

# Building Lebanon Forward | More Inclusive | More Accessible

Helping Mitigate Impacts of the Economic Crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut Port Explosion on Persons with Disabilities in Lebanon

## Concept Note

This initiative, co-led by UNDP and ESCWA, aims to provide immediate, medium and long-term support to help mitigate the adverse impacts of Lebanon’s manifold crises – the dwelling economy, the COVID 19 pandemic and most recently the Beirut Port explosion – on persons with disabilities (PwDs), who have been among the hardest hit by those crises.

The initiative will create a platform to support persons with disabilities and reduce their exposure to increasing vulnerabilities. It will also work on advocacy for policies and practical measures to secure PwDs’ rights to accessibility, inclusiveness and long-term support, in line with the Rights and Access Programme of Lebanon’s Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA).

### Parallel pathways of action towards results

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**Immediate Relief** Providing PwDs with immediate needs required to maintain their health and wellbeing.

#### Relief

**Accessible Recovery** Ensuring that the areas affected by the Beirut Port explosion are reconstructed in a manner that provides improved physical accessibility for PwDs to public institution, streets and private facilities.

**Inclusive Reform** Advocating for the adoption and implementation of policies and measures to guarantee PwDs’ access to quality care facilities and the most essential assistive devices and technologies and their inclusion in social and economic activity without barriers.

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### Activities proposed under the Initiative

#### Advocacy Campaign

The initiative will launch in the first half of October 2020, a campaign to bring attention to:

- the urgency of responding to the immediate needs of PwDs impacted by Lebanon’s multiple crises;
- ensure that efforts to help Beirut recover from the explosion are inclusive and promote physical accessibility in all reconstruction efforts; and
- promote policy action and implementation measures required to remove barriers and ensure access to quality care facilities and the most essential assistive devices and technologies and inclusion of PwDs in economic activities.

The main (medium term) advocacy objective will focus on the roughly 8000 buildings and streets damaged in the close vicinity of the Beirut port explosion. The campaign will offer free consultations, studies and designs to ensure that all facilities requiring rehabilitation/reconstruction are rendered physically accessible to PwDs, prioritizing public buildings and streets and encouraging owners of private building to join.

The advocacy campaign will include engagements with policy makers, academia and the media (traditional and social media) to ensure that voices of PwDs are heard and their views are considered.

The campaign will kick off with a walk by Michael Haddad, UNDP Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Climate Action, an endurance athlete who is a PwD himself, having sustained a spinal injury in his childhood. Haddad will start his walk at UN Headquarters in Lebanon (ESCWA building) treading through the damaged areas of Downtown, Gemayze and Mar Mikhayel to end at to the Karenina Primary Healthcare Center (PGC), one of 23 PHCs that were damaged by the Beirut Port explosion and currently under reconstruction. There will be a “press point” at each end of the walk. At send off, ESCWA Executive Secretary and Under Secretary General, Regional Directors of UNDP, and the UN Resident Coordinator in Lebanon will speak briefly about the significance of the initiative. At the receiving end there will be a representative of Lebanon’s PHC authority together with UNICEFF, WHO and UN-Habitat, both involved in PHC reconstruction.

## Resource Mobilization Drive

Michael Haddad will also aim at raising a minimum of US\$ 1million though the first 1000 steps of his walk, challenging private sector partners to match each step with US\$ 1,000 of support to the initiative. Additionally the campaign will include an online giving effort through **undp.give**, UNDP's official online donation page, allowing individuals from around the world to donate and/or volunteer to join the effort. A parallel arrangement will be offered to people in Lebanon, who, because of the financial crisis are unable to contribute in US\$ and have access only to LBP.

## Understanding the need

- Persons with disabilities in Lebanon represent between 10 and 15% of the total population of 7 million, totaling approximately to around 910,000 (K4D<sup>[1]</sup>report).
- As in many parts of the world, people with disabilities in Lebanon are among the most excluded and marginalized population groups. They contend with a systemic lack of provisions for rights, resources, and services and experience widespread marginalization, exclusion and violence at home and outside. This applies to all areas of their lives including access to quality care facilities.
- With the Lebanese economy practically in freefall, poverty and unemployment rates have reached records high, with disproportionately adverse impacts on persons with disabilities, among other most vulnerable groups.
- The unabating COVID-19 outbreak currently afflicting Lebanon and the measures that were necessary to contain it have resulted in increasing economic hardship including on the affordability and accessibility to healthcare services.
- The horrific explosion that rocked the Beirut Port on 4 August 2020, has caused huge physical damages and shattered the lives and livelihood of people, not only in the immediate vicinity of the blast but across Beirut. The adverse, economic and social impacts of the explosion will be felt throughout Lebanon.
- Currently, there is limited information on the impact of the blast on persons with disabilities. Many persons with injuries are at risk of developing disabilities if not properly diagnosed and supported. Large number of persons with injuries overwhelmed the hospitals and primary health care centers, many of which were already strained and are now damaged by the explosion.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires that disaster preparedness and response initiatives are inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities. A barrier-free environment helps to ensure full and equal participation in society by all, regardless of age, gender or ability, with dignity and with as much independence as possible. Universally designed shelters benefit not only persons with disabilities but other people with reduced mobility, such as elderly people, pregnant women, young children or people who are temporarily impaired. Consequently, they benefit whole families and communities.
- The inclusion of universal design and accessibility principles into the reconstruction and renovations efforts after the explosion contributes towards a barrier-free environment and an inclusive society: "A society accessible for persons with disabilities is one accessible to all"

## Appreciating the urgency

- Price increases linked to the economic crisis, the devaluation of the currency and the economic fallout from COVID-19 lockdown measures, are hindering the provision of required support to persons with disabilities, depriving large numbers of them (Lebanese and refugees) from essential live-saving equipment and assistive devices that they need.
- Failure to provide such essential equipment expose PWDs to serious health problems and complications, such as the development of life-threatening infections, which would require intensive and expensive medical care that would add to the existing burden on PwDs and the government.
- Originally conceived weeks before the explosion, this initiative was intended to cover the deficit in the Ministry of Social Affairs' budget (LBP 6 billion, annually), allocated under the Rights and Access Programme to provide the essential assistive and life support devices (technical mobility and incontinence equipment) to persons with disabilities. Now with additional burden generated by the explosion, implementation of this initiative has become more urgent

- The Rights and Access Programme is implemented in all eight governorates of Lebanon and has accredited 5 NGOs in 8 centers to deliver technical aids (wheelchairs, seat corsets, etc.), incontinence aids (layers, probes, etc.) and aids for the prevention of bedsores (mattresses, cushions etc.).