**Conference on Transition towards Independent Living within the Community**

**For Persons with Disabilities**

*Draft Concept Note & Organization of Work*

***14-15 February 2023***

1. **Background on the Arab-EU Research Network on Disability**

The Arab-EU Research Network on Disability was founded in 2022 by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Government of Malta and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It acts as an inter-regional platform for knowledge exchange and capacity building. It will bring together academics, researchers and institutions from both Europe and the Arab region for the shared objective of pursing research as a driver for change to ensure greater social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The Network is established under the umbrella of the “**Valletta Political Declaration”** which affirmed the rights of persons with disabilities, and which also established the “EU-Arab Cooperation Forum on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (to be known as the “**Valletta Forum”**). The declaration was signed on 25 April 2019 in a forum co-hosted by the Maltese government and ESCWA. Twenty countries and entities adopted the Valletta Declaration: Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, State of Palestine, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Tunisia, together with ESCWA and the League of Arab States.

1. **Article 19 of the CRPD: Transition towards Independent Living within the Community**

This academic conference will focus on the theme of independent living and being included in the community, a right confirmed in Article 19 of the CRPD. It states that “States Parties to the present Convention recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community”[[1]](#footnote-1).

However, this right is far from realized. A study by ESCWA on “Barriers to implementing Article 19: A study on the institutionalization of persons with disabilities in select Arab countries”[[2]](#footnote-2) found that there is large knowledge gap on the status of residential institutions currently set up in the region. The study also found that “few of the institutions studied are providing the kind of care and services required to facilitate the integration and independent living of persons with disabilities in their communities. It also found that in many Arab states, families often turn to institutionalization due to a lack of alternative care options and the inaccessibility of many public spaces, services and facilities.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **Call for Papers**

The Network issued a Call for Papers in April 2022 and received a number of abstracts. A peer-review committee was founded, and it selected the best submissions. The selected papers will be presented during the conference and published in both English and Arabic.

1. **Date and location**

The conference will be held in-person at the UN-House in Beirut, Lebanon on Tuesday and Wednesday 14-15 February 2023. Arabic and English interpretation will be available during the event.

1. **Participants**

The target audience for this conference would be all relevant stakeholders from both Europe and the Arab region, including policy makers, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), universities, researchers, and representatives from the public and private sector.**Provisional Organization of Work**

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| **Day (1)** | |
| *9:00- 9:30* | *Registration* |
| **Conference on “Transition towards Independent Living within the Community”** | |
| 9:30 – 10:20 | **Opening remarks**   * Dr. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UN-ESCWA * Hon. Julia Farrugia Portelli, Minister for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations and Consumer Rights, Malta (video message) * Dr. Gerard Quinn, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities * Ms. Saba Almubaslat, Director, Middle East and North Africa Office, Ford Foundation |
| 10:20 – 10:30 | **Keynote speech**  “Independent Living "IS" Living in the Community”, Ms. Nadia Haddad, Disability Advocate and Expert, Co-Chair of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum (EDF). (video Message) |
| 10:30 – 10:40 | *Coffee break* |
| 10:40 – 11:20 | **Session 1: Independent Living under the CRPD: challenges and opportunities in Europe and Arab region**  **Moderator:** Dr. Nawaf Kabbara, President of the Arab Organization for Persons with Disabilities   * Dr. Tarek El Nabulsi, Minister Plenipotentiary, Director of Development and Social Policies Department, League of Arab States * “UN Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ Perspective on Independent Living,” Dr. Muhannad Al Azzeh, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Secretary General of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jordan * “Outcomes of ESCWA’s Sub-Regional Consultations with OPDs on Independent Living,” Ms. Sumaya Almajthoob, Associate Social Affairs Officer, ESCWA   *Discussion Q&A* |
| 11:20 – 12:20 | **Session 2: Technology and inclusion**  **Moderator and Discussant:** Ms. Samantha Pace Gasan, Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability, Malta   * “Views of persons with disabilities on the future of assistive technologies: would they help them to become more independent?” Ms. Laura Alčiauskaitė (10 min) * Discussant (5 min) * “Access to knowledge through digital inclusion; the case of students with visual disabilities in Cadi Ayyad University, Morocco”, Ms. Hanan Zaafrani (10 min) * Discussant (5 min)   *Discussion Q&A (30 min)* |
| 12:20 – 13:40 | **Session 3: Country case studies and good practices**  **Moderator:** Dr. Alaa Sebeh, Regional Adviser on Disability, ESCWA  *Ministerial statements:*   * Excellency Ms. Awatif Hayar, Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family of Morocco (video message) * Excellency Ms. Wafaa Al-Kilani, Minister of Social Affairs of Libya (video message)   *Country presentations:*   * “The Experience of Jordan in Independent Living”, Dr. Muhannad Al Azzeh, Secretary General of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jordan * “Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) in Morocco and in the Arab Region,” Mr. Ahmed Haoute, Coordinator of Morocco’s CBR/CBID Network * “Opportunities and challenges of independent living in Europe: Case study of Malta,” Dr. Alistair De Gaetano, Administrator at the Directorate for Disability Issues in the Ministry of Inclusion, Voluntary Organizations and Consumer Rights of Malta   *Discussion Q&A* |
| 13:40 – 14:30 | *Lunch* |
| 14:30 – 15:30 | **Session 4: Approaches to independent living in Europe**  **Moderator and Discussant:** Ms. Sylvana Lakkis, President of the Arab Forum for Persons with Disabilities   * “The commitment of the European Union to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the right to independent living within the community”, Mr. Lazar Stefanović (10 min) * Discussant (5 min) * “A public-private partnership approach for accessible and affordable independent living in Estonia”, Mr. Meelis Joost (10 min) * Discussant (5 min)   *Discussion Q&A (30 min)* |
| **Day (2)** |  |
| 9:30 – 9:40 | *Recap of main outcomes of day 1* |
| 9:40 – 10:40 | **Session 5: Independent living for children and students**  **Moderator and Discussant:** Dr. Heba Kotb, Associate Professor of Practice Psychology, American University of Cairo   * “Pathologisation of disabled childhood as an impediment to independent living”, Mr. Radoš Keravica (10 min) * Discussant (5 min) * “A pilot study: The effectiveness of a proposed functional curriculum in giving female students with moderate intellectual disabilities functional/life skills in Saudi Arabia”, Ms. Ikhlas Sawaf (10 min) * Discussant (5 min)   *Discussion Q&A (30 min)* |
| 10:40 – 11:00 | *Coffee break* |
| 11:00 – 12:00 | **Session 6: Transition after university and finding work**  **Moderator:** Mr. Ajaj Ajaj General Director of Persons with Disabilities Directorate at the Ministry of Social Development in State of Palestine  **Discussant:** Ms. Busaina Al Atari, National consultant on disability inclusion at theMinistry of Social Development in State of Palestine   * “Does disability affect labour market outcomes? Application of the case of Egypt”, Ms. Aida Ramadan and Ms.Racha Ramadan (10 min) * Discussant (5 min) * “Life after university and independent living: Case study of persons with disabilities in Oman”, Ms. Rahma Kalbaniah (10 min) * Discussant (5 min)   *Discussion Q&A (30 min)*   * Intervention by Qatar Foundation: “Making Education City inclusive of persons with disabilities using the lessons learned from hosting the World Cup” (5-7 min) |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | **Session 7: Workshop on Future Prospects of Young Researchers, and Bridging Research and Policymaking for Disability Inclusion**  **Moderator:** Dr. Anne-Marie Callus, Associate Professor, University of Malta |
| 13:00 – 13:15 | **Concluding remarks**   * Dr. Mehrinaz El-Awady, Director of the Population, Gender and Inclusive Development Cluster (5 minutes) * Dr. Gerard Quinn, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (5 minutes) * Dr. Alistair De Gaetano, Administrator at the Directorate for Disability Issues in the Ministry of Inclusion, Voluntary Organizations and Consumer Rights of Malta (5 minutes) |
| 13:15 – 14:15 | *Lunch* |

1. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-19-living-independently-and-being-included-in-the-community.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/barriers-implementing-article19-institutionalization-persons-disabilities-en_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-19-living-independently-and-being-included-in-the-community.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)