

Dialogue with experts on older women and organizations for women and girls with disabilities on the regional review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after thirty years

Key messages

On 6 August 2024, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) organized an online dialogue with representatives of a number of organizations working on the rights of women and girls with disabilities and older women from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia. The dialogue was aimed at discussing the achievements made over the previous five years in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and identifying challenges and priorities for action in the following years. Participants in the meeting stressed that the inclusion of issues of persons with disabilities in various fields remained insufficient despite achievements. In the absence of disaggregated monitoring of social conditions by gender, age and disability, data are insufficient to formulate policies that address the challenges faced by women with disabilities or older women. In addition, women and girls with disabilities and older women are excluded from national policymaking and suffer from social stigmatization and multifaceted, cumulative and intersecting discrimination. They face discrimination not only on the basis of sex, but also on the basis of disability or age with its implications on their social and economic reality. At the end of the meeting, participants delivered some key messages to the international community and decision makers in Arab countries.

At the outset, participants stressed the importance of adhering to international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially for ratifying countries, as well as adhering to other reference documents such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The participants condemned the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and all inhumane practices and genocide committed against the Palestinian people. They also stressed the need to highlight the impact of the Israeli colonial occupation on the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem, and the unprecedented targeting of civilians, especially women and children, since the Second World War. They also noted the high number of victims among persons with disabilities, as reported in the regional reviews and the outcome document, which set out the global commitment and priorities for action over the following five years for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs.

Discussing the 6 dimensions that integrate the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the SDGs, participants concluded with the following key messages:

- Shift to the political, social and human rights perspective adopted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities instead of the medical perspective contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
- Call on international organizations to centrally integrate the issues of women with disabilities and older women into their international support and cooperation programmes.
- Promote a holistic approach to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the coming years, obliging States to pay attention to the issues of persons with disabilities and older persons, especially women, and build on past achievements and developments to address the gaps and challenges that continue to hinder the full inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and older women.
- Urge States and regional organizations to adopt a common definition of persons with disabilities in order to formulate and analyse relevant regional reports in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- Harmonize domestic laws with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and adopt laws consistent with its provisions.
- Urge ministries and national institutions to adopt an intersectional approach to all forms of human existence in development work and in the design of national policies, and include the needs of persons with disabilities and older persons in national or women's strategies, plans and budgets, including national plans for the implementation of the Security Council resolution on women, peace and security.
- Work with organizations of persons with disabilities and national organizations dealing with older persons' issues, and benefit from their experience and knowledge of the reality and needs of persons with disabilities and older persons, especially women, to ensure their representation at the national level.
- Attach importance to the situation of women caregivers of persons with disabilities by developing policies that address obstacles affecting their health and limiting their professional, social and economic participation, and by providing them with direct support, especially those who lose their jobs to care for their children.
- Criminalize age-based or other discrimination in all employment-related cases and prohibit the mandatory retirement age.
- Build more inclusive social protection systems to secure income for women with disabilities and older women, including expanding coverage and reforming pension systems to include more older persons and persons with disabilities, especially women working in the private and informal sectors.
- Prioritize universal coverage of health-care services to ensure the well-being of women and girls with disabilities and older women.
- Expand and increase adult learning, especially in areas with high illiteracy rates among older persons.
- Respect the right of women with disabilities and older women to access comprehensive and quality health services, including reproductive and sexual health services.
- Promote positive discrimination for women and girls with disabilities and older women within social and service policies and sectors, including health insurance.
- Develop and enforce laws to combat violence and abuse against older persons, and develop support programmes for women and girls with disabilities and older women survivors of violence.
- Increase societal awareness of disability issues, emphasize the inclusion of persons with disabilities, especially women, in various aspects of life, and spread the culture of enhancing the economic and political participation of women with disabilities as well as empowering them and building their capacities.
- Deploy efforts to develop mechanisms, tools and institutions that help prepare specialized surveys and provide intersectional data on the situation of persons with disabilities and older persons, and rely on these surveys and data in the development of national policies that contribute to improved conditions in society.
- Adopt effective approaches to strengthen partnership with the private sector and develop formal mechanisms to monitor the implementation of procedures, laws and policies for older persons and persons with disabilities.
- Adopt an approach that takes into account the needs of girls and women with disabilities and older women in planning for access to natural resources, in-kind assistance and relief in situations of war, conflict, natural and epidemic disasters, and climate change.
- Provide accommodation and accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons to enable them to exercise their rights and freedoms, encourage women and girls with disabilities and older women to use modern and accessible technology, and adapt digital contents to their intellectual and cognitive qualifications.