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| Query title | **Disability Inclusion in the Middle East and North Africa Presentation – Question and Answer Session** |
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| Query | A session to provide an introduction to FCDO’s approach to disability inclusion, the scale of the barriers faced by people with disabilities across MENA and entry points for promoting disability inclusion through existing work in the region and internally. |
| Enquirer | MENAD Gender Equality Network |

Disability Inclusion in the Middle East and North Africa

What are the best ways to address stigma and discrimination in the MENA context?

People with disabilities often face stigma and discrimination in their public and private lives. Public exclusion of people with disabilities in the MENA region reinforces various, misconceptions and discriminations. The capabilities of people with disabilities are undermined, limiting their access to services and active participation in their communities on an equal bases with their peers. Strategies to address stigma and discrimination include:

* Highlight success stories and achievements of people with disabilities as practical evidence to address negative stereotypes and convince communities of the capabilities and skills people with disabilities have. Working with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) can be an effective way of doing this. Raise awareness of the rights of people with disabilities.
* Promote inclusive education and employment. Highlight the positive impact it has for the entire community.
* Provide much needed funding and technical support to enhance, communities, infrastructure, and accessibility, so that people with disabilities can engage in socioeconomic activities to fulfil their capabilities and to be part of a diverse community and workforce.

How can we best engage with political and religious leaders to promote disability inclusion?

There have been positive steps, particularly advancements in legal frameworks as an increasing number of MENA countries have ratified the UN convention on the Rights of people with disabilities (UNCRPD). Ratifying these international conventions and charters provides a basis to advocate for more progressive national legal frameworks and strategies that promote the rights of people with disabilities, maybe for the first time in some contexts.

There is a need to capture more evidence and learning to help make the case. Despite the current increase in funding for programmes and projects to enhance access to services for people with disabilities and to elevate the abilities of OPDs and other community-based actors, more focus is needed on documenting their achievements. Furthermore, there is also a scarcity of evidence-based research and statistical information about disability prevalence and status to indicate knowledge/service gaps and that marginalisation faced by this target group.

Further baseline studies and assessments are needed to elevate practice. Efforts are also needed to produce operational guidelines in Arabic and in accessible formats to engage the wider community into the learning process.

What recommendations and guidance do you have to promote inclusive employment for people with disabilities? What should be done to convince employers of the importance of employing people with disabilities, especially in leadership positions?

There is evidence that people with disabilities:

* + make good, dependable employees.
  + are more likely to stay on the job.
  + are an untapped resource of skills and talents
  + represent an overlooked and multibillion-dollar market segment
  + can assist in identifying, developing and delivering products and services targeted at this significant and growing market
  + Hiring people with disabilities increases workforce morale.

*See ILO Global Business and Disability Network website:* [*www.businessanddisability.org*](http://www.businessanddisability.org)

Various international organisations are conducting projects to support governments in the MENA region to offer accessibility resources or to enhance outreach skills to communicate with and include people with disabilities as part of their target groups. There isn’t a comprehensive mapping of these interventions, which is important to avoid duplication and wasting resources. There are also partnerships between ministries, councils and NGOs either acting in solidity with disability movements or creating disability centres in universities.

More guidance, toolkits and lessons learned from these projects need to be captured to guide others through their work. Evidence can be drawn from other regions, such as this guide for employers: [EmployAbility: Tapping the potential of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacifi](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_839506.pdf)c.

Mainstreaming disability inclusion

**What are your top three takeaways on how colleagues can mainstream disability inclusion in their work?**

1. **Use participatory approaches.** Invite people with disabilities and their representative organisations to round table discussions, meetings and workshops. This is crucial for designing inclusive strategies, priorities and programmes. Create opportunities to meaningfully engage with different representatives from OPDs and people with different types of impairments. This will raise awareness of specific challenges faced by people with disabilities in the MENA region including socioeconomic marginalisation, poverty, poor nutrition, forced displacement and barriers to education and health services.
2. **Develop partnerships.** A common issue is that projects regard people with disabilities as recipients only rather than partners. They are your partners and target groups, and therefore should be included throughout the project cycle. People with disabilities should be employed as part of the project team and part of the monitoring process. People with disabilities and OPDs are often passed over in project orientations, briefings on project activities and outreach to communities. Furthermore, programmes should be flexible and dynamic to reflect the needs and any new challenges that are raised by OPDs and people with disabilities.
3. **Conduct analysis and design an outreach strategy.** An outreach strategy will guide you to reach your target groups, including people with disabilities. Safeguarding needs to be properly considered and integrated throughout the strategy. It is important to understand communities and conduct gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis to ensure the outreach strategy is effective. It should be designed before the start of the project, to not only guide you to target groups but also analyse specific community needs and strengths.

**What can colleagues do to create a more inclusive working environment?**

Stereotypes and negative attitudes are key barriers for people with disabilities to be seen equal to their peers. Employing people with disabilities in leadership positions, middle management and different positions equally to others sets a visible example of what people with disabilities can achieve. Removing barriers for people with disabilities to be hired within an organisation also widens the talent pool available for the organisation. Inclusion should be considered throughout the recruitment process, with reasonable accommodations offered.

It is important to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical approaches that hinder the ability of people with disabilities to build connections with their colleagues and progress within an organisation. Conducting trainings on disability inclusion and inviting talks from OPDs can help challenge these stereotypes.

Attitudinal barriers can also be reflected in workplace policies and standards so these should be reviewed to ensure an inclusive work environment. The human resources department plays a key role in introducing and orienting employees regarding inclusive workplace and disability etiquette to promote respect and ensure decent communication within the workplace. Safeguarding and bullying and harassment policies should be disability inclusive, and steps should be taken to ensure staff are aware that ableism is not accepted in the workplace.

Environmental barriers also need to be considered, including accessible communication, entry ways, bathrooms, and emergency procedures.

What are your perspectives on the different language used to describe disability, for example ‘people with determination’ rather than people with disabilities?

We have seen the term “determination” being increasingly used within in the last five years. Together with other terms, such as special needs and people with special abilities. This is despite that fact that the UNCRPD was designed by activists with disabilities and experts who decided to use the term “persons with disabilities.”

People have impairments, but disabilities come from barriers in society. The focus should be on removing the barriers. Determination and other such terms are often used in a sympathetic manner or an attempt to empower, but unfortunately, the result in most cases is the opposite. It can be condescending and doesn’t take the preferences of people with disabilities into account.

Data and evidence

**Are there good sources of evidence to persuade Arab governments that it is in their interest to enable people with disabilities to make a full contribution?**

We have included a range of data sources across a range of sectors in the additional PowerPoint slides including in the presentation.

Who is working to plug the gap and provide further evidence?

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk has produced a number of resources including: [Disability rights in North Africa and engaging with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the region](https://sddirect.org.uk/resource/query-52-disability-rights-north-africa-and-engaging-disabled-peoples-organisations-dpos) and [Disability inclusion in climate change programming in the Middle East](https://sddirect.org.uk/resource/query-56-disability-inclusion-climate-change-programming-middle-east). More resources can be found on our [website](https://sddirect.org.uk/library).

There are many OPDs in the Middle East and North Africa who are generating data and evidence, including the Arab Organisation of Persons with Disabilities. For example, information can also be found on the [Disability Hub](https://disability-hub.com/), which is run by the Centre for Lebanese Studies.

Helpdesk Resources

You can find out more about the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, and find links to our rapid research reports, evidence digests and knowledge products here: <https://www.sddirect.org.uk/our-work/disability-inclusion-helpdesk/>

**About Helpdesk reports:** The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), contracted through the Disability Inclusion Team (DIT) under the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. Helpdesk reports are based on between 4 and 5 days of desk-based research per query and are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues and expert thinking on issues around disability inclusion. Where referring to documented evidence, Helpdesk teams will seek to understand the methodologies used to generate evidence and will summarise this in Helpdesk outputs, noting any concerns with the robustness of the evidence being presented. For some Helpdesk services, in particular the practical know-how queries, the emphasis will be focused far less on academic validity of evidence and more on the validity of first-hand experience among disabled people and practitioners delivering and monitoring programmes on the ground. All sources will be clearly referenced.

Helpdesk services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations and individual experts on disability, including Social Development Direct, Sightsavers, Leonard Cheshire Disability, ADD International, Light for the World, Humanity & Inclusion, BRAC, BBC Media Action, Sense, and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Expert advice may be sought from this Group, as well as from the wider academic and practitioner community, and those able to provide input within the short timeframe are acknowledged. Any views or opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of FCDO, the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk or any of the contributing organisations/experts.

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