prosthetics and wheelchairs, in order to facilitate their daily activities. The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with international bodies and organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established educational facilities tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities[[6]](#footnote-6). In July 2022, the Egyptian government inaugurates first beach for the visually impaired people, in the Mandara area on the Mediterranean coast, allowing persons with disabilities to move and swim within safe depths of water without facilities, which strengthens their ability to exercise and engage in a significant community activity.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In the UAE, it will not be much different. The government has been working on several skilled training programs with clear guidelines for dealing with persons with visual and auditory disabilities. This, in addition to providing many educational smart tools and digital technologies that deal with disability on a large scale such as the senses' bag to develop sensory skills for the blind and the bag of comprehensive Arabic speaking visual skills[[8]](#footnote-8). On the other hand, during Covid-19 pandemic, Saudi Arabia has used digital learning tools that are tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities to ensure that none lags behind in the educational process[[9]](#footnote-9). In Jordan, several civil society organizations, in cooperation with the Government, have begun to provide appropriate pathways and ways for blind persons within universities to overcome their visual impairment.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In a related context, many countries are working to enhance the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their families to address the cultural challenges of social stigmatization of disability in society. In Saudi Arabia, it provides a system to protect persons with disabilities from abuse as well as to address the behavioral phenomena caused by this and eliminate all words and stereotypes that may cause future discrimination against persons with disabilities[[11]](#footnote-11). Despite all these models, which illustrate the efforts of many Arab countries to integrate persons with disabilities into society. However, many States still face serious challenges that cannot be resolved.

**Challenges to the integration of persons with disabilities into Arab societies**

There are many challenges facing the full integration of persons with disabilities into Arab societies. Covid-19 pandemic is estimated to have played a role in exacerbating the problem of inequality in the education of visually impaired and hearing-impaired people with learning disabilities in the Arab region[[12]](#footnote-12). On the other hand, in the multiple refugee camps in the Middle East, many persons with disabilities have faced numerous obstacles in accessing basic shelter, water, sanitation and medical care services, particularly in Yemen and Syria.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the meantime, wars and security problems in the Arab region have caused an increase in the number of persons with disabilities, whose rights were ignored and lacked medical services. In Iraq, there are insufficient facilities to deal with persons with disabilities in government facilities and educational buildings such as safe corridors or stairs, there are no buses or safe roads capable of dealing with the needs of these groups, resulting in the isolation of persons with disabilities from their social surroundings.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In Lebanon, due to wars, conflicts and grinding political crises, many persons with disabilities are unable to access social services or engage in their daily activities in an easy and simple manner. Many people with disabilities find it difficult to move from home to bring their own daily needs or bring medicines, owing to the inadequacy of roads and means of transport to deal with their needs, Lebanon's curriculum also suffers from a lack of experience in dealing with different types of disabilities, such as auditory, visual and speech disabilities as well as the weakness of e-learning services and their inadequacy to deal with different disabilities. In the same vein, women with disabilities suffer from their daily activities in Lebanese refugee camps, due to the lack of services provided to them, causing them to be socially isolated from their environment.

**Recommendations**

In conclusion, there are many efforts in the Arab world to remove barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society's activities. However, many obstacles to the realization of these efforts persist and Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:

* The need to promote and provide services that help persons with disabilities communicate with society such as technology applications that allow interpretation of sign language;
* The need to improve roads and transportation systems with technologies that help persons with disabilities to move freely and without the help of others;
* The need to support various services that help persons with disabilities to engage in their daily life activities;
* The need to take into account the elimination of all physical prejudices in educational and health establishments that prevent persons with disabilities from receiving services;
* The need to support persons with disabilities in various refugee camps owing to their poor access to services;
* The need to eliminate negative stereotypes in societies about the societal view of disability.
1. الاستراتيجية الوطنية لحقوق الإنسان ذوو الهمم في عقل وقلب الرئيس، صدي البلد ، سبتمبر ٢٠٢١، <https://bit.ly/3p4Ja4S> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. حماية حقوق أصحاب الهمم الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة. <https://bit.ly/3QdNDym> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة ، المنظمة العربية الموحدة ، المملكة العربية السعودية ، <https://bit.ly/3QiYdnS> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. شاهد كيف تعمل دبي على توفير الفرص وتسهيل الحياة لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة ، يوروب نيوز، <https://bit.ly/3vMAqEv> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. محافظ القاهرة تطبيق مبادرة إتاحة أرصفة لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة بالمعادي والزمالك ، أخبار اليوم ، مارس ٢٠٢٢ ، <https://bit.ly/3vQmEAP> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. لاستراتيجية الوطنية لحقوق الإنسان ذوو الهمم في عقل وقلب الرئيس، مرجع سبق ذكره [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. نحن فرحون جداً أول شاطئ للمكفوفين في مصر، الميادين ، يوليو ٢٠٢٢ ، <https://bit.ly/3BUv5yK> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. دمج أصحاب الهمم في النظام التعليمي، <https://bit.ly/3vQuYjI> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة ، مرجع سابق ذكره [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. مسار آمن لدعم تعليم ذوي الإعاقة في الجامعة الأردنية، الفنار الإعلام ، <https://bit.ly/3JIkAjN> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. نظام الحماية من الإيذاء، <https://bit.ly/3P7Q2sV> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. كوفيد-19 يفاقم صعوبات تعلم الطلاب المعوقين، الفنار الإعلام ، <https://bit.ly/3bCJ55G> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. احموا حقوق ذوي الإعاقة خلال تفشي فيروس كورونا، هيومان رايتس واتش ، <https://bit.ly/3p6XkTa> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. العراق خطوات أولية نحو تسهيل حياة ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، العربية ، <https://bit.ly/3A9mVkF> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)