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Strengthening Protection of Women, Children and Youth with Disabilities in Lebanon

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and UNICEF are working together to strengthen disability inclusion in child protection (CP) and gender-based violence (GBV) programs in Lebanon. A needs assessment was recently conducted, in partnership with a wide range of operational NGOs, consulting with 44 persons with disabilities, including adolescent girls and boys with disabilities, 57 parents or care-givers, and over 70 gender-based violence and child protection actors.

Women, children and youth with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on age, gender and disability. Ongoing displacement, reduced assistance and limited income generation opportunities add to the socio-economic stress experienced by refugee households, which affect women and children with disabilities, and female care-givers, in unique and oftentimes devastating ways. Girls with disabilities are at risk of early marriage, as families perceive that they become less desirable as they grow older with a disability; women with disabilities face increased risk of intimate partner violence; and mothers of children with disabilities report feeling like they are "easy targets" for exploitation. Refugee children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities who have witnessed violence in their home country often demonstrate regressive behaviors, such as withdrawing from social interactions, and deterioration in their communication and personal care skills. Adolescents who acquire new disabilities report that their personal relationships and peer networks break down, and that others express pity and shame about their situation, leading them to suicidal ideations and attempts.

Women, children and youth with disabilities also face challenges in accessing GBV prevention and response, and psychosocial support activities. Persons with disabilities, parents and care-givers reported not getting information about these activities. As persons with disabilities are still largely viewed through a "medical model", they are often only considered for medical services and interventions. This extends also to children with disabilities, who are often told *"they can't play with or go to activities with other kids because they are too fragile, or people will be mean to them"*.

The perspectives of women, children and youth with disabilities however is quite different. They talked about the importance of their identity, and being able to define this for themselves, at times even highlighting or profiling other (non-disability) parts of their identity to the world – *"when strangers see me, they look at the tattoo now more than the chair"*. Girls and boys with intellectual disabilities highlighted the importance of being in age and gender appropriate activities. This is especially important in early adolescence, when girls and boys become more aware and sensitive to gender norms, and physical changes start to happen to their bodies. And women with disabilities spoke about being accepted and recognized for their skills and capacities: *"I think maybe I have been the first community mobilizer in the area with a disability. I went on to meet many other people who were passionate about the same things as me and I started to feel like my family and community respected me more"*.

In coming months, the WRC will be developing a range of guidance, tools and training for GBV and CP actors in Lebanon. Most notably there will be guidance and training for frontline workers and community mobilizers on safely identifying and referring women, children and youth who are at risk of a range of protection concerns to appropriate services and assistance. Guidance and

training will also support these actors to communicate with parents of children with disabilities on the importance of psychosocial support, and then to adapt their community-based and focused psychosocial activities to needs, skills and capacities of the children who attend. Lastly, guidance will be developed for GBV case managers to ensure that the dignity and agency of survivors with different types of disabilities is maintained throughout their care and support.

Organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) bring particular expertise on topics, such as participation, accessibility, and communicating with persons with different types of disabilities. The WRC's DPO partners in Lebanon have expressed an interest to be more involved in the protection and empowerment of women, children and youth, and in the last week participated in a training on the core concepts of GBV and CP.

The WRC looks forward to working with GBV and CP actors, and DPO partners, as this guidance and training is developed, expanding and strengthening networks for future collaboration on the protection and empowerment of women, children and youth with disabilities in Lebanon.

For more information about this project, please contact: Emma Pearce, Associate Director – Social Inclusion, Women's Refugee Commission at EmmaP@wrcommission.org.

Photo: Courtesy of World Learning's Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education Improvement (QITABI) project, Lebanon, 2017.



The Role of Inclusion in Sustainable Institutional Reform

For countries that have committed to meeting international standards for gender equality, knowing where to start can be one of the biggest challenges

In Jordan, local gender advocates and development practitioners have an uphill battle ahead as they work to mainstream gender within policy, professional, and community spheres. Despite having signed on to international commitments such as CEDAW and UN Women's Planet 50:50, and despite some progress in meeting those lofty goals over the last several years, Jordan's government is still grappling with how to incorporate gender equity into the long-term strategies, budgets, and day-to-day operations of its many public institutions.

The task of dismantling gender-discriminatory policies and practices in bureaucratic institutions is not a simple one. Any truly sustainable effort to do so requires an inclusive, holistic approach that not only addresses high-level policy, but that also has buy-in from all levels of public administration. With that in mind, IREX's USAID-funded Takamol Gender Program is working with eleven ministries and publicly-funded agencies to identify and address areas where they can improve specific conditions for female employees. To accomplish this, IREX is collaborating with these institutions to empower ministry staff to assess the state of gender equality in their workplace and to play a substantive role in developing strategies to improve it. Through a three-phase participatory gender audit, IREX has equipped government employees with the skills, tools, and agency to recognize and address gender inequality in their workplaces.

"Before the gender audit, we didn't have privacy as women in the workplace and our representation in several departments was low due to social perceptions determining the division of work among men and women," recalls Ms. Sumaya Al Zoubi, an employee at the Department of Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Ministry of Labor. Women like Sumaya face daily challenges carrying out their work in the public sector due to a lack of guidelines to ensure that women and men have equal access to opportunities in the workplace. Through training and mentorship from IREX, she and her gender audit team at the Ministry of Labor built skills in research, communication, and report writing before carrying out a comprehensive gender audit of ministry operations through staff surveys and key informant interviews. "Through the program, we were able to meet employees from across the kingdom and learn about the challenges they faced and, most importantly, how to address them."

Based on their findings, the gender audit teams put forth specific recommendations to each ministry and are now working with institutional leadership to begin making improvements. As a result of this process, several participating ministries are taking measurable steps toward meeting Jordan's gender equity and equality commitments, such as providing day care for female employees and ensuring equal access to professional development opportunities regardless of gender. These changes will significantly impact the personal and professional lives of many Jordanian women, and IREX's multi-ministry approach has laid the groundwork for these types of reforms across the entire government. The more inclusive the process, the more likely it is that these kinds of institutional reforms will stick, and the faster Jordan will meet its lofty commitments to gender equality.

Photo: Courtesy of IREX, 2017.

Indigenous Women



New Report on Indigenous women and Their Human Rights in the Americas

The Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) released a joint report in April 2017 called "[Indigenous Women and Their](#)

Human Rights in the Americas” The report revealed devastating, systemic levels of human rights violations against indigenous women, ranging from murders and disappearances in British Columbia, Canada, to cases of rape and torture by members of the armed forces in Guerrero, Mexico,. The OAS and IAHCR conducted hearings and working visits that uncovered gaps in government assistance provided to indigenous women; discrimination based on gender and race, age, poverty and disability; and identity-based barriers to jobs, health care, education, social services and political participation. These “multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination” further the susceptibility of indigenous women to sexual, psychological and sexual violence. Although the report discussed the various forms of violence and discrimination which indigenous women face, the Commission focused on their status as holders of rights and empowered actors as opposed to victims.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concluded the report with ten recommendations to assist States in their ongoing efforts to prevent and respond to human rights violations affecting indigenous women. These include legal reforms, reparations and improved coordination between State and traditional indigenous justice systems. The The IACHR observed that, “in devising and implementing measures to ensure respect for indigenous women’s human rights, States should adopt a holistic approach in all laws and policies that affect indigenous women to address the multiple and interconnected forms of discrimination they encounter in different contexts, and include it as well in the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of all forms of violence against indigenous women. This approach should consider the sex, gender, and history of racism and discrimination faced by indigenous women and their worldview. States should be guided by principles of equality and non-discrimination, should have as a foundation the right of indigenous communities to self-determination and cultural identity.”

Photo: Report cover page “Indigenous Women and Their Human Rights in the Americas”, OAS/IAHCR, April 2017.



Infographic: “The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders”, Mobility International USA, 2017.

1. Disability Inclusion in Action: The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young

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