



**Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities**  
**Social and Economic Policies Monitor – Al Marsad**

## **Position Paper: The Official Response to the Economic and Social Conditions of Women and Girls with Disabilities**

**May 2020**

The spread of the Covid-19 epidemic (the Corona virus emerging) sparked global discussions about the feasibility of the "current system" by which most of the countries of the world are ruled, through national and international institutions, most of which were established at the end of World War II, to consolidate the victor's equation. These discussions also included the system of the United Nations organizations themselves, and their ability to respond to the humanitarian, economic and social crisis resulting from this pandemic. As well as the importance of reviewing the intellectual property of medicines, vaccines, medical masks, and respiratory devices owned by major pharmaceutical companies, controlling their high prices, and preventing pharmaceutical manufacturing under the threat of expensive legal claims.

In this context, the United Nations launched what it called "the United Nations Framework for the Immediate Social-Economic response to Covid- 19"<sup>1</sup>. This document included the groups and people that it must reach (women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, refugees, etc.). Justifying this by the fact that during the spread of the Ebola virus in Africa in 2014, more people died from the collapse of social services and difficult economic conditions than those who died as a direct result of infection with the virus<sup>2</sup>. And this base is adopted as a reference to dealing with the current crisis, as failure to provide social and economic solutions to societies and the most marginalized groups directly threatens their lives.

Thinking and planning globally are now focused on dealing with the crisis of the spread of the Corona virus and the post-crisis repercussions, where collapses are expected in social, economic, educational indicators, and even health systems, which has become urgent and preoccupying for many official and unofficial parties. While Palestine appears as if it is on a permanent date with the crisis resulting from the continued occupation and its destruction of all essential elements of stability and development, the Corona virus crisis revealed weak government capabilities. Whether at the level of planning, or at the level of crisis management, or the provision of sufficient resources to address the economic and social impacts, specifically, towards groups such as workers, self-employed, farmers, people with disabilities, micro, small and medium enterprises. The government responses provided were unable to deal with the scale of the crisis, and only provided amputated and unconvincing answers.

### **Missing social protection framework**

The International Labour Organization considered that social protection has moved from being a group of concessions to being a right. The right to social protection is related to the core principles of social justice in terms of being related to a fair redistribution of wealth, using government spending to finance programs that guarantees the right to social security to all. Also, that guarantees individuals' sustainable access to

---

<sup>1</sup>- United Nations. A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. April 2020.

<sup>2</sup>- Ibid

services that assure a decent life, and that free them from the risks of hunger, destitution and lack of health coverage<sup>3</sup>

Whereas social protection programs in Palestine are based mainly on the criteria and philosophy of the World Bank, by providing cash assistance to poor families that meet the targeting criteria, and without ensuring that these families leave poverty, that is, poverty is reduced rather than eliminated.

Similarly, the cash assistance model and targeting criteria (which is the largest and most funded and targeted program) avoids addressing and supporting fragile families (i.e. families that may fall into the cycle of poverty or extreme poverty as a result of any unexpected financial crisis). In addition, this model also avoids addressing the situation of marginalized groups that do not meet the targeting criteria, such as day labourers, or people with disabilities, including women with disabilities, in terms of designing specialized targeting programs for them.

In addition, the issue of the absence of a social security system, which the Palestinian progressive social movement struggled to accomplish before the occurrence of this crisis, is also highlighted. Especially for its role in providing social protection for workers / employees, and in ensuring income from the social security fund as a result of the interruption of their income due to cessation of work, or due to economic losses incurred as a result of the state of emergency and the accompanying interruption of economic life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Which the Palestinian government avoids providing any practical and direct answers to address the conditions of workers / employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, and providing truncated answers such as the idea of Good loans, without explaining the mechanisms and guarantees, or how to access such loans, and the potential cost.

In this context, the role of the Ministry of Social Development comes as a jurisdiction to address the issues mentioned in the position paper, as it leads the social sector in terms of planning, implementation and intervention. The Ministry has worked on preparing a "Rapid Response Plan in the Social Protection Sector for the Implications of the Corona Virus Pandemic<sup>4</sup>". The plan explicitly foresees an increase in the risk of marginalization and aggravation of the crisis among the already marginalized and poor families, including people with disabilities, whose percentage of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip reached 5.8% for the year 2017. Statistics show that the percentage of women and girls with Disability reached 5.3% for 2017.

The plan came short of capturing its goal despite the awareness of those responsible for preparing it. The danger of exposing poor families or families that will be uncovered and joining the category of poor families, where it can be said that the plan was not comprehensive or responsive to social challenges

---

<sup>3</sup>- International Labor Organization. 2014. Social protection from concessions to the right.

<sup>4</sup>- Ministry of Social Development. 4/8/2020. Rapid response plan in the social protection sector for the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

resulting from the emergency due to the spread of the Corona virus. Moreover, the interventions contained in the plan came in accordance with the format and logic of the cash assistance program that is, providing very simple cash assistance to the target / s of this plan, not to mention the problems that affect the eligibility mechanisms of the beneficiaries of this program.

Targeting the rapid response plan for people with disabilities did not include those outside the framework of targeting the ministry or its services forum. No update was made to the ministry's database to find out the families of people with disabilities who have experienced social and economic difficulties as a result of the emergency, and who need cash or other assistance. The plan also dealt with people with disabilities, included in the ministry's lists, only by distributing hygiene items worth \$ 400,000. However, they were not provided with food parcels, medicines/ medical equipment, cash assistance, psychological and social counselling, or any of the services they desperately need. The emergency plan missed the participation of people with disabilities and the institutions working with them, or the institutions that represent them in the development of the plan; contrary to what was stated in a document issued by the Ministry of Social Development confirming the rights of persons with disabilities during the spread of the Covid-19<sup>5</sup>.

The aforementioned document outlines a set of rights and procedures to be followed during the emergency period with people with disabilities in several areas. Nonetheless, these rights have not been translated into interventions or programs, at least according to the rapid response plan, or according to the results of the survey assessing the needs of women and girls with disabilities, as we will refer to it later.

In addition, the Ministry's emergency plan remained unable to capture that people with disabilities suffer from unemployment, at 37%, while only 4% of women with disabilities participate in the workforce. This means that the main problem is the lack of income resulting from economic participation, and the lack of the ability to provide them with any special requirements or needs in the prevailing emergency.

The results of the survey directed to assess the needs of women with disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip confirm the weakness of the comprehensiveness and response of the emergency plan to the needs and requirements of women with disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This survey which was implemented by the Stars of Hope Society to empower women with disabilities and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor in two phases during the months of March and April of this year, it has so far covered about 350 women and girls with disabilities, with the survey results showing the following issues:

- No official body, whether at the level of a ministry or a department, has contacted any woman or girl with a disability in order to examine their needs, or to check on their conditions in light of the

---

<sup>5</sup>- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Amid COVID-19. Joint guidance note by United Nations Human Rights oPt, the Ministry of Social Development and the Independent Commission for Human Rights.

emergency, whether in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. This indicates that women with disabilities have disappeared from the official agencies' map and emergency plans.

- The survey revealed that there are several cases of women with disabilities who were cut off from cash assistance provided by the Ministry of Social Development, which further deteriorated their living conditions.

- Some civil society organizations (and to a limited extent) communicated with some women and girls with disabilities, with 15 women and girls with disabilities out of 350 assured, or only 4.2%, and only 5 women with disabilities (only one in the West Bank and the rest of the Gaza Strip) Of the 350 receiving services in the form of food parcels or psychological and social counselling sessions, i.e. only 1.4%.

- Unemployed women with disabilities suffer additional pressure in the event of an emergency due to the deteriorating financial conditions of the family, given the dependency of the breadwinner's income in many families, which makes them feel unfair and persecuted due to the lack of fair job opportunities for them, causing feelings of injustice and marginalization, and weak ability to Help.

- The survey showed that there are several violations related to the labour law despite the fact that the majority of women and girls with disabilities do not work or are unemployed. However, the survey documented the dismissal of a worker with a disability for health causes in conjunction with the start of the emergency state. In addition, the non-payment of wages of three workers with disabilities by their operators, other than a number of workers who don't know if they will be paid or not, despite the fact that nearly two months have passed since the start of the crisis. Violations in the area of work and the economic effects were not limited to wage workers, as the survey documented; it also affected the vulnerability and income of a number of disabled workers who are self-employed.

- The survey documented the high sensitivity of women and girls with disabilities to deal with emergency committees, formed by one political party and which is also male-dominated, in various locations within the West Bank, due to the girls' sense of a lack of privacy and confidentiality in dealing with their needs. In addition to their belief that there is no fair distribution of aid, favouritism that play a role in the distribution without regard to eligibility. Likewise, some of the beneficiaries pointed to a political-party control in the committees, where some committees refuse to include the needs of girls and women with disabilities because of their affiliation or their families to different political organizations, and this is confirmed by a report issued by the Independent Commission for Human Rights.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>- The Independent Commission for Human Rights. 4/15/2020. Position Paper No. (2) On local emergency committees formed in the context of confronting the emerging Corona virus pandemic in the West Bank.

Based on the above, the Stars of Hope Society and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor recommend the following:

- The need to review government plans and interventions during the emergency period, specifically the Rapid Response Plan for the social sector, to include in the plan clear interventions that protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities to a decent life. By providing income sources, cash and in-kind assistance, providing medicine and medical supplies, and access to health and psychological services, through direct contact with them to ensure the privacy, confidentiality and dignity of these women and girls.
- Allocating a clear and appropriate access mechanism for persons with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities, to file a complaint, and to obtain a response from the Ministry regarding the required needs. Likewise, asking the social researchers of the Ministry to place persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, on the priorities of their list visit and their social research directed at targeting.
- Demanding the Ministry of Labour to take immediate measures to stop violations by employers against workers with disabilities, and to compensate them for any wages or losses resulting from the emergency period, including self-employed workers, who suffer economic losses without the presence of any official agency working to assist them.
- It stresses the need for representative institutions working with people with disabilities, and relevant coalitions to participate, specifically representative institutions working with women with disabilities in formulating and developing contingency plans and interventions to ensure that persons with disabilities are clearly and explicitly included.
- We reiterate the need to strengthen the system to address gender-based violence and disability, develop response mechanisms to protect against violence as part of efforts to respond to the prevailing emergency, and ensure that the necessary funding is available to support these services while broadening and adapting them to women and girls with disabilities.