



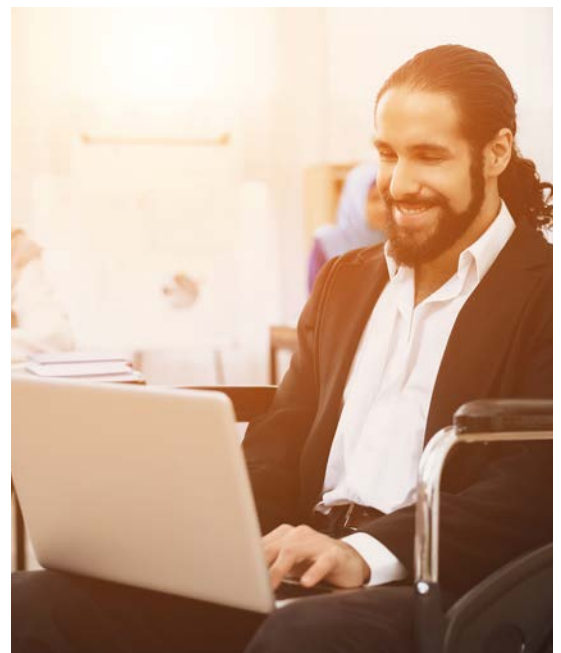
MAPPING NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGIES

in the Arab region



Introduction

Most Arab countries have signed and/or ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Like other international conventions, State Parties have an obligation to align their national legislation and policies with the CRPD, and to report to the CRPD Committee on the progress made periodically. National disability strategies and policies are important tools for aligning national frameworks with the CRPD and are necessary but not sufficient components of CRPD compliance. They provide the enabling policy and legal environment to issue laws, programmes and initiatives to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities. Most Arab countries have adopted some form of national disability strategies and policies with this goal in mind. Some are general disability policies, others are more focused



on specific themes like digital inclusion, independent living, inclusive education and so on.

This brief aims to map national disability strategies and action plans in the Arab region. It will first look at States' former and current strategies in this area. Second, it will look at thematic strategies, including both general disability strategies and more specialized strategies for inclusive education, inclusive health or e-accessibility. It aims to assess where countries stand in terms of existing policies and identify gaps.

A comprehensive analysis of all these strategies is beyond the scope of this review. Rather, it will present a quick snapshot of some strengths and weaknesses and identify what thematic or policy areas Arab States can focus on moving forward.

Methodology

The brief's methodology relied first on a desk review of all publicly available disability strategies and action plans in the region, in both English and Arabic. It also reviewed country reports on CRPD implementation. Second, a questionnaire on national disability strategies was sent to the focal points of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (IGED), and 9 out of 18 States responded.¹ The draft mapping was also sent to the IGED for their review, additional inputs and verification. Third, based on the IGED inputs, the draft was updated and presented to the IGED in the sixth annual meeting held virtually on 29 November 2021. Following the IGED meeting, the mapping was finalized.

The CRPD in the Arab Region

Table 1 below shows the status of signing and ratifying the CRPD and its Optional Protocol in the Arab region.² All Arab States have ratified the CRPD except for Lebanon, which signed it in 2007, and is in the process of ratifying it. The Lebanese Parliament adopted a law, on 29 March 2022, authorizing the Government to proceed with the ratification process.³



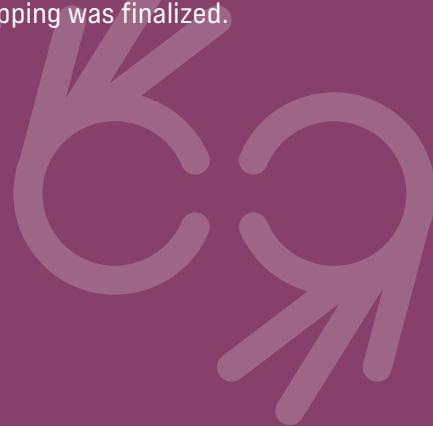
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Status of signing/ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Arab region



Country	Convention		Optional Protocol	
	Signed	Confirmed/acceded to/ratified	Signed	Confirmed/acceded to/ratified
Algeria	30/3/2007	4/12/2009	30/3/2007	-
Bahrain	25/6/2007	22/9/2011	-	-
Comoros	26/9/2007	16/6/2016	-	-
Djibouti	-	12/6/2012	-	12/6/2012
Egypt	4/4/2007	14/4/2008	-	-
Iraq	-	20/3/2013	-	-
Jordan	30/3/2007	31/3/2008	30/3/2007	-
Kuwait	-	22/8/2013	-	-
Lebanon	14/6/2007	-	14/6/2007	-
Libya	1/5/2008	13/2/2018	-	-
Mauritania	-	3/4/2012	-	3/4/2012
Morocco	30/3/2007	8/4/2009	-	8/4/2009
Oman	17/3/2008	6/1/2009	-	-
State of Palestine	-	2/4/2014	-	-
Qatar	9/7/2007	13/5/2008	9/7/2007	-
Saudi Arabia	-	24/6/2008	-	24/6/2008
Somalia	2/10/2018	6/8/2019	-	-
Sudan	30/3/2007	24/4/2009	-	24/4/2009
Syrian Arab Republic	30/3/2007	10/7/2009	-	10/7/2009
Tunisia	30/3/2007	2/4/2008	30/3/2007	2/4/2008
United Arab Emirates	8/2/2008	19/3/2010	12/2/2008	-
Yemen	30/3/2007	26/3/2009	11/4/2007	26/3/2009

Source: United Nations Treaty Collection (as of 15 July 2021).

Mapping national disability strategies in the arab region

13 out of 22 States⁴ in the Arab region have released national disability strategies, whether general in scope or more specialized, such as the “National Autism Strategy” in Qatar or the “Strategy for empowering people with disabilities in higher education and scientific research” in the Sudan. The full mapping of national disability strategy in the Arab Region can be reviewed in Annex 1.

First, the nine States⁵ that have not established national disability strategies have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of their regional peers and build strategies that respond to their local context and needs.

Second, a review of the existing 13 national disability strategies in addition to a review of the CRPD Committee’s concluding observations reveal a number of positive aspects and opportunities for further improvement. Below are some brief observations:

1. Commitment to a human rights approach to disability

The national disability strategies in the Arab region illustrate an increasing commitment to a human rights-based approach to disability as well as progress in legislative changes to ensure inclusion and prohibit discrimination. These strategies also support the national implementation and monitoring mechanisms regarding the rights of persons with disabilities, either through national human rights institutions or dedicated disability committees or councils.

2. Improving implementation and evaluation mechanisms for national disability strategies

At the same time, one recurring recommendation by the CRPD Committee is the need to improve measures for implementing and evaluating these strategies, especially since a few of them have expired and States will work on updating them or establishing new ones.

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a. Challenge of conflict and instability

It is worth mentioning that conflict and political fragility remain challenges for States in the region to develop new strategies or update existing ones. This is evident in Yemen, which developed a “National Disability Strategy” for 2014-2018.⁶ However, due to the ongoing conflict, there have been challenges to implementing and updating the strategy.

In other countries, such as Libya and the Sudan, political instability is inconducive to effective governing institutions, which are necessary in order to develop and implement national disability strategies.



b. Inclusive and participatory processes

In a questionnaire sent by ESCWA to IGED focal points,⁷ seven States (Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) indicated that their national disability strategies were developed in an inclusive and participatory process wherein different government agencies, non-government organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities were consulted. This is a positive trend and in line with the emphasis under the CRPD for a participatory and inclusive approach.

3. Lack of disability-inclusive disaster, humanitarian and emergency responses

Disability-inclusive approaches are needed in the design and implementation of disaster and emergency strategies. This gap was noted in several concluding remarks of the CRPD Committee, and a lesson learned from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The root cause of this gap is a lack of awareness of the necessity to include the needs of persons with disabilities in national disaster and emergency response plans. Such an awareness is a necessary condition to ensure the allocation of necessary resources and capacities. Disability-inclusive approaches to disaster and emergency responses can follow

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the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which stresses the importance of integrating a disability perspective, in addition to involving persons with disabilities themselves in the design and implementation phases per the principle of “nothing about us, without us”.

4. Opportunities to improve inclusive education

There are opportunities to improve inclusive education, through national disability strategies or by mainstreaming disability inclusion within national education plans. One challenge in the region is the continued segregation of education for children with disabilities, and there is a need to move towards inclusive education environments within the mainstream schooling system. This would require programmes, policies and investments in inclusive education technology, curricula and training. There are however significant experiences in this regard in the region. For example, Jordan launched a “10-year Strategy for Inclusive Education” for the years 2019-2029, which uses a phased approach in its theory of change. It focuses on legislative changes, awareness-raising, accessibility and reasonable accommodations, human resources and capacities, the inclusion of children who are usually excluded from education and focusing on research and data collection.⁸

5. Opportunities to improve inclusive health

There are opportunities to improve inclusive health, through national disability strategies or by mainstreaming disability inclusion within national health plans. This would help ensure access to healthcare for all persons with disabilities, especially women and those in rural areas. There is also a need to provide disability-inclusive training to medical staff on the human-rights approach to disability. In addition, there are opportunities to adopt community-based inclusive development (CBID)⁹ in the region. The older centralized medical approach to rehabilitation can be replaced with CBID, which is more holistic and people-centred and relies on a localized approach to ensure persons with disabilities are included in their community and have equal access to their rights in all areas: health, education, employment, sports, recreation and more.¹⁰

6. The need to invest in accessibility and digital inclusion

Despite legislative and policy progress to ensure accessibility of the built and digital environments in the region, gaps remain, which are especially visible if one explores the lived experience of persons with disabilities. In addition to being a human right, ensuring the accessibility of all facilities, public and private spaces, transportation and access to information and communication technology also has social and economic benefits. Accessibility benefits everyone in society and ensures social inclusion, not to mention the business case for it, as it opens up untapped market segments and drives innovation.¹¹

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Mapping national and thematic disability strategies in the arab region

1. National disability strategies

Country	English	Arabic title	Year	English link	Arabic link
Algeria	N/A				
Bahrain	National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities	الاستراتيجية الوطنية لحقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة في مملكة البحرين	2012-2016	N/A	[Link]
Comoros	N/A				
Djibouti	N/A				
Egypt	Medium-term strategy for the protection, rehabilitation and empowerment of persons with disabilities (aimed to be the starting point for a comprehensive strategy)	استراتيجية متوسطة المدى لحماية وتأهيل وتمكين الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة، بهدف أن تكون نقطة الانطلاق لإعداد استراتيجية شاملة	2017-2020	[Link]	[Link]
Iraq	N/A				
Jordan	National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities	الاستراتيجية الوطنية للأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة	2007-2015	N/A	N/A
	National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (Action Plan for the Second Phase)	الاستراتيجية الوطنية للأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة (خطط العمل للمرحلة الثانية)	2010-2015	N/A	[Link]
	National Policy to Ensure the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	السياسة الوطنية لضمان حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة في المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية	2020-2030	N/A	[Link]
Kuwait	N/A				
Lebanon	National Plan for Human Rights: Rights of Persons with Disabilities	الخطة الوطنية لحقوق الإنسان: حقوق المعوقين	2008	N/A	[Link]
Libya	N/A				
Mauritania	N/A				
Morocco	Integrated Public Policy to advance the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	السياسة العمومية المندمجة للنهوض بحقوق الأشخاص في وضعية إعاقة	ongoing policy	N/A	[Link]
	National Action Plan for the Integrated Public Policy to advance the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	مخطط العمل الوطني: للسياسة العمومية المندمجة للنهوض بحقوق الأشخاص في وضعية إعاقة	2017-2021	N/A	[Link]
Oman	Social Action Strategy	استراتيجية العمل الاجتماعي	2016-2025	N/A	[Link]

The State of Palestine	The National Strategic Plan of the Disability Sector in the Occupied Palestinian Territories	الخطة الاستراتيجية الوطنية لقطاع الإعاقة في الأراضي الفلسطينية المحتلة	2012	[Link]	N/A
Qatar	See thematic strategies				
Saudi Arabia	See thematic strategies				
Sudan	See thematic strategies				
Somalia	N/A				
Syrian Arab Republic	National Plan for the Care and Habilitation of People with Disabilities	الخطة الوطنية لرعاية وتأهيل الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة	2008	[Link]	N/A
Tunisia	N/A				
United Arab Emirates	National Policy for Empowering People of Determination	السياسة الوطنية لتمكين ذوي الإعاقة- أصحاب الهمم	Issued in 2017, still operational	[Link]	[Link]
Yemen	National Disability Strategy	الاستراتيجية الوطنية للإعاقة	2014-2018	N/A	[Link]

2. Thematic disability strategies

Country	English	Arabic title	Year	English link	Arabic link
Jordan	National Strategy for the Deinstitutionalisation of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan	الاستراتيجية الوطنية لبدائل دور الإيواء الحكومية والخاصة المتخصصة بالأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة في الأردن	2019	[Link]	[Link]
	10-year Strategy for Inclusive Education	الاستراتيجية العشرية للتعليم الدامج	2019-2029	[Link]	[Link]
	National Rehabilitation Strategic Plan	الاستراتيجية الوطنية لإعادة التأهيل	2020-2024	[Link]	[Link]
	National Plan for Rectifying Existing Buildings and Public Facilities	الخطة الوطنية لتصويب أوضاع المباني القائمة والمرافق العامة	2019-2029	N/A	[Link]
The State of Palestine	National Early Childhood Development and Intervention Strategy	الاستراتيجية الوطنية للتنمية والتدخل في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة	2017-2022	N/A	[Link]
Qatar	Qatar National Autism Plan	الاستراتيجية الوطنية للتوحد	2017-2021	N/A	N/A
	Qatar e-Accessibility Policy	سياسة قطر للنفاذ الرقمي	2011-ongoing	[Link]	N/A
Saudi Arabia	Special Education Strategy	استراتيجية التربية الخاصة	Still operational	N/A	[Link]
Sudan	Strategy for empowering people with disabilities in higher education and scientific research	استراتيجية تمكين ذوي الإعاقة في التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي	2018-2022	N/A	N/A

Submission of initial state party reports to the CRPD committee by Arab States

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Algeria [Link]	5 January 2015											
Bahrain [Link]										12 October 2017		
Comoros												
Djibouti [Link]	02 February 2016											
Egypt [Link]	04 February 2020											
Iraq [Link]							19 August 2015					
Jordan [Link]										3 October 2012		
Kuwait [Link]										24 September 2015		
Lebanon												
Libya												
Mauritania [Link]	31 January 2017											
Morocco [Link]		17 March 2014										
Oman [Link]										1 September 2014		
State of Palestine [Link]										14 June 2019		
Qatar [Link]										19 June 2012		
Saudi Arabia [Link]										1 July 2015		
Somalia												
Sudan [Link]										1 September 2014		
Syrian Arab Republic												
Tunisia [Link]										4 September 2018		
United Arab Emirates [Link]	24 January 2013											
Yemen												

Source: United Nations Treaty Collection (as of 15 July 2021).

Endnotes

1. The nine States that responded are: Bahrain, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.
2. The table includes all ESCWA member States in addition to members of the League of Arab States to provide a fuller picture of the region.
3. <https://lebanon.un.org/en/-176653statement-united-nations-resident-and-humanitarian-coordinator-lebanon-mrs-najat-rochdi>
4. The 13 States that have released national disability strategies are Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
5. The nine States that have not established national disability strategies are Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Somalia and Tunisia.
6. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/15/Yemen_National-Disability-Strategy-2014-%E2018-93%80%2.pdf.
7. ESCWA questionnaire on “National Disability Strategies in the Arab Region” sent to IGED members, October 2021.
8. https://moe.gov.jo/sites/default/files/the_-10year_strategy_for_inclsuive_education_0_0.pdf.
9. <https://www.cbm.org/in-action/community-based-inclusive-development-cbid/>.
10. In the region, the State of Palestine has an extensive experience in community-based rehabilitation programs, see: https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_disability_inclusion_report_2020_final.pdf.
11. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/business-case/>.



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