



**Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination against Women and Girls with Disabilities**

**Submission on the Draft Guidelines on Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination  
against Women and Girls with Disabilities**

**Submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

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## **Executive Summary**

This submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a set of observations and recommendations aimed at strengthening the Draft Guidelines on Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination against Women and Girls with Disabilities, drawing on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as relevant international normative developments concerning equality, non-discrimination, and the human rights-based approach.

QADER for Community Development considers that the discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities cannot be reduced to the mere accumulation of multiple forms of discrimination. Rather, it constitutes an intersectional and compounded form of exclusion and inequality, arising from the interaction between disability, gender, age, poverty, geographic location, displacement, emergencies, the broader context of unlawful occupation, and other relevant social, economic, and political factors. Addressing such discrimination therefore requires comprehensive approaches that go beyond partial or narrowly sectoral interventions.

This submission emphasizes the importance of treating disability inclusion as a governing principle for public policies, legislation, plans, programmes, and budgets related to gender equality and women's empowerment, rather than as a subsidiary or additional component within them. It further underscores that legal capacity and access to justice constitute the foundation for the exercise of all other rights, and that women and girls with disabilities continue to face legal, institutional, and procedural barriers that limit their ability to participate fully and equally in public life and within justice systems.

The submission stresses that participation, leadership, and representation should not be understood as numerical targets or merely procedural measures, but rather as integral components of substantive equality and the realization of rights. It further highlights the importance of ensuring the meaningful presence of women and girls with disabilities at all levels and centers of decision-making, while considering the diversity within this group and the multiple and intersectional dimensions of discrimination and marginalization they experience.

Regarding economic and social rights, the submission emphasizes that education, health, employment, and social protection constitute key areas in which the effects of multiple and intersectional discrimination are particularly evident. Removing barriers within these sectors and developing rights-based policies grounded in

disability inclusion are essential prerequisites for achieving equal opportunities, autonomy, empowerment, and decent livelihoods.

The submission gives particular attention to the situation of women and girls with disabilities in contexts of conflict, emergencies, and unlawful occupation, including in the occupied Palestinian territory, where the risks of exclusion, violence, repeated forced displacement, and the deterioration of living conditions are significantly exacerbated. In this regard, the submission emphasizes the importance of integrating disability inclusion throughout all phases of humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction, in line with Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Security Council Resolution 2475, and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

The submission further affirms that data collection, monitoring, documentation, and accountability are not merely technical matters, but essential tools for achieving equality, justice, and equity. It calls for the development of rights-based and disability-inclusive systems capable of capturing the realities of women and girls with disabilities and the patterns of discrimination and violations they face, while linking data and documentation to decision-making processes, accountability mechanisms, and access to remedies.

The submission proposes several issues that merit consideration in the final version of the Guidelines, including disability inclusion as a governing principle for gender-related policies; the situation of women and girls with disabilities within the framework of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda; their role in recovery and reconstruction processes; emerging challenges in digital environments; and comprehensive, multidimensional representation in leadership and decision-making positions.

QADER for Community Development concludes that achieving substantive equality for women and girls with disabilities requires moving from the recognition of rights to ensuring their effective enjoyment; from formal inclusion to genuine inclusion; and from abstract protection to empowerment, participation, and leadership. This requires a shared responsibility among States, United Nations organs, entities and agencies, international organizations, donors, and all other relevant stakeholders, to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are not left behind.

## 1. Introduction and Methodology

### Introduction

This submission is made in response to the call issued by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for comments and recommendations on the Draft Guidelines on Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination against Women and Girls with Disabilities. This initiative comes within the broader context of international efforts to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 6 concerning women with disabilities, through developing a deeper understanding of the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities across all areas of life, promoting normative and practical responses capable of addressing such discrimination, and ensuring substantive equality and the full enjoyment of the spectrum of rights.

This submission is grounded in the recognition that the discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities cannot be adequately understood or addressed through a single-axis approach. Disability intersects with gender, age, poverty, displacement, deprivation of services, and other factors that generate complex and overlapping forms of marginalization and exclusion based on both sex and disability. It further stems from the importance of recognizing women and girls with disabilities as full rights-holders, rather than merely as a vulnerable group in need of protection, in a manner consistent with the provisions and objectives of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as with evolving international standards relating to human rights, equality, and disability inclusion. From this perspective, addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination requires comprehensive normative frameworks for protection, empowerment, and participation, based on the systematic integration of a disability perspective into relevant policies, legislation, and programmes.

This submission is based on a review and analysis of the draft guidelines under consultation in light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 6 on women with disabilities, Article 12 on legal capacity, and Article 13 on access to justice, as well as the Committee's general comments, concluding observations, and relevant international normative instruments, including the broader normative framework relating to gender equality, discrimination against women, disability inclusion, and substantive equality.

This submission also draws upon the accumulated research and practical expertise of QADER for Community Development in the field of the rights of persons with disabilities and the disability inclusion approach. This

includes specialized studies, analytical papers, and rights-based and policy initiatives developed by QADER on issues relating to women and girls with disabilities, legal capacity, access to justice, multiple and intersectional discrimination, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and data collection, monitoring, and documentation from a disability inclusion perspective<sup>1</sup>. The observations and recommendations have been organized under thematic headings that reflect the key issues addressed by the draft guidelines, with references to the relevant paragraphs of the draft and the inclusion of several issues that warrant further consideration to strengthen the coherence and comprehensiveness of the guidelines.

## 2. Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination against Women and Girls with Disabilities

QADER for Community Development welcomes the approach adopted by the draft guidelines in addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities and considers this approach to be an essential entry point for understanding the patterns of exclusion and inequality that this group continues to experience across different societies. The discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities does not arise from a single factor or isolated cause; rather, it is shaped by the interaction between disability, gender, and various social, economic, cultural, and political factors, resulting in complex and overlapping forms of discrimination and exclusion that hinder the effective enjoyment of rights on an equal basis with others<sup>2</sup>.

The impact of this discrimination extends beyond the multiplication of barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities. It also contributes to the reproduction of power imbalances and inequalities within families, communities, and both public and private institutions. Women and girls with disabilities are often subjected to discrimination as women, discrimination as persons with disabilities, and additional forms of discrimination linked to age, poverty, forced displacement, residence in conflict-affected or emergency settings, unlawful occupation, or other factors that intensify exclusion and discrimination and limit opportunities for equal participation in all areas of life.

QADER considers it important to clearly emphasize that multiple and intersectional discrimination should not be understood merely as the accumulation or combination of several forms of discrimination. Rather, it should

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<sup>1</sup> For related publications, please refer to the resources available on the website of QADER at: <https://www.qader.org/resources>

<sup>2</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing the concept of multiple and intersectional discrimination, the forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, and the general obligations of States in this regard.

be recognized as a distinct condition that produces compounded effects that are more severe and complex than the sum of its individual components. The experiences of women and girls with disabilities cannot be reduced either to the experiences of women in general or to those of persons with disabilities in general. Instead, they require an independent understanding that considers the nature of the interaction between the numerous factors shaping their daily realities and the resulting implications for the enjoyment of rights, access to services, justice, participation, and protection.

QADER also considers it important to strengthen the explicit linkage between the concept of multiple and intersectional discrimination and the concept of disability inclusion as a governing framework for policies, legislation, programmes, and budgets. Addressing discrimination cannot be achieved solely through the provision of special protection measures or the development of targeted programmes for women and girls with disabilities. It also requires the systematic integration of a disability perspective into all policies, plans, programmes, and mechanisms related to gender equality and women's empowerment. From this perspective, women and girls with disabilities should not be treated as a subcategory or an ancillary component within gender-related policies; rather, they should be recognized as an integral part of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes across all relevant policies, interventions, and programmes.

QADER proposes that the guidelines explicitly affirm the obligations of States, international organizations, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and donors to address multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities, not only through legislative and policy measures, but also by ensuring the integration of this perspective into planning, financing, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and data systems. Such an approach would support the transition from the theoretical recognition of the problem to the practical and systematic addressing of its causes and consequences<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. Disability Inclusion as a Governing Principle in Gender Policies**

QADER for Community Development welcomes the emphasis placed in the draft guidelines on the importance of including women and girls with disabilities in policies and programmes related to gender equality and women's rights. At the same time, QADER believes that disability inclusion should not be understood as a subsequent addition or a subsidiary component within such policies and programmes, but rather as a governing principle that guides their design, implementation, and evaluation. Substantive equality cannot be

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<sup>3</sup> See the strategic paper issued by QADER on **Rebuilding the United Nations Disability Inclusion Approach in Palestine**, available at: <https://www.qader.org/resources/10865.html>

achieved merely by including women and girls with disabilities in selected interventions or activities; it requires the systematic integration of a disability inclusion perspective throughout all stages of policy-making and decision-making processes<sup>4</sup>.

National, regional, and international experiences demonstrate that many policies and plans relating to gender equality and women's empowerment continue to treat women and girls with disabilities as a separate category for which a dedicated section or standalone component is allocated. Meanwhile, the remaining elements of the policy or plan are often implicitly based on assumptions that fail to take disability, the diversity of women and girls with disabilities, and reasonable accommodations into account. As a result, disability may appear to be formally reflected in the document while remaining largely absent from planning, implementation, financing, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms, thereby limiting the capacity of such policies to address existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion in practice<sup>5</sup>.

QADER considers that this approach is inconsistent with the philosophy of the CRPD, which is founded on the integration of the rights of persons with disabilities across all relevant policies and measures. Accordingly, the question should not be: *Where should women and girls with disabilities be placed within gender policies?* Rather, it should be: *How can gender policies be designed from the outset in a manner that recognizes women and girls with disabilities as an integral part of the target population?* Disability inclusion is not about adding a new category to existing policies; it is about rethinking how those policies are designed and implemented to ensure that none of the groups they are intended to serve are excluded.

QADER further proposes that the guidelines more explicitly emphasize the need to integrate disability inclusion as both a governing principle and an analytical lens within international, regional, and national frameworks related to gender equality and women's empowerment, including development plans, sectoral policies, national women's strategies, cross-sectoral policies, and mechanisms for implementing relevant international commitments. Continuing to treat women and girls with disabilities as an exception or a subcategory within these frameworks risks undermining the effectiveness of interventions aimed at achieving substantive equality

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<sup>4</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in policies, legislation, and programmes; gender equality; the general obligations of States; and measures aimed at combating multiple and intersectional discrimination.

<sup>5</sup> See the analytical paper issued by on **the New Global Guidance Document for Women and Girls with Disabilities**, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/10386.html>.

and may perpetuate the very patterns of discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion that such frameworks seek to address.

In this context, QADER underscores the importance of strengthening the linkage between the disability inclusion approach, accountability mechanisms, and effective remedies. The integration of a disability perspective into gender policies should not be measured by the mere presence of references or sections addressing disability; rather, it should be assessed by the extent to which this perspective is reflected in objectives, indicators, budgets, implementation arrangements, monitoring systems, and evaluation frameworks. Disability inclusion therefore serves not only as a human rights obligation incumbent upon States and other relevant actors, but also as a key benchmark for assessing the quality and effectiveness of gender policies.

#### **4. Legal Capacity, Protection, and Access to Justice**

QADER welcomes the emphasis in the draft guidelines on the importance of access to justice and legal protection for women and girls with disabilities. QADER considers legal capacity and access to justice to be among the areas in which the effects of multiple and intersectional discrimination are most directly manifested and therefore deserving of more in-depth consideration. Access to justice does not begin at the doors of courts, police stations, or protection institutions. Rather, it begins with the full recognition of the person as a rights-holder and an individual with will and agency, and with ensuring her ability to participate effectively in proceedings and decisions affecting her life, rights, and interests on an equal basis with others<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, QADER considers it important to strengthen the explicit linkage between these guidelines and Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the full legal capacity of persons with disabilities of all disability types. Women and girls with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, continue to face, in many legal and institutional systems, preconceived assumptions that conflate disability with the ability to make decisions, express one's will, or exercise rights. The impact of such assumptions extends beyond restricting personal autonomy; it also results in their exclusion from legal proceedings or the substitution of their will with that of guardians, trustees, or other representatives, thereby transforming certain protection measures themselves into sources of discrimination and exclusion.

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<sup>6</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing access to justice, protection, and the recognition of legal capacity. See also **the publications on legal capacity** available on the website of QADER at: <https://www.qader.org/resources>

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee's General Comment No. 1 (2014) affirm that legal capacity is an inherent right of every person and may not be restricted or diminished based on disability. Accordingly, difficulties in communication, understanding, or expressing one's will do not justify excluding women and girls with disabilities from legal proceedings or decision-making processes. Rather, they impose a positive obligation on States to provide the necessary support and appropriate accommodations to enable them to exercise their rights and express their will and preferences on an equal basis with others. It should further be emphasized that supported decision-making must not become a mechanism for substituting or overriding a person's will; instead, it should aim to enable individuals to exercise their rights and freedoms in accordance with their own will and preferences.

This issue acquires particular significance in cases involving violence, exploitation, and sexual abuse. In many practical contexts, women and girls with disabilities face heightened risks that extend beyond exposure to such violations and include the barriers they encounter when reporting them, accessing remedies, or participating effectively in judicial proceedings.

Approaches based on guardianship or substituted decision-making may marginalize victims, weaken their legal voice, and exclude them from the justice process itself, thereby preventing their meaningful participation in proceedings intended to protect and provide redress for them. Furthermore, persistent conceptual and operational gaps within justice systems—including assumptions that women and girls with disabilities are incapable of making decisions or participating in legal proceedings—together with the absence of support mechanisms, accessible communication, and reasonable accommodations, limit their ability to report violations, participate in judicial processes, and exercise their rights on an equal basis with others.

QADER further considers it important to emphasize that restrictions on legal capacity affect far more than access to courts and justice. Their impact extends across a broad spectrum of civil, political, economic, and social rights. Depriving a woman or girl with a disability of the exercise of her legal capacity restricts her ability to manage her personal and financial affairs, access services, and make decisions relating to her private and public life, thereby generating reinforcing cycles of discrimination, exclusion, and dependency. Legal capacity is therefore not merely an independent right; it is a fundamental gateway to the effective enjoyment of the full range of rights on an equal basis with others.

QADER considers it important that the guidelines explicitly emphasize the interrelationship between legal capacity, access to justice, and protection from violence, discrimination, and exploitation. Recognition of legal capacity is not merely an independent right; it is an essential prerequisite for the exercise of all other rights and

for access to protection, remedies, and accountability. Consequently, any efforts aimed at combating multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities should include practical measures to ensure respect for will and preferences, provide support in decision-making, and remove legal and procedural barriers that hinder equal access to justice.

Finally, QADER for Community Development proposes that the guidelines explicitly affirm the need to move from guardianship-based and substituted decision-making models toward models based on supported decision-making and the respect, clarification, and implementation of an individual's will and preferences, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and relevant international normative developments. Genuine protection is not achieved by replacing the will of women and girls with disabilities, but by empowering them to exercise their rights and legal and social roles independently, while ensuring the provision of the support and safeguards necessary to uphold dignity and equality before the law.

## **5. Participation, Leadership, and Inclusive Multidimensional Representation**

QADER welcomes the emphasis in the draft guidelines on the importance of the participation of women and girls with disabilities in public life and decision-making. QADER considers this dimension to be one of the key foundations for addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination and advancing substantive equality. Participation is not merely a means of expressing views or providing advice; it is a fundamental right and an essential mechanism for ensuring that policies, legislation, and programmes reflect the needs, experiences, and aspirations of women and girls with disabilities. Effective participation is also a prerequisite for moving beyond treating women and girls with disabilities as recipients of policies toward recognizing them as partners in their formulation, development, and implementation, consistent with the core principles of the Convention.

Nevertheless, women and girls with disabilities continue to face significant challenges that hinder their full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making. These challenges are reflected in their low levels of representation within public institutions, elected bodies, and national mechanisms concerned with gender equality, as well as in their limited involvement in the development of policies, plans, programmes, and budgets addressing women's issues, empowerment, and gender equality that directly affect their lives and rights. Physical, communication, institutional, and social barriers continue to restrict opportunities for equal participation and access to positions of influence and leadership.

QADER considers it important that the draft guidelines more explicitly emphasize that effective participation is not achieved merely through the presence of women and girls with disabilities in meetings, consultations, or

committees. Rather, it requires creating the conditions that enable them to exert meaningful influence over decisions, outcomes, and policies. Genuine participation requires accessible information, reasonable accommodations, accessibility measures, sufficient time for consultation, and participation mechanisms that take into account the diversity of disabilities and lived experiences. It also requires institutional environments that are responsive to their views and ensure that those views are genuinely reflected in decision-making outcomes.

QADER also considers it important to strengthen the linkage between participation and leadership. The objective is not only to expand opportunities for participation, but also to enable women and girls with disabilities to access positions of influence, responsibility, and leadership within women's organizations, public institutions, and other relevant bodies. The continued underrepresentation of women with disabilities in leadership positions limits their ability to influence priorities and policies and contributes to the persistence of the gap between their actual needs and the decisions made concerning them.

In this context, QADER highlights the importance of exploring more inclusive approaches to participation and representation that take into account the multiple dimensions of discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. Measures aimed at enhancing women's participation in general do not necessarily result in greater participation by women with disabilities. Likewise, measures directed toward persons with disabilities in general may not adequately address the specific challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities. Ensuring meaningful participation therefore requires attention to the intersection of gender, disability, and other factors that influence opportunities to access positions of influence and decision-making<sup>7</sup>.

QADER proposes that the guidelines emphasize the importance of supporting the self-leadership of women and girls with disabilities and strengthening their presence within organizations of persons with disabilities, women's organizations, national bodies and committees, official delegations, United Nations mechanisms, and other platforms where decisions are made and policies are formulated. Sustainable participation extends beyond consultation; it also encompasses capacity-building, the creation of opportunities, the provision of necessary support, and the removal of barriers that impede access to positions of influence and leadership.

Finally, QADER for Community Development considers that participation, leadership, and representation should not be understood merely as procedural or numerical objectives, but as integral components of justice,

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<sup>7</sup> The guidelines could benefit from **inclusive representation approaches that consider the multiple and intersectional dimensions of discrimination and marginalization**, thereby ensuring that women and girls with disabilities are not excluded from public participation mechanisms or from measures designed separately for women or for persons with disabilities.

substantive equality, empowerment, and the realization of rights in practice. The presence of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making positions contributes to improving the quality of policies and programmes, strengthens their legitimacy and effectiveness, and ensures that the voices of those most exposed to discrimination and exclusion are present in setting priorities, identifying solutions, and shaping the future.

## 6. Education, Health, Employment, and Social Protection

QADER welcomes the emphasis in the draft guidelines on the importance of ensuring that women and girls with disabilities enjoy their economic and social rights on an equal basis with others. QADER considers education, health, employment, and social protection to be key areas in which the effects of multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities are particularly evident. Deprivation or exclusion in any one of these areas does not remain confined to that domain alone; rather, it directly affects other rights and opportunities, resulting in compounded and reinforcing cycles of poverty, dependency, marginalization, and inequality throughout various stages of life<sup>8</sup>.

In the field of education, many women and girls with disabilities continue to face compounded barriers that impede their access to inclusive, quality, accessible, and disability-friendly education on an equal basis with others. These challenges become even more acute when disability intersects with poverty, geographic location, displacement, or other forms of marginalization. Ensuring the right to education therefore extends beyond enrolment in educational institutions; it requires the development of inclusive education systems that embrace human diversity and provide reasonable accommodations, accessibility, and the support necessary for participation, learning, and achievement, thereby enhancing opportunities for autonomy, empowerment, and future participation in society and the labor market.

In the area of health, women and girls with disabilities frequently encounter additional challenges related to access to healthcare services, health information, and sexual and reproductive healthcare. Stereotypes and preconceived assumptions associated with disability and gender often undermine their autonomy in making decisions concerning their health and private lives. QADER therefore emphasizes the importance of clearly affirming the right of women and girls with disabilities to access healthcare services based on respect for dignity, autonomy, and free and informed consent, as well as the removal of barriers that impede equal access to all forms of healthcare.

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<sup>8</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing education, health, employment, social protection, and the economic and social rights of women and girls with disabilities.

In the field of employment, women with disabilities remain among the groups most excluded from the formal labour market and experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, poverty, and precarious work. This situation is not attributable to disability itself, but rather to the multiple barriers that hinder access to education, training, and inclusive employment opportunities and work environments. Achieving equality in employment requires the removal of these barriers, the provision of support and reasonable accommodations, and the promotion of policies and measures that guarantee equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and economic independence.

Regarding social protection, QADER emphasizes that women and girls with disabilities should not be viewed solely through a lens of care or dependency, but rather through a framework of rights, autonomy, and dignified living. Social protection programmes should be designed and implemented in ways that consider the multiple and intersectional discrimination that women and girls with disabilities may face and should contribute to enhancing participation, economic and social independence, and decision-making capacity, rather than reinforcing patterns of dependency or exclusion.

QADER further considers that weak disability-inclusive data and information systems represent not merely a technical or statistical gap, but one of the most significant obstacles to developing rights-based and evidence-based policies, interventions, and responses. This gap becomes even more critical in situations of conflict, emergencies, and unlawful occupation, where inadequate data hinders the assessment of violations, needs, and losses, as well as the identification of priorities and the equitable and effective allocation of resources. The development of disability-inclusive data and information systems is therefore an essential prerequisite for planning, response, accountability, and equity, and for ensuring that women and girls with disabilities do not remain invisible within policies, programmes, and interventions<sup>9</sup>.

QADER considers it important to strengthen the linkage between these economic and social rights and the concept of disability inclusion as a governing principle of public policy. The challenge lies not only in creating programmes or initiatives specifically targeting women and girls with disabilities, but in ensuring that all education, health, employment, and social policies are inclusive of them from the planning stage through implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Without such a structural transformation, existing gaps will persist despite the proliferation of programmes and interventions, and the participation of women and girls

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<sup>9</sup> On the importance of **strengthening disability data systems and linking them to monitoring, documentation, evidence-gathering, accountability, and effective remedies**, see the statement issued by QADER, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/17557.html>

with disabilities in these sectors will remain limited and fragile. It is equally important to emphasize the interrelationship between these rights and participation, leadership, autonomy, and empowerment. Education, health, employment, and social protection are not isolated sectors; together, they form the foundation upon which women and girls with disabilities can exercise their other rights and participate in decision-making.

Finally, QADER proposes that the guidelines explicitly affirm the responsibility of States, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and donors to support the development of inclusive policies and programmes that respond to the diverse needs of women and girls with disabilities in the fields of education, health, employment, and social protection, in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Sustainable Development Goals, and other relevant international commitments. QADER further considers that the effective enjoyment of these rights should not be viewed as a collection of separate sectoral interventions, but rather as a fundamental prerequisite for autonomy, empowerment, participation, and substantive equality. Consequently, removing the barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities in these areas represents a crucial step toward dismantling accumulated patterns of discrimination and exclusion and strengthening their ability to participate fully and effectively in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others.

## **7. Women and Girls with Disabilities in Situations of Conflict, Emergencies, and Occupation**

QADER welcomes the inclusion of conflict and emergency-related issues in the draft guidelines and considers that this area warrants more extensive and in-depth treatment in light of the compounded and escalating forms of discrimination, risks, and violations experienced by women and girls with disabilities in such contexts. Armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, and unlawful (colonial) occupation, as is the case in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, do not affect all populations in the same manner. Rather, they expose, intensify, and compound pre-existing inequalities, making women and girls with disabilities among the groups most vulnerable to exclusion, violence, and deprivation of protection and essential services. The consequences of these contexts extend beyond immediate threats to life and safety and undermine access to education, health, employment, social protection, and community participation, thereby generating compounded cycles of marginalization and inequality<sup>10</sup>.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 11, affirms the obligation of States to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of

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<sup>10</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, crises, and disasters, and their impact on women and girls with disabilities.

risk, humanitarian emergencies, and armed conflict. This obligation was further reinforced by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019), which emphasized the need to include persons with disabilities in all phases of conflict prevention, response, and recovery, while stressing their meaningful participation in relevant decision-making processes. These obligations assume even greater significance in situations of protracted conflict and prolonged occupation, where protection, accessibility, and participation become everyday concerns rather than exceptional measures limited to emergency periods, extending into all aspects of daily life.

QADER believes that the guidelines would benefit from more explicitly highlighting the specific challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in these contexts. In addition to the general risks associated with displacement, loss of shelter, and the collapse of essential services, women and girls with disabilities face additional risks related to difficulties in accessing shelters, healthcare facilities, protection services, and humanitarian information, as well as increased exposure to violence, exploitation, neglect, and separation from support and care networks. Physical, communication, and institutional barriers also exclude them from humanitarian response mechanisms themselves, despite being among those most affected and most in need of such assistance. As a result, some humanitarian interventions risk becoming new spaces for the reproduction of exclusion rather than instruments of protection.

QADER further emphasizes the importance of affirming within the guidelines that disability inclusion in humanitarian action should not be viewed as an optional measure or a best practice, but rather as a legal and human rights obligation incumbent upon States, the United Nations and its agencies, international organizations, donors, and all humanitarian actors. The continued design and implementation of humanitarian response programmes without adequately considering women and girls with disabilities effectively reproduces the same patterns of discrimination and exclusion that such programmes seek to address and undermines the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and leaving no one behind that underpin the human rights framework and the Sustainable Development Agenda<sup>11</sup>.

Recent experiences in conflict-affected settings demonstrate that the absence of disaggregated data, limited consultation with women and girls with disabilities, and the failure to involve organizations of persons with disabilities in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes result in significant gaps in identifying needs, setting priorities, and allocating resources. An inclusive humanitarian response therefore requires the

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<sup>11</sup> See the **Urgent Appeal** issued by QADER on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/10229.html>

meaningful involvement of women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes, rather than treating them solely as beneficiaries of services or assistance, in accordance with Article 4(3) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the principle of meaningful participation upon which the Convention is founded<sup>12</sup>.

In this context, QADER for Community Development underscores the importance of strengthening the linkage between these guidelines and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent resolutions. Despite the progress achieved under this agenda over recent decades, women and girls with disabilities remain inadequately represented in many of the policies, programmes, and mechanisms associated with it. Achieving meaningful participation, protection, and inclusive recovery therefore requires the systematic integration of a disability perspective across all pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including prevention, protection, participation, relief, recovery, and reconstruction.

QADER proposes that the guidelines explicitly affirm the responsibility of the international community to support women and girls with disabilities in situations affected by conflict, emergencies, and occupation, in accordance with Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning international cooperation. The challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in such contexts cannot be addressed through national interventions alone; they require a genuine international commitment to financing, technical assistance, capacity-building, strengthened accountability, monitoring, data collection, and the integration of disability inclusion across all humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction programmes. These responsibilities have acquired particular significance in light of recent developments in international law, especially the 2024 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the subsequent 2024 United Nations General Assembly resolution, both of which reaffirmed the responsibilities of States, the United Nations system, and relevant international actors in addressing unlawful situations and their impact on human rights and on groups most vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See the **Urgent Appeal** by QADER on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Response, Recovery, and Reconstruction Efforts in the Gaza Strip, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/10229.html>

<sup>13</sup> See the analytical paper issued by QADER on **the New Global Guidance Document for Women and Girls with Disabilities**, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/10386.html>.

On the importance of strengthening disability data systems and linking them to monitoring, documentation, evidence-gathering, accountability, and effective remedies, see the statement issued by QADER, available at: <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/17557.html>.

Finally, QADER considers that the guidelines would benefit from emphasizing that recovery and reconstruction should not be limited to restoring pre-conflict or pre-disaster conditions. Rather, they should serve as opportunities to address accumulated patterns of discrimination and exclusion and to build more just and inclusive foundations for the future. Reproducing systems, services, and institutions that previously failed to respect the rights of women and girls with disabilities will only reproduce the same patterns of marginalization. Recovery and reconstruction should therefore be grounded in a rights-based approach, disability inclusion, and meaningful participation, ensuring that women and girls with disabilities are partners in rebuilding their communities rather than merely recipients of aid or beneficiaries of interventions. In this sense, recovery and reconstruction represent an opportunity to build societies that are more equal, inclusive, and resilient, rather than simply returning to the conditions that existed before the crisis.

## 8. Data, Monitoring, Accountability, and the Disability Inclusion Approach

QADER welcomes the attention given in the draft guidelines to data and information collection and considers this issue to be one of the fundamental pillars for addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities, particularly in conflict settings and situations of unlawful (colonial) occupation. However, the challenge lies not only in the lack of data or the limited availability of information, but also in the absence of integrated systems for generating, analyzing, utilizing, and linking data to decision-making, public policies, and relevant human rights and legal processes. The existence of data does not necessarily mean that the realities of women and girls with disabilities can be understood or that their needs can be effectively addressed unless such data form part of a rights-based and disability-inclusive framework<sup>14</sup>.

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms the obligation of States to collect appropriate information, including statistical data and research, to enable them to formulate and implement policies aimed at realizing the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the data required to achieve this objective should not be limited to general quantitative indicators. Rather, they must be capable of revealing the forms of multiple and intersectional discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, including the intersections between disability, gender, age, poverty, geographic location, displacement, and other relevant

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<sup>14</sup> **Relevant paragraphs in the draft guidelines:** The paragraphs addressing data, statistics, monitoring, and the collection and analysis of information. **On the importance of strengthening disability data systems and linking them to monitoring, documentation, evidence-gathering, accountability, and effective remedies, see the statement issued by QADER, available at:** <https://www.qader.org/news-blogs/17557.html>

factors. Such data should enable a deeper understanding of existing gaps, their causes, and their consequences, rather than merely describing them in abstract terms.

QADER emphasizes the importance of clearly recognizing that data are not merely a technical or statistical matter; they are also a tool for advancing equality, justice, and accountability. When disaggregated, up-to-date, rights-based, and disability-inclusive data are absent, women and girls with disabilities become less visible within policies, plans, and programmes, and the capacity to identify priorities, allocate resources, measure impact, and assess the effectiveness of interventions is diminished. The absence of such data often obscures patterns of discrimination, violence, and exclusion experienced by women and girls with disabilities and limits opportunities to address these issues or hold those responsible accountable.

QADER further considers that the guidelines would benefit from a clearer emphasis on the participation of women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations throughout all stages of data production, from the design of studies, surveys, and indicators, through data collection and analysis, to their use in policy development and evaluation. Such participation is not merely a consultative practice; it constitutes a human rights obligation consistent with the Convention and enhances both the accuracy of data and their capacity to reflect the lived realities of women and girls with disabilities.

In contexts affected by conflict, emergencies, and occupation, the importance of data and monitoring becomes particularly acute. The absence of disaggregated data on women and girls with disabilities may result in their exclusion from humanitarian responses and from protection, recovery, and reconstruction programmes. It may also impede understanding the cumulative impact of the violations they experience and prevent accurate assessments of their needs and priorities. Data collection in such contexts should therefore be grounded in a disability inclusion approach and should respect the principles of protection, confidentiality, safety, and non-discrimination, ensuring that data serve as a tool for protection and response rather than becoming an additional source of marginalization or exclusion.

QADER also highlights the importance of strengthening the linkage between data, monitoring, documentation, and accountability. Data should not be produced solely for planning and administrative purposes; rather, they should form part of a broader system of monitoring, documentation, evidence-gathering, and analysis capable of tracking violations, particularly in conflict zones and contexts of colonial occupation, identifying patterns of discrimination and violence, and assessing the effectiveness of measures adopted to address them. Such systems should contribute to remedies, accountability, and the prevention of impunity, particularly in cases involving serious or systematic violations against women and girls with disabilities. In this regard, it is important

to distinguish between the mere collection of information and evidence-based documentation conducted in accordance with international standards, which is capable of supporting accountability processes, redress, and the effective realization of rights.

QADER further considers it important to address the interrelationship between Article 31 on data and information and Article 32 on international cooperation. Existing gaps in data and monitoring concerning persons with disabilities in general, and women and girls with disabilities in particular, cannot always be viewed as an exclusively national responsibility, especially in contexts affected by conflict, humanitarian emergencies, occupation, and large-scale destruction. In such situations, the capacity of national institutions to generate, collect, analyze, and utilize data becomes increasingly constrained. This places particular importance on the responsibilities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, international organizations, and donors in supporting the development of rights-based and disability-inclusive systems for data collection, monitoring, and documentation. International cooperation in this field therefore represents more than a form of technical or financial assistance; it constitutes part of a shared effort to ensure that persons with disabilities in general, and women and girls with disabilities in particular, are not excluded from policies, humanitarian responses, recovery and reconstruction programmes, or protection, accountability, and redress mechanisms.

Finally, QADER considers that the quality of data should not be measured solely by the number of indicators or the volume of information collected, but by their capacity to reveal the realities of women and girls with disabilities and translate those realities into policies, rights, accountability, and redress. Data that are not used to expose discrimination, guide responses, or support accountability remain of limited value regardless of their accuracy. When data fail to make women and girls with disabilities visible, policies fail to protect them, opportunities for accountability diminish, and access to justice and redress becomes increasingly difficult and complex.

## **9. Issues Requiring Further Consideration**

QADER considers that the draft guidelines constitute a crucial step towards developing a more comprehensive understanding of multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities. At the same time, there are several issues that present both challenges and opportunities and warrant further consideration in the definitive version of the guidelines due to their practical and normative significance and their direct impact on the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

## **9.1 Disability Inclusion as a Governing Principle for Gender Policies**

QADER considers that the guidelines could further develop a clearer approach to disability inclusion as a governing principle for gender policies, rather than treating it merely as an additional component or a subsidiary theme within them. Despite growing recognition of the importance of including women and girls with disabilities in policies and programmes related to gender equality and women's empowerment, many of these policies continue to address disability as a specialized and separate issue, thereby limiting their ability to effectively address multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination.

QADER further considers that moving towards disability inclusion as a governing principle necessarily requires rethinking how policies, legislation, plans, programmes, budgets, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are designed from the outset, so that they are built on the assumption that women and girls with disabilities are included from the beginning rather than added later. Such an approach would strengthen the alignment of gender policies with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and contribute to achieving a more inclusive, equitable, and responsive form of equality that reflects the diversity of human experiences and circumstances.

## **9.2 Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda**

QADER considers that the guidelines could provide a clearer treatment of the relationship between the rights of women and girls with disabilities and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and its subsequent resolutions. Despite the progress made under this agenda over recent decades, women and girls with disabilities remain insufficiently visible within many of its policies, plans, and implementation mechanisms. This absence often weakens opportunities for their participation in conflict prevention, response, and recovery processes and limits the benefit that can be drawn from their experiences and contributions to strengthening social cohesion.

QADER further considers that integrating a disability inclusion perspective into the Women, Peace and Security Agenda should not be limited to expanding protection measures or responding to humanitarian needs. Rather, it should encompass the meaningful and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making, mediation, peacebuilding, recovery, and reconstruction efforts. Such integration would strengthen the inclusiveness of the agenda itself and help ensure that a group facing compounded and intersectional forms of discrimination and exclusion in conflict-affected, emergency, and humanitarian crisis settings is not left behind.

### **9.3 Women and Girls with Disabilities in Recovery and Reconstruction Processes**

QADER considers that the guidelines could benefit from a clearer treatment of the position of women and girls with disabilities within recovery and reconstruction processes. Despite growing international attention to humanitarian response in situations of conflict and emergency, humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction from the perspective of disability inclusion as a governing principle continue to receive relatively limited attention. This often results in the persistence of barriers and forms of exclusion that existed prior to crises or were exacerbated during them, thereby limiting the ability of women and girls with disabilities to benefit equally from opportunities for recovery, development, and participation in shaping future priorities.

QADER further considers that recovery and reconstruction should not be limited to restoring pre-conflict or pre-disaster conditions. Rather, they should be viewed as opportunities to address accumulated patterns of discrimination and exclusion and to build systems, institutions, programmes, and interventions that are more inclusive and responsive to the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Accordingly, their involvement in planning, implementation, and monitoring, together with ensuring that their rights and needs are addressed across all sectors, constitutes a fundamental element of achieving a rights-based, disability-inclusive, equitable, and sustainable recovery.

### **9.4 Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination in Digital Environment**

QADER considers that rapid digital transformations present new challenges and opportunities for women and girls with disabilities that deserve greater attention within the guidelines from an inclusion perspective. With the expansion of digital platforms, online services, and artificial intelligence technologies, new forms of discrimination, exclusion, and digital violence have emerged that particularly affect women and girls with disabilities, in addition to challenges related to accessibility, digital divides, privacy, data protection, and digital security.

QADER further considers that ensuring the digital inclusion of women and girls with disabilities is no longer merely a technical or developmental issue; it has become an integral component of the effective enjoyment of many fundamental rights and freedoms in the context of rapid digital transformation and the growing use of artificial intelligence. The guidelines could therefore benefit from a clearer treatment of the challenges and opportunities presented by digital environments, in a manner that promotes accessibility, safe and equal participation, and equitable access to the benefits of these transformations.

## 9.5 Inclusive Multidimensional Representation

QADER emphasizes the importance of developing a deeper understanding of the issue of inclusive representation of women and girls with disabilities within various decision-making mechanisms and representative and advisory bodies. Practical experience indicates that measures aimed at increasing women's representation do not necessarily translate into greater representation of women with disabilities, just as measures directed towards persons with disabilities in general may not adequately address the specific challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities. Achieving equality in representation therefore requires moving beyond traditional approaches that focus solely on numerical presence or symbolic representation and adopting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of the concept of inclusive representation.

In this context, QADER considers that women and girls with disabilities do not constitute a homogeneous group. Their experiences, needs, and opportunities for participation are shaped by multiple and intersecting factors, including age, type of disability, geographic location, socioeconomic conditions, displacement, emergency contexts, and other relevant considerations. Consequently, systems and mechanisms that achieve only limited or symbolic representation may not necessarily succeed in amplifying the voices of those who are most exposed to marginalization, exclusion, and deprivation within this group itself.

Inclusive multidimensional representation is not only about who occupies seats or leadership positions; it is also about how participation, representation, and decision-making mechanisms are designed so that they do not reproduce patterns of marginalization and exclusion. From this perspective, the guidelines could benefit from a more in-depth treatment of inclusive representation, ensuring the meaningful participation of diverse women and girls with disabilities and strengthening their presence in leadership and decision-making positions in a manner that reflects the full diversity of their experiences, realities, and needs. Inclusive multidimensional representation is not merely a mechanism for improving participation; it embodies a fundamental requirement of substantive equality, justice, respect for inherent dignity, and the commitment to leave no one behind. Ensuring the presence of women and girls with disabilities from diverse backgrounds and experiences in positions of influence and decision-making is therefore essential for developing policies and responses that are more inclusive, equitable, and effective.

## 10. Key Messages

The observations and recommendations presented in this submission highlight several key issues that can contribute to strengthening the coherence, comprehensiveness, and practical impact of the guidelines. In this context, QADER wishes to emphasize the following key messages:

1. The discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities cannot be understood as merely the accumulation of multiple forms of discrimination. Rather, it constitutes an intersectional and compounded form of exclusion and inequality that requires comprehensive and integrated legal, policy, and institutional responses.
2. Women and girls with disabilities should be recognized as full rights-holders, rather than being viewed solely as recipients of protection or care, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the principles of dignity, autonomy, equality, and non-discrimination.
3. The disability inclusion approach constitutes a governing principle for gender policies and should not be treated as a separate component or a subsequent addition within policies, legislation, plans, programmes, priorities, and budgets related to gender equality and women's empowerment.
4. Legal capacity constitutes a fundamental foundation for the exercise of all other rights. Women and girls with disabilities must be guaranteed the enjoyment of their legal capacity on an equal basis with others, together with the provision of the support and accommodations necessary for the effective exercise of those rights.
5. Access to justice requires the removal of legal, institutional, communication, and procedural barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities, as well as ensuring their meaningful and effective participation throughout all stages of legal and judicial proceedings to secure substantive justice.
6. Genuine participation is not achieved through symbolic presence or formal consultation, but through ensuring meaningful participation, leadership, and inclusive, equitable, and effective representation of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making positions and public policy processes.
7. Policies relating to education, health, employment, and social protection should be grounded in the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination, ensuring the removal of barriers, responsiveness to the

diverse needs of women and girls with disabilities, and the promotion of their autonomy, participation, and dignified living.

8. Women and girls with disabilities face heightened risks in situations of conflict, emergencies, and unlawful (colonial) occupation, which requires the systematic integration of disability inclusion throughout all stages of prevention, humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction.
9. Data collection, monitoring, documentation, and accountability constitute fundamental human rights obligations rather than merely technical matters. Systems should be developed that are capable of capturing the realities of women and girls with disabilities and the patterns of discrimination and violations they face, particularly in conflict settings, while supporting pathways to redress, accountability, and the prevention of impunity, and linking data to decision-making, policy development, effective protection, and the realization of rights.
10. States, the United Nations and its entities and agencies, international organizations, and donors share responsibility for supporting the rights of women and girls with disabilities, including through promoting participation, access to justice, strengthening data and monitoring systems, and integrating disability inclusion into international cooperation and humanitarian and development responses, thereby ensuring that women and girls with disabilities are not left behind.

## **11. Concluding Observations**

QADER welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Committee to develop guidelines on multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities and considers the draft guidelines a major step towards strengthening both the normative and practical understanding of the multiple challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities across different contexts. The guidelines also reflect a growing recognition of the need to address discrimination through a comprehensive approach that considers the intersection between disability, gender, and other factors affecting the enjoyment of rights.

At the same time, QADER hopes that the observations and recommendations presented in this submission will contribute to strengthening several areas that, in our view, warrant further development and elaboration,

particularly those relating to disability inclusion as a governing principle for gender policies, legal capacity and access to justice, leadership and inclusive representation, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, data, monitoring, documentation and accountability, as well as issues related to conflict, emergencies, humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction. Strengthening these dimensions would enhance the consistency of the guidelines with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relevant international normative developments, while improving their ability to respond to the diverse and evolving realities experienced by women and girls with disabilities around the world.

QADER emphasizes that achieving substantive equality for women and girls with disabilities requires moving beyond the recognition of rights to ensuring their effective exercise; beyond formal inclusion to genuine inclusion; and beyond abstract protection to empowerment, participation, and leadership. It also requires moving beyond data collection towards the use of data for monitoring, documentation, accountability, and redress, and beyond responding to immediate needs towards addressing the structural causes of discrimination, exclusion, and inequality. The challenge lies not merely in acknowledging the presence of women and girls with disabilities within policies and programmes, but in ensuring their meaningful influence in shaping, implementing, and evaluating them, as well as in all spheres of decision-making.

QADER believes that building more just, equal, equitable, and inclusive societies requires that women and girls with disabilities be recognized as full and active partners in setting priorities, shaping policies, and guiding development, humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction processes. This also requires a shared responsibility among States, the United Nations and its entities and specialized agencies, international organizations, donors, and all other relevant actors to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are not left behind and are enabled to fully enjoy their rights, freedoms, and human dignity on an equal basis with others.