

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Committee on Social Development  
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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

## **Activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability**

### **Summary**

The Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (IGED) of the Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) comprises representatives of government institutions involved in disability and social development issues. IGED was established in September 2016 at the request of the Committee on Social Development to support member States in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level. IGED provides a platform for the exchange of experiences, knowledge and good practices between member States.

The current document provides a review of the activities undertaken by IGED since the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held virtually on 22 and 23 September 2021. The Committee is invited to take note of implemented activities and make comments to guide the work of the ESCWA secretariat in this field.

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## **Introduction**

1. In the Arab region, there is a major gap for a sustainable and structural mechanism to facilitate peer to peer learning and exchange of knowledge in the area of disability inclusion. Despite the fact that member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) have been pursuing transformational changes in their policies and programmes on disability inclusion, they lacked a regional institutionalized mechanism to facilitate learning from the best practices and experiences of their neighbours and globally.
2. To fill this gap, ESCWA established the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (IGED) in September 2016. IGED provides a regional platform aimed at strengthening collaboration, coordination, and the exchange of experiences in the field of disability issues. Nineteen countries have appointed IGED focal points, who are senior government officials responsible for disability issues. While the remaining country, Algeria, did not assign a specific focal point, it has nominated different attendees for IGED meetings.
3. Since 2016, IGED has contributed to improving the implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past years, ESCWA, as the secretariat of IGED; has organized meetings to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences between members of IGED, which led to a tangible change in policies through South-South cooperation.
4. IGED has held seven formal meetings (Beirut, September 2016; Amman, July 2017; Riyadh, May 2018; Cairo, December 2019; online, December 2020; online, November 2021; Beirut, October 2022). IGED members also participated in a number of specialized training courses, regional workshops, and provided input to national and regional reports.
5. ESCWA work to support disability inclusion through IGED stems from its commitment to inclusive development and to leaving no one behind. ESCWA launched its own Disability Inclusion Policy in December 2021, in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). The policy showcases the ESCWA three-pillar approach to disability inclusion. Firstly, it supports member States in implementing targeted disability inclusion policies and initiatives. Secondly, it supports member States to mainstream disability rights in other sectoral strategies and policies. Thirdly, ESCWA also works internally to mainstream disability inclusion within the organization operationally and programmatically. Through annual action plans that take into account previous progress and planned remedial actions, ESCWA has been making steady progress in implementing the policy and UNDIS. The work of IGED is one example of the first and second pillar, allowing ESCWA to support member States achieve greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

## **I. IGED activities**

6. Since the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held virtually on 22 and 23 September 2021, members of IGED have been active in influencing regional priorities on disability inclusion, where they have been leading a shift in the approach to disability inclusion from a medical model to a social one capitalizing on the various policy frameworks and tools produced by ESCWA. Since its fourth meeting in December 2019, IGED has been consistently supporting member States in applying this shift in approach in national disability policies and action plans. This approach had been reflected in the functional assessment and disability determination in Egypt, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.
7. In addition to the advocacy role played by members of IGED, two annual meetings were held to discuss regional priorities.

**A. Sixth IGED meeting on disability assessment and determination,  
national strategies on disability, and physical accessibility**

(Virtual, 29 November 2021)

8. The sixth meeting of IGED held virtually on 29 November 2021 focused on three main substantive topics: (a) disability assessment and determination; (b) national strategies on disability; and (c) physical accessibility, in addition to general updates and the 2022 work plan and agenda. Somalia was represented in the sixth IGED meeting for the first time.

9. The meeting included presentations and discussions by IGED members on national disability assessment and determination efforts since the fifth IGED meeting (December 2020).

10. In recognition that national disability strategies help build the policy and legal framework to pass laws, programmes, and initiatives to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, IGED members discussed their national disability strategies and experiences in developing and implementing them. The discussion built on ESCWA's "Policy brief on Mapping National Disability Strategies in the Arab Region" ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/POLICY BRIEF.3](#)).

11. Finally, the meeting discussed accessibility in the physical environment in the Arab region; the discussion was supported by ESCWA's "Policy brief on innovative solutions to ensure physical accessibility in the Arab region" ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/POLICY BRIEF.4](#)).

**B. Seventh IGED meeting on challenges and recommendations related  
to the implementation of CRPD and the Community-based**

**Inclusive Development approach**

(Beirut, 18–19 October 2022)

12. The seventh meeting of IGED focused on two main substantive topics: (a) implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and (b) Community-based Inclusive Development (CBID), in addition to general updates. The seventh IGED meeting was the first physical meeting since 2019. It was attended by more persons with disabilities than previously, reflecting a positive trend in the region where persons with disabilities are increasingly appointed as decision makers and policymakers. Algeria was represented in the seventh IGED meeting for the first time.

13. IGED members discussed their experiences in the implementation of the Convention. ESCWA supported the conversation by presenting a review of the challenges countries face in implementing it and policy recommendations for successful implementation, as outlined in the policy brief "Challenges in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Arab region" ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/POLICY BRIEF.10](#)).

14. Finally, the updated definition of disability in the Convention embraces CBID, which would enhance the independence and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. IGED members discussed CBID in the Arab region, supported by a forthcoming ESCWA policy brief on the subject.

**II. Future areas of work**

15. Throughout the years, IGED has been a catalyst for change towards greater inclusion for persons with disabilities through peer learning and exchange and South-to-South cooperation.

16. To build on this work, the agenda of the next IGED meeting will include one of the following areas recommended by IGED members:

(a) Raising awareness on disability inclusion: targeting both decision-makers and the general public to address the misconceptions and negative stereotypes that remain a barrier to disability inclusion;

(b) Disability assessment and determination: it is suggested to build on the cumulative work of the fourth, fifth, and sixth IGED meetings and support Arab countries to adopt the new approach to disability assessment and classification;

(c) Addressing barriers to the implementation of CRPD through capacity development, and through mainstreaming disability issues in national plans, strategies, and programmes;

(d) Improving disability disaggregated data on a national and regional level;

(e) Increasing the role of national councils of persons with disabilities as a key instrument for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

17. The Committee on Social Development is invited to take note of IGED activities and to comment on work priorities in disability areas for the coming period.

## **Annex I**

### **IGED responsibilities**

1. The Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (IGED) was established at the request of the ESCWA Committee on Social Development at its tenth session (Rabat, 8–9 September 2015) to support member States in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level.
2. IGED members' responsibilities cover the following issues:
  - (a) Act as the main interlocutor for receiving and responding to communications from ESCWA on disability issues, including through coordination with ministries and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate;
  - (b) Advise ESCWA on national developments in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including institutional, legal and policy processes, and in the field of data and statistics on disability;
  - (c) Participate in in-person and online IGED meetings, and participate (or nominate other representatives to participate) in other meetings related to disability and social development;
  - (d) Exchange information with other members on experiences, good practices and lessons learned, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and improving their participation in social development;
  - (e) Develop and implement biennial work plans and review performance based on desired outcomes at each formal meeting;
  - (f) Review the financial needs of IGED and propose funding sources;
  - (g) Submit a biennial report on IGED achievements to the ESCWA Committee on Social Development.

## Annex II

## Members of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability

Country	Name	Professional titles	Ministry/organization
Bahrain	Najwa Janahi	Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Social Welfare and Rehabilitation	Ministry of Social Development
Egypt	Iman Karim	Secretary-General	National Council for Disability Affairs, Cairo
Iraq	Abir al-Jalabi	Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
	Ali Alhillo	Director of Pension and Security Office	Commission for the Care of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Jordan	Muhannad Alazzeah	Secretary-General	Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
	Razan al-Kurdi	Director	
Kuwait	Alkhansaa al-Husseini	Director of the Planning and Research Department	Public Authority for Disability Affairs
Lebanon	Abdallah Ahmad	Director-General	Ministry of Social Affairs
Libya	Bashir al-Fitouri	Disability adviser at the Ministry of Social Affairs	Ministry of Social Affairs
Mauritania	Abdullah Adiakiti	Legal Adviser	Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family
	Alioun Haidara Muhammed Lahbib	Director of Persons with Disabilities	
Morocco	Ahmed Sheikhi	Director of Prevention, Accessibility and Assistance Division	Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family
	Aziz Azerbi	Director of the Prevention and Awareness Department	
Oman	Hammoud bin Mirdad bin Hammoud al-Shabibi	Director-General; Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities	Ministry of Social Development
	Mohammed Hamad Mubarak al-Habsi	Head of the Employment Follow-up Department	
State of Palestine	Ajaj Ajaj	Director of the Department of Persons with Disabilities	Ministry of Social Development
Qatar	Laalei Abu Alfain	Executive Director of Shafallah Center	Qatar Social Work
Saudi Arabia	Abdullah al-Otaibi	Director of the General Directorate for International Cooperation	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development
	Hisham al-Haidari	Executive Director	Authority for the Care of Persons with Disabilities

<b>Country</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Professional titles</b>	<b>Ministry/organization</b>
Somalia	Mohammed Nadif	Advisor to the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Sudan	Rehab Mustafa	Secretary-General	National Council for Persons with Disabilities
Syrian Arab Republic	Khadija Arsan	Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
Tunisia	Raja bin Brahim	Director of Solidarity and Social Development	Ministry of Social Affairs
	Walid bin Belqasim Al Qasimi	Assistant Director of the Directorate Administration for Social Advancement	Directorate General of Social Advancement, Ministry of Social Affairs
United Arab Emirates	Wafaa Hamad bin Suleiman	Director of the Department for the Care and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities	Ministry of Community Development
Yemen	Faisal al-Maqtari	Adviser	Disability Welfare and Rehabilitation Fund, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

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