



Rights of persons with disabilities and international cooperation



Armadilla scs

Introduction

In this Notebook we propose one of the priority themes of international cooperation: care and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Over one billion people, about 15% of the world's population, live with some form of disability. At least one-fifth of these, some 110-190 million individuals, face "very significant" difficulties in everyday life. Furthermore, disability rates are increasing due to the ageing of the population. These data are contained in the first World Report on Disability, developed by the World Health Organization and the World Bank and whose original text can be found on the website [WORLD REPORT FROM WHO: THE DISABLED IN THE WORLD ARE 1 BILLION - Disabled.com](http://WORLDREPORTFROMWHO:THEDISABLEDINTHEWORLDARE1BILLION-Disabled.com).

Among the issues highlighted: Discrimination, together with lack of health care and rehabilitation, comes first, followed by architectural barriers: public transport, inaccessible buildings and information technology.

The consequences of these difficulties that accompany the lives of people with disabilities are generally more precarious health than the average, poorer educational and professional opportunities, poverty and a lower level of education, precisely because of the difficulties in accessing higher education. The difference between the percentage of disabled children and the percentage of able-bodied children attending primary school ranges from 10% in India to 60% in Indonesia. The deficiency in the school's integrative system is obviously also reflected in the realities of work. Overall data show that work rates are lower for men (53%) and women with disabilities (20%), compared to able-bodied men (65%) and women (30%). Moreover, **in OECD countries, the percentage of disabled people in employment is 44%, compared to 75% for the able-bodied.** The data collected shows that in many countries rehabilitation services are inadequate. The data collected in four countries in Southern Africa show that only 26-55% of disabled people received the medical rehabilitation they needed, while only 17-37% got the necessary medical devices (wheelchairs, prostheses, hearing aids).

Even in high-income countries, between 20% and 40% of people with disabilities are generally unable to meet their needs in everyday activities. Through the report attached to this discouraging report, WHO and the World Bank urge governments to renew their efforts to provide this large segment of the population access to essential services and to invest in targeted programmes to unlock the vast potential of people with disabilities.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals has given the issue of disability a new centrality in international development strategies. In many Objectives we find direct references to persons with disabilities: n.4 (education), n. 8 (employment), n.10 (inequalities) and n.11 (sustainable cities) all closely linked by the human rights approach. It is important to highlight the interdependence of the objectives and related targets with particular reference to education, health, violence, especially gender-based violence, emergency, accessibility and training.

The Italian cooperation has approved the Guidelines for Disability that you can find in [LINEE-GUIDA-DISABILITA-2018.pdf \(aics.gov.it\)](#).

Armadilla, in line with the principles established at international level, has made a consistent commitment by proposing in its interventions in this sector a participatory approach that provides for the active involvement of the community, central and local institutions and civil society, promoting multidisciplinary and intersectorality.

1. Policies and principles of reference

The interventions of international cooperation for the defense of the rights of persons with disabilities have as a fundamental reference the United Nations Convention on Disabilities that you can read in the following link:

[Libretto Tutti uguali:Layout 1 \(lavoro.gov.it\)](#)

The following is stated in Article 1:

"The purpose of the present Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

The principles of the Convention concern:

- a) Respect for the inherent dignity, individual autonomy - including the freedom to make one's own choices - and independence of persons;
- b) non-discrimination;
- c) full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- d) respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity itself;
- e) equality of opportunity;
- f) accessibility;
- g) equality between men and women;
- h) respect for the development of the capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identity (art.3).

This Convention in article 7 gives guidance for children with disabilities:

- States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by children with disabilities on an equal basis with other children.
- In all actions concerning children with disabilities, the best interests of the child will be a primary consideration. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters concerning

them, their views being duly taken into account in relation to their age and maturity, on the basis of equality with other children, and that adequate assistance is provided in relation to disability and age in order to achieve this right.

The WHO identifies as a winning strategy the Community Based Inclusive Development, which provides for the involvement of public actors responsible for the provision of essential services and thus for the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities in various areas: health, education, work, social services, etc.

The guidelines for this methodology can be found on the CBR Guidelines website (who.int). This strategy provides for the empowerment of people with disabilities and their organizations, promoting mainstreaming of disability, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas where cooperation operates. This approach provides for the cross-integration of disability issues into all social, economic, legislative, political and cultural policies and practices. This indicates the inclusion of people with disabilities among beneficiaries of all international cooperation activities, providing appropriate support for the enjoyment of their rights and defining interventions related to their needs.

Italian cooperation has identified the rights of people with disabilities among the priorities of its programming. The subjects operating in this field are given recommendations that Armadilla has also hired as guides of its own work in order to respond effectively to the difficult challenges that the different local realities pose:

- Support increased investment in projects for people with disabilities.
- Programmes for training on inclusive and sustainable design in order to achieve mainstreaming of disability in all phases of the projects: planning, management, monitoring and evaluation.
- To improve the quality of the AICS data collection system, in particular for projects entrusted to CSOs by local AICS offices, in the context of humanitarian aid and demining programmes, through an accurate use of the "disability marker" inserted in the new AICS information system.
- To support initiatives in which beneficiaries include people with mental, sensory and/or intellectual disabilities, also through cultural awareness activities and the development of specialist skills.
- Systematize and disseminate good practices implemented by projects, including those carried out by international bodies in order to achieve a multiplier effect through more intense collaboration with the United Nations and its agencies, the European Union and national agencies for international cooperation.
- To strengthen the capacity of the implementing agencies to carry out ex ante, in itinere and ex post quality assessments of the initiatives financed by AICS in order to collect disaggregated data useful to verify the impact of the projects, always giving them appropriate dissemination and visibility.

- Disseminate more innovative approaches and tools such as: empowerment of people with disabilities, in particular women with disabilities, emancipatory disability research, emergency peer counselors, new information technologies.

In 2014, in the absence of a specific OECD DAC code for the classification of projects and with the aim of having timely information on **the commitments of the Italian Cooperation in favour of persons with disabilities**, a special working group was set up that proposed the inclusion, in the internal information system, of a specific "marker" for disability in line with the provisions of the Disability Action Plan adopted by the Italian Cooperation. The inclusion of the marker took place in May of 2014 and made it possible to more accurately incorporate the principles of Aid Efficiency and Development defined at international level. The marker was applied to the initiatives being approved and the scores awarded (from 0 to 4) corresponds to a percentage that quantifies the actual financial investment of the disability project, allowing also to collect information on projects, not entirely targeted at the sector, which include within them components of disability activities, from a mainstreaming perspective.

2. ARMADILLA OPERATION

Armadilla carries out projects in defense of the rights of people with disabilities in Syria and Lebanon. In order to guide its interventions, it has adopted the basic principles indicated in the UN Convention for people with disabilities and the guidelines and orientations proposed by the Italian cooperation. **It agrees with the need to adopt the theme of disability as mainstreaming and with a multi-sectoral approach in cooperation interventions with the aim of abandoning the welfarist model and building networks that are able to enhance public and private resources in different sectors.** Access to health services must be guaranteed to all without distinction. In the educational sector, the need to work alongside institutions emerges in order to influence the phenomena of school drop-outs and child labor, which have a negative impact on the community as a whole. **The community is the key element to ensure sustainability together with the involvement of people with disabilities and their organizations.** Its role becomes crucial also in the educational-recreational activities through the support to non-formal education centers that favor the processes of socialization and social inclusion outside the school environment. **In the labor sector an important challenge is to work with and for women with disabilities, who live situations of multidiscrimination.** In this direction, supporting their participation in different economic activities represents a challenge that needs inclusive awareness raising and training processes of all the actors involved. It is essential that the projects favor the passage from an emergency perspective to a development one, linking disaster risk reduction to a more medium-long term intervention perspective, supporting and rooting the positive changes triggered in the community through a *bottom-up* community approach that enhances people and makes them "owners" of the development actions. In this way, the

project activities are not perceived as an external intervention, but as a concrete change within the community and achieved with their own strength. Community members thus increase not only their own abilities, but also their self-esteem and therefore their ability to react promptly and positively when a risk or threat arises. In the objectives examined, accessibility is reported in most cases on the infrastructure aspect of schools to ensure the standards necessary for the inclusion of children/and disabled people in ordinary schools through various tools such as access ramps, the use of sanitary facilities and the possibility of using playgrounds as well as others. Accessibility also refers to educational materials for visual and hearing disabilities through the presence of operators, mediators (e.g. a sign language expert) to ensure participation in activities. The importance of specialized human resources, which play an important role as mediators and are indicators of contextual inclusiveness, is underlined.

In Syria Armadilla has carried out projects since 2004, in collaboration with the local partner, the Association of Women, Zahret Al-Madan (ZAM), working mainly on disability. In the last ten years, Syria has been going through a dramatic period of war and destruction, the consequences of which are far from exhausted in the places where firefights continue. Clashes and conflicts have resulted in over 500,000 deaths and over 12 million people have had to flee their homes and communities. **Despite this escalation of violence and deprivation for the population, Armadilla continues to work alongside and for civil society, carrying out humanitarian interventions to meet the most immediate needs of the population, food, assistance and protection.** The situation of generalized fear and destruction, not only material but also psychological, hinders the possibility of peaceful coexistence among local communities. But the stories of the lives, sufferings and desires of the people who are experiencing this drama call for a commitment by all to recreate conditions in which human dignity is respected and weapons give way to dialogue and peace. Armadilla, in Syria, together with ZAM, has been managing for more than ten years a reception centre and social activities that has become over time **a fundamental reference point for the families** that find support and protection there. Armadilla was thus able to develop a program, funded by UN agencies, the Waldensian Church and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, for the most vulnerable families in the suburbs of Damascus and in the rural areas of the city. This program, in which several projects and activities of humanitarian aid and technical capacity building of local actors are integrated, is based on the principles of social inclusion and implements special activities for people with disabilities. **Step by step, Armadilla is scaling up the program, involving local and international actors: regions, municipalities, NGOs, cooperatives, companies.** An attempt to systemize and operate effectively. Among these entities, an important role is played by the Emilia Romagna Region, which has involved the ASPHI Foundation of Bologna (<http://www.asphi.it>) and its "Click4all" project (<http://www.click4all.com/>). The project was born with the ambition to build a digital world for everyone, especially for disabled children who are the most excluded from a shared community life. The situation is aggravated in the war situation destroying

Syria. For Armadilla, the relationship with Montecatone Rehabilitation Institute of Imola (BO), Ortopedic Institute Rizzoli (Bologna), INAIL Prosthesis Center of Vigorso di Budrio (BO) is also central, as they are available to host visits and brief internships for the managers of the Prosthesis Center of Damascus and the Ministry of Health of Syria.

The Faculty of Occupational Therapy of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE), which together with Armadilla and the Syrian foundation Aamal supported the creation of the first Occupational Therapy course in Syria. UNIMORE professors co-ordinate the course at Manara University in Latakia and carry out teaching, distance tutoring and exams for students. This project allowed to lay the basis for the recognition of the three-year curriculum by the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education.

In addition, in 2020, Armadilla prepared and presented to all the actors with whom it works an **action plan to strengthen the capacities of Syrian actors in the field of social inclusion and care for people with disabilities.**

The plan, which is based on experience developed on Italian territory and taking into account the international landscape for disability activities, aims to map the path to be used in Syria, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of local actors to address disability improving the lives of people with disabilities and promoting social inclusion at all levels.

The approach adopted in drafting the plan starts from the inescapable concept of the promotion and protection of the rights of people with disabilities in view primarily of the discrimination that affects them.

The strategy is developed according to different levels and taking into account the following methodologies:

- *Universal Design* - in line with the strategy set out in Art. 2 of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;**
- *Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID)*, which involves **providers of essential public services** and bases the rights of persons with disabilities in several areas: health, education, employment, social services, etc;
- *Transversality* - this approach pursues **the mainstreaming of disability issues into all social, economic, legislative, political and cultural policies and practices**, emphasising the need for inclusion of people with disabilities in every area of society and life;
- *Binary approach* - expressing the need on the one hand to increase efforts to implement and encourage cross-cutting disability policies, and on the other hand to **implement immediate concrete initiatives specifically aimed at people with disabilities;**
- *Bio-psycho-social model of disability* - the approach defines disability as **the consequence or result of a relationship between health conditions, personal causes and environmental factors.** The ICF tool (International Classification of Functioning by WHO) should be considered as a conceptual reference for inclusive development, in line with the definition of disability of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Participatory and interdisciplinary approach - since it is necessary to pursue the goal of an inclusive society, **design and research activities based on a participatory and**

interdisciplinary approach represent the strategic methodological tool to design proposals aimed at empowering people with disabilities.

From this intervention strategy, Armadilla will develop its actions in areas of tangible intervention, including:

Training - training of all stakeholders (including public and private service providers), health care providers, social and school workers, caregivers, both informally (families) and professionally, both on technical issues and on the process of empowerment and involvement of people with disabilities;

Community Awareness - crucial element in promoting social inclusion. Awareness-raising actions on the issues of the rights of persons with disabilities contained in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities need to be strengthened. In particular, the activity aims to inform and involve families and the whole community to support and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the whole society, preventing all forms of isolation and segregation, especially children and women with disabilities often subjected to violence and abuse.

Institutional Advocacy - to lead and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and promote their inclusion in society at all levels.

Education - it is necessary to implement actions that facilitate access to quality education (from pre-school to university), to promote and support the development of inclusive schools, to support the training of teachers, school operators, parents and local communities for the implementation of inclusive education, to promote the use of tools that facilitate the learning processes of children with disabilities, with a specific focus on new technologies for teaching.

Decent Work - It is necessary to promote initiatives and policies that facilitate access to work or activities that produce a decent income, including the design of technical training schools and involving the world of private enterprise in the process. It is also important to promote the principles of "Business and Human Rights". and corporate social responsibility.

Health - the promotion and protection of health is crucial for the care and inclusion of people with disabilities. It is necessary to promote the prevention of risk factors for the onset of disability, to strengthen the ability to make early diagnoses, with particular reference to deafness and the risk of blindness, to promote the right of access to basic health services, assistance and rehabilitation, to strengthen territorial networks with specific and intensive training of social and health workers to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, including critical issues related to domestic violence and abuse.

Prevention, support and protection for disabled victims of violence - Actions to support victims of violence, in particular women with disabilities, should be promoted; to terminate inform and train local operators on prevention and support to victims of violence, to promote family and community awareness on violence and abuse against people with disabilities, to promote the knowledge of social and health operators on the sexuality of people with disabilities, a topic often ignored.

Institutional strengthening and empowerment of civil society - Institutional strengthening and support and capacity building of disability actors for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities as well as preparation, review and enforcement of relevant legislation should be identified as a priority.

In Lebanon, the sector of the rights of people with disabilities is also a priority in the cooperation interventions that Armadilla carries out.

Starting from the analysis of documents at national level and preliminary meetings with stakeholders operating in these territories, the following intervention strategy was proposed to the local partners:

The strategic objective to be pursued, in the medium-long term, is the social inclusion of people with disabilities. This, of course, also implies the concept of inclusive education.

1. Considering the potentialities expressed during the first steps of the feasibility, carry out a pilot action on assistance and therapeutic paths for people with disabilities at the public hospital of Quarantine (Beirut), the one of Nabatieh and the local center of mediation of social conflicts with which Armadilla has been collaborating for years.

2. Action on the issue of disability in Lebanon must be contained in a broader program aimed at protecting the most vulnerable, through social and health tools, which can also include:

- Seniors
- People suffering from chronic and disabling diseases, including pain therapy
- People with pathological substance dependencies
- Children with special needs.

It is estimated that 10-15% of the Lebanese population has physical, sensory, intellectual or mental disabilities, according to the most reliable data available. The prevalence rate is estimated to be about 10% among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon since 1947, about 8% among Palestinian refugees from Syria, and 10-22.8% among refugees who fled Syria since 2011. There is a systematic lack of provisions for the assertion of rights, allocation of resources and implementation of services for persons with disabilities in Lebanon, due mainly to state inaction. As a result, persons with disabilities experience widespread discrimination, marginalization, exclusion and sometimes even violence at the hands of a range of institutions and actors both state and non-state, in both their homes and communities. This applies to all areas of their lives. In particular, when present, basic services and services for access to employment for people with disabilities are inadequate, not accessible and of poor quality.

The legal framework on the rights of persons with disabilities is limited and in any case often not enforced. Legislation and policies do not focus on a rights-based approach and tend to exclude non-physical disabilities from consideration.

People with disabilities face adverse political, social, cultural and economic conditions. This has extremely detrimental effects on their rights, abilities, experiences and quality of life. Little if any action has been taken by policy towards the rights of persons with disabilities. At

the societal level, knowledge of the issue, attitudes and behaviors towards persons with disabilities in Lebanon is often based on a charitable or purely clinical approach, rather than a rights-based social approach. Lack of knowledge about the topic, prejudice and stigma towards people with disabilities are common, especially towards people with cognitive or mental disabilities. Family caregivers face an overwhelming direct commitment to care, which negatively affects their own health as well as that of the persons with disabilities they care for.

Economic, social and political structures create the general conditions for vulnerabilities. These structures include socio-economic status, types of disability, gender, age, nationality and refugee status. In particular, these structural conditions affect: the poorest and least educated people; people with intellectual or mental disabilities; the women, the girls and the boys; children, young and old, and Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

However, more pointed analyses provide detailed analyses of vulnerabilities and nodes to intervene on, in particular: family support systems, economic situation, access to basic and specialist services, peer support networks and assistive devices.

Overall, the disability situation in Lebanon remains poorly analysed and studied, particularly with regard to: the relations between the Lebanese political economy and disabilities, rural areas and the situation of migrant workers (both as caregivers and as users).

A separate chapter deals with school-age children.

According to the law, all Lebanese children should have access to education without discrimination: Lebanese Law 220 of 2000 guarantees the right to education, health and other fundamental rights to persons with disabilities. Lebanon has established a commission dedicated to optimizing conditions for children registered as persons with disabilities to participate in teachings and examinations, but in reality, the educational journey of children with disabilities in Lebanon is littered with logistical, social and economic pitfalls that mean they face a compromised school experience at the outset (when they can register...).

In the cases analyzed by “Human Rights Watch”, most families said that children with disabilities were excluded from public schools because of discriminatory admission policies, lack of reasonable accommodations, lack of sufficiently trained staff, lack of inclusive curricula (no individualized education program), and discriminatory fees and charges that further marginalize children with disabilities from poor and marginalized families.

There is no clear data on the total number of children with disabilities in Lebanon or how many of them attend school. According to Rights and Access, the government agency in charge of registering persons with disabilities, there are currently 8,558 children with disabilities registered, ranging in age from 5 to 14 (the age of compulsory education in Lebanon). Of these, 3,806 are in government-funded institutions and a few others attend public and private schools. Unfortunately, many of those on the registry do not attend any type of educational facility. Moreover, these figures are extremely low compared to the reality of the situation, given that the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank estimate that at least 5% of children

under the age of 14 have a disability. Based on this statistic, a conservative estimate of at least 45,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14 in Lebanon are living with one or more disabilities. This discrepancy raises concerns that tens of thousands of Lebanese children with disabilities are not registered as such and many of these children do not have access to education.

Although Lebanese law explicitly prohibits schools from discriminating against children with disabilities, admission to public and private schools continues to depend on the discretion of teachers and school administrators, leading to the exclusion of many children.

A 2009 analysis conducted by the "Lebanese Physical Handicap Union" revealed that only 5 of the 997 public schools visited met Lebanon's physical accessibility standards for public buildings. The majority of public and private schools visited by "Human Rights Watch" in 2018 have a lack of reasonable and appropriate accommodations that ensure a learning environment in which all children can fully participate. The education of children with disabilities is also hampered by the lack of reasonable accommodations, including basic physical accessibility in buildings. Also: lack of adequately trained teachers, lack of an individualized approach to the education of special children and discriminatory economic conditions (from tuition fees to transportation costs). The lack of community-based services and support means that many children with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities have to travel long distances (spending up to six hours a day in cars, or forced to sleep in residential institutions) to access any kind of care: health, education or other support services, such as early childhood education.

According to Lebanese law, the specialized isolated institutions funded by MOSA - some of which are residential - are supposed to serve as an educational alternative to school and intended exclusively for children with disabilities, but the educational resources of these institutions are often of poor quality. Most of the specialized institutions are not even classified as schools by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The lack of monitoring for quality education, reliance on inadequate evaluation mechanisms and lack of adequate resources raises serious concerns about whether these institutions are fulfilling children's right to education. "Most of them are just day care centers and nothing more," said a disabled rights expert at "Human Rights Watch".

Although an inclusive educational system cannot be realized from one day to another, Lebanon should introduce a new legislation to align its national laws and practices to international law and standards. At the same time, the Lebanese government should implement and enforce the existing legislation on the rights of the disabled, such as Law 220 of 2000, approved 18 years ago but never fully implemented. While Lebanon should devote more funds to make schools inclusive of all children, the inclusive education must not be expensive. A global study of the 2005 World Bank has noted that even where changes are needed to ensure that buildings are physically accessible to people with disabilities, making the necessary changes usually costs only 1% of the overall cost of the building. A

fundamental step towards inclusion is to form teachers on inclusive education methods, which can be integrated into existing training.

