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# Disability Inclusion Programme

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOOD PORTFOLIO

UNDP SYRIA

DECEMBER 2021

Physical and mental wellbeing



Socio-economic integration



Legislative framework and social norms



Capacity development



## Background

As of March 2021, more than one in four individuals or 28 percent of the total population aged two and above in Syria have some form of disability.<sup>1,2</sup> Evidence from the national assessment of disability in Syria shows that in addition to the provision of medical rehabilitation services, other environmental factors such as physical and social barriers and the mental health of persons with disabilities (PWDs) are priorities to be addressed and require urgent attention.

PWDs are disproportionately affected by the ongoing socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Lebanese financial crisis. Due to attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers that are reproduced in the COVID-19 context, they have faced structural inequalities, undermining their social, economic and health needs.<sup>3,4</sup> Syria is no exception: it was reported that persons with hearing disabilities in particular have faced many challenges, as the lockdown excluded them from health and education services.

As noted in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 'Disability Inclusive Development in UNDP: Guidance and entry points', disability is a multidimensional development and human rights issue. Disability inclusion is fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their central pledge to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first.<sup>5</sup>

UNDP Syria recognizes disability inclusion as an essential requirement for advancing the implementation of the SDGs and promotes the rights of PWDs in Syria in line with the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), such as non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, equality of opportunity, respect and dignity, and respect for diversity, which are fundamental for building an inclusive and cohesive society in Syria. Inclusive policies and programmes are sound investments in society, and both the SDGs and the CRPD are mutually inclusive and critical for developing an effective disability inclusion and overall recovery and resilience programme.

- 1 United Nations Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, 'Disability in Syria: Investigation on the Intersectional Impacts of Gender, Age and a Decade of Conflict on Persons With Disabilities', Damascus, 2021, <https://www.hi-deutschland-projekte.de/lnob/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/hnap-disability-in-syria-investigation-on-intersectional-impacts-2021.pdf>.
- 2 United Nations Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme, 'Disability: Prevalence and Impact', Damascus, 2019, [https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Disability\\_Prevalence-and-Impact\\_FINAL-2.pdf](https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Disability_Prevalence-and-Impact_FINAL-2.pdf).
- 3 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'COVID-19 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Guidance', Geneva, 29 April 2020, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19\\_and\\_The\\_Rights\\_of\\_Persons\\_with\\_Disabilities.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf)
- 4 M.A Turk and M. Mitra, 'COVID-19 and people with disability: Social and economic impacts', *Disability and Health Journal*, Volume 14, Issue 4, October 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1936657421001503?via%3Dihub>.
- 5 United Nations Development Programme, «Ten» Boot Camp for effective inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Syria, Damascus, 28 July 2019, [https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/Boot\\_Camp\\_PWD.html](https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/Boot_Camp_PWD.html)

# Strategy and approach

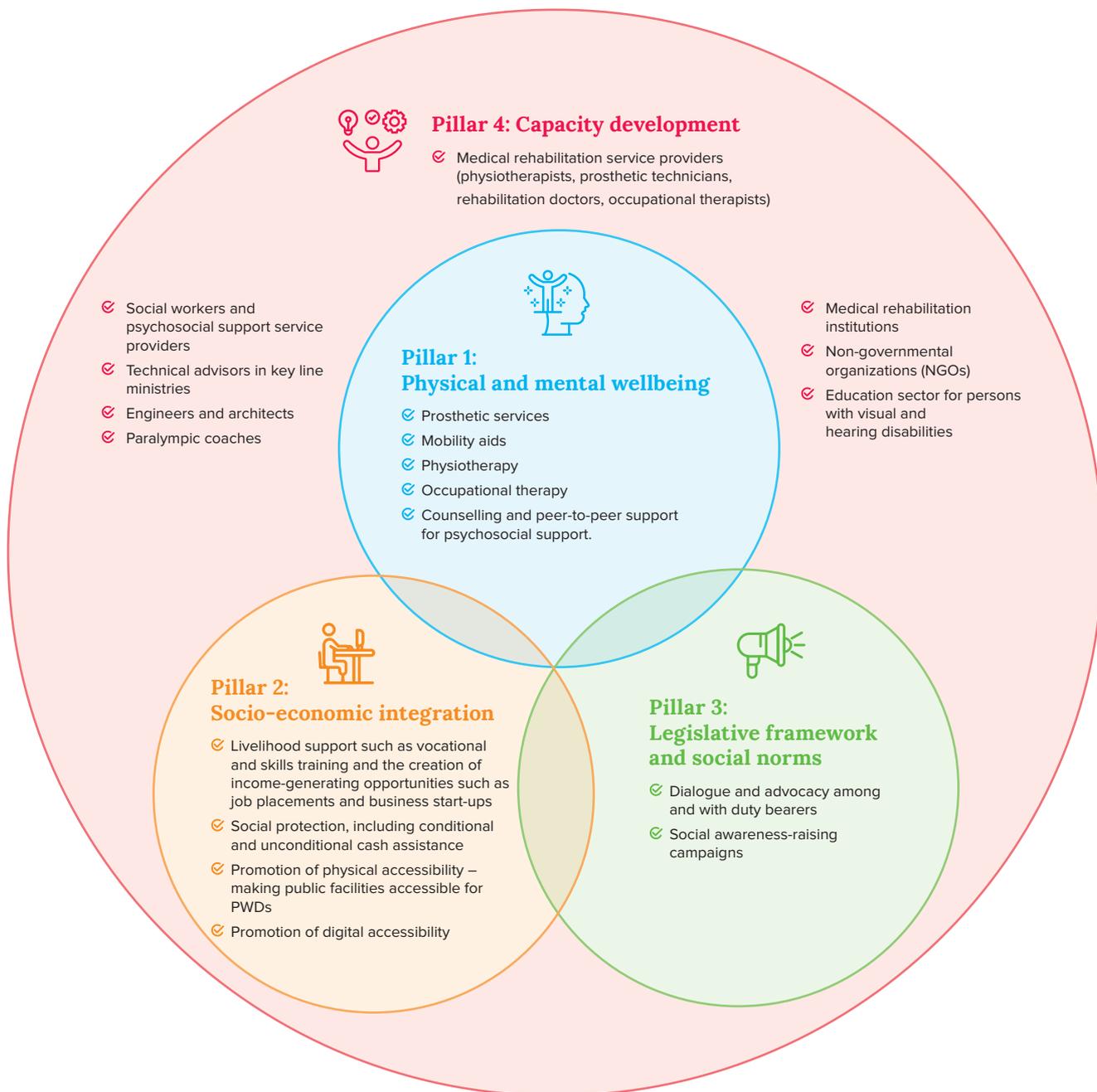
UNDP's strategy to support PWDs in Syria is based on the human rights-based approach to disability in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the CRPD and the principle of leaving no one behind. The strategy consists of four pillars that are closely interlinked and require an integrated approach:

**Physical and mental well-being:** Rehabilitation treatment, including psychosocial support, forms the basis of the inclusion process. This pillar aims to enhance the functionality and autonomy of PWDs through a variety of medical rehabilitation and psychosocial support services.

**Socio-economic integration:** This pillar aims to enhance the resilience of PWDs and their families to better cope with the socio-economic impacts of the crisis in Syria. It addresses their right to access employment, education and other basic services and socio-economic opportunities.

**Legislative framework and social norms:** PWDs often face stigma and discrimination in their communities. Due to discriminatory legislative and social barriers, they are frequently denied their fundamental rights such as access to food, education, employment, information, and health services. This pillar aims to promote inclusive legal and social environments.

**Capacity development:** This is a cross-cutting issue across the above three pillars, aiming to improve the quality and sustainability of services by enhancing local capacity.



# Key results since 2015

## Pillar 1: Physical and mental well-being

Since 2015, UNDP's work on medical rehabilitation has been an essential entry point for other parts of the disability inclusion programme to follow. In fact, UNDP has established four prosthetic workshops in collaboration with local communities in Damascus, Aleppo, Tartous and Al-Hassakeh governorates. During the crisis in Syria, UNDP has provided more than 650 lower limb prosthetic devices to people in need, including women and children. Despite this valuable contribution, there is still a huge need for a roughly estimated over 100,000 cases of amputation. Along with the prosthetic services, UNDP ensures the provision of comprehensive physical rehabilitation treatment that includes medical consultation, physical therapy, and psychosocial support.

Another significant added value in this domain is the enhanced quality of assistive devices, including wheelchairs, for which UNDP developed improved technical specifications. Prior to UNDP's interventions, the service focused merely on procuring and distributing commercially available wheelchairs without due attention to each individual's needs and preferences. To address this issue, UNDP partnered with experts through a network of decentralized local authorities in Italy and transformed the system from the simple distribution of wheelchairs to the provision of a comprehensive wheelchair service to enhance the functional level and autonomy of PWDs. This simple yet technically demanding step yielded significant results by reducing morbidity and improving the quality of life of the targeted PWDs.

### Key results for Pillar 1



**11,625 PWDs**

received assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, crutches, air mattresses and prosthetics



**3,077 PWDs**

received rehabilitation treatment

**1,577 PWDs**

received psychosocial support



**10,859 rehabilitation sessions provided**



**Four prosthetic centres**

established in Damascus, Aleppo, Al-Hassakeh and Tartous governorates



## Pillar 2: Socio-economic integration

Building on its experience in providing livelihood support and economic recovery for vulnerable groups, UNDP has supported more than 1,300 PWDs in 12 governorates in Syria to enhance their livelihood opportunities and overall resilience.

Moreover, UNDP was the first United Nations agency in Syria to promote the right to accessibility for PWDs. This is one of the most challenging aspects of the Syrian context. The challenges come from the need to have a multisectoral/multidisciplinary approach, which requires greater awareness and better coordination among several key stakeholders to ensure accessibility and alleviate the barriers in physical, information and attitudinal environments. UNDP has implemented several pilot projects in Al-Hassakeh and Aleppo governorates, with four schools having been successfully rehabilitated to enable access for 50 children with physical disabilities.

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, UNDP initiated the first intervention to enhance access to the Internet and information targeting university students with disabilities. In 2021, UNDP scaled up the intervention and targeted all registered students with disabilities at national universities in Syria, providing them with a one-year Internet package.

Persons with severe disabilities such as spinal cord injuries and traumatic brain injuries are often left behind due to a lack of capacity to deal with the levels of severity. Under the principle of leaving no one behind, UNDP Syria identified conditional cash assistance coupled with physiotherapy as an efficient and effective intervention to support the resilience of persons with severe disabilities and their households. In 2019, UNDP implemented the first conditional cash assistance programme, targeting 500 persons with severe disabilities in Aleppo governorate—one of the most devastated during the conflict. This intervention resulted in supporting the livelihood of their households and improved the health outcomes of the household members. UNDP believes that creating an enabling legal environment to impose obligations for the application of accessibility guidelines is crucial in addition to strengthening the technical capacities in this domain. This is a fundamental step that UNDP aims to achieve through Pillars 3 and 4.

### Key results for Pillar 2

**1,312 PWDs**

benefited from livelihood support



**30 university students** with disabilities were provided with access to the Internet



**500 PWDs** benefited from cash support

**Nine facilities** enabled for accessibility of PWDs (five schools, two rehabilitation centres, one park and one bus)



## Pillar 3: Legislative framework and social norms

One of the major challenges to advancing disability inclusion in Syria are the outdated concepts adopted by the public, decision makers, service providers and PWDs themselves. Therefore, there is a dire need to re-establish a unified language and level of comprehension among all actors based on the human rights-based approach and the CRPD guidelines.

UNDP is leading the development of local capacities and raising awareness on the rights of PWDs as stipulated in the CRPD, and it is advocating for the importance of implementing and adhering to the CRPD obligations. In addition, UNDP facilitates dialogues and promotes regional and global networking through workshops, training sessions and events.

Empowering PWDs themselves is a crucial component of speeding up the transformational process towards inclusion. Overcoming social barriers, stigma and discrimination are particularly important for the empowerment of PWDs. UNDP uses communication for development (C4D) and other tools to respond to this need to change people's attitudes and behaviours and create a more inclusive social environment. For instance, UNDP has implemented a programme called '10 Bootcamp' that empowers PWDs themselves to run social awareness campaigns and initiatives. The project resulted in creating the first community-led online platform promoting the rights of PWDs and highlighting the challenges and opportunities for disability inclusion.

### Key results for Pillar 3



#### Three workshops

on the CRPD facilitated for

#### 40 nationals and NGO staff

working in the field of disability  
inclusion and support

#### One C4D campaign

on disability inclusion



#### One online platform

on disability  
inclusion awareness

#### One community of practice

at the national level



## Pillar 4: Capacity development

To ensure sustainable and quality local services for PWDs, UNDP provides technical support to strengthen service providers' human and institutional capacities in the fields of medical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, accessibility, disability rights and sport. To date, UNDP has delivered several training programmes for 400 service providers from different disciplines. In addition, to enhance institutional capacities, UNDP has provided the prosthetic centre at the Ministry of Health with a digital manufacturing system to improve its capacity to offer these valuable services.

In the last two years, UNDP has expanded its services to different types of disabilities, such as hearing and visual disabilities. Tapping into the education sector as an entry point, UNDP developed the institutional capacity of two schools for students with visual impairment in Damascus and Aleppo governorates by providing braille language printers, braille typewriters and stationery for the students with visual disabilities. The schools are now able to print the national curriculum and to enhance the students' academic attainment. In addition, UNDP supported an initiative to provide sign language interpretation for the university curriculum at two universities, resulting in better inclusion of students with hearing impairment in university life.

### Key results for Pillar 4

**400 service providers** benefited from capacity building programmes



**285 health workers** on physical rehabilitation

**35 social workers** on psychosocial support

**25 engineers** on accessibility and universal design

**40 national and NGOs staff** on disability rights

**12 Paralympic coaches**



# Hanin's life-transforming journey with UNDP Syria

Hanin Samer Eyadah was just 5 years old when a shell exploded in her hometown of Deir-Ez-Zor in eastern Syria and lodged a piece of shrapnel in her left leg. "My body was covered in blood," recalls Hanin, now 11. "I looked down, discovered my leg was not there, and burst into tears." With her leg amputated, confined to a wheelchair and unable to go to school, Hanin quickly became isolated. Her family found it difficult to overcome the new challenges they faced in a country in which disability is still stigmatized and support is limited, even though 28 percent of the population aged 2 and over live with some form of disability. "It was hard," says Rana Al Deleh, Hanin's mother. "I felt very sad watching her become so helpless at such a young age."

## From wheelchair to walking

With violence continuing in her area, Hanin was sent to UNDP's prosthetics workshop in Damascus run by UNDP in partnership with the Relief and Development Center, a Syrian NGO. At the workshop, Hanin was fitted with her first prosthesis and offered physical and psychosocial therapy. With the determination and energy of youth, she was back on her feet almost immediately and was soon in school again and walking to class every day. However, like most children with an amputation, Hanin quickly outgrows her device and needs a new limb each year. On occasion, instability has prevented her from travelling for treatment, forcing her to abandon her prosthetic leg and revert to crutches. To avoid this, UNDP now provides additional assistance and covers the costs associated with each medical visit.

## Stepping up support

While Hanin is making significant progress, other PWDs across Syria are struggling to access regular care and are at risk of further health issues, violence, and marginalization. In response, UNDP is working closely with communities in Damascus, Aleppo, Tartous and Qamishli to run five prosthetic and rehabilitation workshops and has provided lower limb prosthetics to 650 people over the last six years. Part of UNDP's wider Disability Inclusion Programme,<sup>6</sup> these workshops contribute to broader initiatives to empower PWDs and their communities to reduce inequality and build resilience. As set out in the SDGs and the CPRD, UNDP's programme helps enable PWDs to exercise their fundamental human rights, including access to health, food, education, and employment. However, with over a decade of crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic further constraining access to already limited health care services, and over 100,000 people with amputations still requiring rehabilitation care, additional support is needed urgently in Syria.

## Towards a bright future

With characteristic perseverance, Hanin is already planning how to contribute to this effort. "I want to be a journalist to write about people who have lost their legs, and help them become active in their communities," she says. "Like me, they have the right to pursue their dreams." With a prosthetic leg and continued medical care provided by UNDP and its national partners, Hanin is making great strides towards a bright future. Disability inclusion is fundamental to UNDP's efforts to achieve the SDGs and the pledge to leave no one behind.



<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Un-silence my world" Campaign, UNDP, Damascus, 31 May 2020, <https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/Un-silencemyworldCampaign.html>.



## Vision for the future

UNDP aims to scale up the scope and coverage of its programmes and drive the impact of its approach and activities in the following ways:

- ▶ Commitment to reach out to as many PWDs as possible to improve their lives, especially those in remote and hard-to-reach areas and those who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and violence, including women and girls with disabilities
- ▶ Promotion and expansion of the platforms by and for PWDs for their networking, advocacy and social and economic participation that will be the basis of building an inclusive society
- ▶ Promotion of innovative solutions that will improve the socio-economic lives of PWDs
- ▶ Establishment of communities of practice on disability inclusion issues at national, regional, and global levels to share and improve practices
- ▶ Expansion of partnerships through South–South collaboration for capacity-building programmes to support the sustainability and quality of service provision for PWDs
- ▶ Promotion of community-based rehabilitation in policies and programmes.

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