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## The Constitutional and Policy-Oriented Framework of Rights, Services, and Integration of People of Determination in the United Arab Emirates

By Muhamad Olimat<sup>1</sup> and Osman Antwi-Boateng<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The term “People of Determination” (PODs), coined by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government, refers to women and men with disabilities and is articulated and inspired by the country’s history, culture, and traditions. This study aims to examine the constitutional and policy-oriented framework of PODs in terms of rights, services, and their integration process in UAE society. In so doing, it explores the UAE’s perspective on PODs in terms of conceptualization, services, framework of empowerment, institutions, rehabilitation efforts, employment, and societal integration. Although the UAE is a federal state composed of seven emirates with federal institutions, each emirate has established a set of governmental and nongovernmental institutions that provide an integrated system of care, rehabilitation, skills-building, employment, and inclusionary and societal integration for PODs. The country is a pioneer in this area such that prominent international institutions have recognized its accomplishments and organized major world events such as the 2019 Special Olympics in Abu Dhabi. The first section of this study examines issues surrounding conceptualization and some relevant theoretical contributions to PODs. The second investigates the constitutional and legal framework of the UAE’s POD paradigm. The third explains the UAE’s narrative about PODs as well as the policy-oriented instruments, institutions, and mechanisms that have translated such narrative, values, and laws into practical policies and institutions. Finally, the paper discusses accomplishments, outcomes, and recommendations. The article as a whole demonstrates how future researchers and policymakers can contribute to a deeper engagement with issues of gender and disability to achieve intersectional gender and disability justices.

**Keywords:** UAE, People of Determination, Gender, Disability, Services, Rehabilitation, Education, Protection mechanisms, Integration, Emiratis with Disability Act, UAE Constitution, National Plan for PODs

### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that a staggering 1.3 billion people experience a significant level of disability, stating that every person will likely experience some disability in their lifetime. It adds that disabled people suffer from health inequalities, die early, and suffer daily because of “stigma, discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and barriers faced in the health system itself.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the WHO suggests that “disability inclusion is critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goals.”<sup>4</sup> It is the state’s

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<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Disability: An overview*. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab\\_2](https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_2)

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Disability: An overview*. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab\\_2](https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_2)

responsibility to address such inequities, and the WHO urged the international community to resolve them so as to enable persons with disabilities to enjoy their right to health.<sup>5</sup>

“People of determination” (PODs) is a concept articulated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government to refer to the segment of society with disabilities. Although it is challenging to determine the exact number of PODs in the UAE, the Ministry of Community Development has built a database that provides the demographic, social, and educational data for more than 30,000 PODs in the country.<sup>6</sup> Official government statistics report a total of 23,263 PODs in the UAE, of whom 14,860 are men, 8,403 are women, 9,962 are non-nationals, and 13,301 are nationals.<sup>7</sup> However, this data does not correlate social and educational data by gender for POD. As such, the data needs to be upgraded to capture the intersections of disability, education, gender, and other social variables for the state to better address the distinct challenges that POD face based on gender and age. The UAE’s perspective on PODs is driven by values deeply rooted in its faith, traditions, and system of ideals parallel to any other aspect of society. Regarding mercy and compassion toward segments of society with disabilities, the UAE narrative is well-grounded in Islamic values that promote assisting these individuals.

The UAE also consists of tribes that are deeply immersed in Arab Tribal traditions with a history of aiding those with disabilities and those generally in need. The two pillars, faith and tribe, explain why UAE rulers and officials compete to provide healthcare, financial support, training, rehabilitation, and external healthcare for PODs. The practice of Majlis,<sup>8</sup> which refers to council or parliament, invites any citizen to meet rulers and their representatives, submit their requests, and receive an immediate answer. Usually, healthcare requests top the list. The UAE has established healthcare attaché offices worldwide to provide the necessary healthcare services for its people, especially those with disabilities. It has several offices in the United States (Houston, Los Angeles), Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, France, and other countries.

For 50 years, the UAE has uplifted its people from complete marginality to the center of modernization and global affairs. Cities, highways, and airports are on the rise, information technology is within the reach of its territory, and its people enjoy unprecedented levels of prosperity. The country has also become the envy of the world with its state-of-the-art infrastructure. Similarly, the UAE has generously extended healthcare, education, housing, and social welfare to its people, including PODs. Its healthcare system is unmatched in the region, and if an extra healthcare need arises, the government does not hesitate to send its patients abroad to receive the best care, paid fully by the government. There have been countless cases where the UAE government rented life flights to send patients to the United States, Korea, Thailand, or Japan. When it comes to the health of its population, the UAE does not calculate monetary considerations. However, this data is not gender disaggregated and needs to be addressed for the effective formulation of policies to tackle the dual challenge of gender and ableism that POD face.

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Disability: An overview*. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab\\_2](https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_2)

<sup>6</sup> Wam-Gulf News. (2022, June 18). *People of Determination always a priority in the UAE: Minister tells New York summit*. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/people-of-determination-always-a-priority-in-uae-minister-tells-new-york-summit-1.88673278#>

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Community Development. (2019). *People of Determination portal*. <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/social-affairs/people-of-determination>

<sup>8</sup> The Majlis is the direct interaction between the rulers and the people, organized usually once a week, or sometimes once a month to respond to the requests submitted directly by the citizens.

Another essential element in the UAE's approach to the needs of PODs is the concept of justice and fairness. The country has accomplished a remarkable level of development, and the fruits of its prosperity should reach all its people, especially PODs. The federal and local governments provide monthly stipends for PODs, special assistance credit cards, free comprehensive healthcare insurance at its best hospitals such as Cleveland Abu Dhabi, National Media Commission, and Burjeel and its public hospitals.<sup>9,10</sup> The stipends and all forms of financial assistance aimed at enhancing the welfare of POD are gender neutral and constitute a key component of the social welfare state of the UAE.

The most important factor here is the role of founder Sheikh Zayed, who spent his entire life caring for his people, setting an example for his successors to emulate. He once said, "[L]imiting disability is a national responsibility."<sup>11</sup> The ruling families established a comprehensive set of governmental and nongovernmental agencies with the sole purpose of caring for and empowering PODs. The late Sheikh Zayed is viewed as the patriarch of the UAE's family, state, and societal affairs. He is also called the father of all citizens, and this attachment of a loving father to his family, children, community, and society is a major force behind the massive and generous UAE framework of assistance for and integration of PODs.

### Theoretical Background

The UAE government coined the term "PODs," which pertains to people with disabilities as recognized by the United Nations Convention on People with Disabilities. The concept's development from "handicapped people," "disabled people," "impaired," "people with special needs," and "people with disabilities" is associated with the evolution of attitudes and trends toward this segment of society. The term "PODs" has a cultural and social depth in UAE society, referring to those determined to achieve success and fully participate in societal life despite physical or mental challenges. It also highlights positive values across the country and sets norms on classification, treatment, roles, accomplishments, and societal development. Compared to other denigrating titles that refer to the same segment worldwide, the UAE has created a positive framework that strengthens PODs' rights, freedoms, and impressions. Other countries still refer to PODs as "handicapped," "impaired," "incompetent," and other degrading and negative stereotypes. These terminologies have no room in the UAE's vocabulary; neither should they occupy space in the narrative of other countries.

As discussed above, the UAE's narrative is well-rooted in its faith, history, values, and modern history. It is also well-founded in the modern philosophy of justice, which has fairness as its core principle. The concept of justice is the principal founding block of the UAE's POD framework. In John Rawls's (1971) words, "justice is the first virtue of social institutions . . . each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice."<sup>12</sup> The UAE's laws and institutions embody the principle of justice in providing a comprehensive framework for the philosophy of disability, its institutions, policies, and instruments. Such a framework is as close as it can be to Rawls's imagined "just" society in modern times, a society committed to the concept of fairness as justice.

<sup>9</sup> TAMM. (2021). *Benefits provided to People of Determination*. <https://www.tamm.abudhabi/en/articles/benefits-provided-to-people-of-determination>

<sup>10</sup> UAE Government Portal. (2024). *Health of people of determination*. <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/health-and-fitness/health-of-vulnerable-groups/specialneedshealth>

<sup>11</sup> Shiekh Zayed Bin Sultan, 2024. *The People of Determination, a National Responsibility*. Zayed Higher Organization for the People of Determination. ZHO. <https://www.zho.gov.ae/en/About-ZHO/About-Us>

<sup>12</sup> Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press, 3.

Gender justice is “defined as a society in which there are no gender-related asymmetries of access to, or allocation of, status, power and material resources, or in the control over and capacity to benefit from these resources”<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> While this paper focuses on disability justice, feminist intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989)<sup>15</sup> calls for an examination of the intersections of oppressions to appreciate the policy and activist interventions that reflect particular needs identified through this approach. Hence, future studies should take up this call.

Disability studies, as a field of knowledge and a specialty area in the social sciences and humanities, is deeply rooted in history. In the social sciences, humanities, and applied sciences, the early articulation of the field took place after World War I and was strengthened by the calamities of World War II. The field was influenced by the aggregated catastrophes of the European global wars in the early part of the last century, reinforced by the conflicts and civil wars in the 1950s–1980s and wars of national liberation from European colonial powers, and began to emerge in the 1980s as a field of knowledge. However, with the increasing process of interaction and integration between the applied sciences and humanities, its boundaries, mandate, and focus have become clearer. While disability studies are well-rooted in the humanities and social sciences, it is equally grounded in the applied sciences and the rightly termed area of medical humanities. This link and space between medicine and disability studies within the humanities and social sciences led pioneers such as Diana P. Herndl (2005) to view disability as a matter beyond bodily dysfunctionality or disease. She argues that disability must not only focus on bodily functioning but on the obstacles created by society for inequitable access to spaces and opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, girls and women face different challenges of inequity than do boys and men. Although a gender lens introduces such a framework, this article does not address these differences. Nevertheless, the article recognizes gender as important in disability studies as evidenced by both the rise of feminist disability studies and multiple UN documents that outline the differential challenges that are produced by gender distinctions rooted both in biology and in social systems. Here is an example of such an approach as captured in a UN study (UN Women, 2019).<sup>17</sup> As such, this article encourages further research that presents a gender lens for PWD, caregivers, and the implications for the law.

As a field, disability studies encountered major challenges throughout its development. Focusing on different aspects of disability, several authors, area specialists, and practitioners found that public health systems have paid little attention to disability issues. Lollar (2002) captured this trend, by observing that traditionally the community of public health has not paid enough attention

<sup>13</sup> Institute for Gender And Development Studies. (2024). *The UWI gender policy: Promoting gender justice for all*. [https://www.mona.uwi.edu/igds/sites/default/files/igds/updated\\_2024\\_the\\_uwi\\_gender\\_policy\\_aug\\_26\\_2024.pdf](https://www.mona.uwi.edu/igds/sites/default/files/igds/updated_2024_the_uwi_gender_policy_aug_26_2024.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Barriteau, E.V. (2004). Constructing feminist knowledge in the Commonwealth Caribbean in the era of globalization. In B.Bailey & E. Leo-Rhynie (Eds.), *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions and Possibilities* (pp. 437-465), University of the West Indies Press.

<sup>15</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–168.

<sup>16</sup> Herndl, D.P. (2005, March). Disease versus disability: The medical humanities and disability studies. *PMLA*, 120(2), 593.

<sup>17</sup> UN Women. (2019). *Human rights of women and girls with disabilities: A brief guide to the intersectional approach through the implementation of CEDAW and CRPD in Ukraine*. [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2019/06/DAW%20CRPD%20Guide%20ENG\\_compressed.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2019/06/DAW%20CRPD%20Guide%20ENG_compressed.pdf)

to the needs of people with disabilities.<sup>18</sup> Lollar echoed previous contributions in the field and confirmed that advanced countries such as the United States have identified disability as their biggest public health challenge.<sup>19</sup>

Another major theme observed in disability literature is the social exclusion of persons with disabilities from public spaces, especially in employment and the capitalist economy, and this trend applies to advanced economies as much as it applies to developing economies. Barnes and Mercer (2005) point out that the stringent physical fitness requirements of the capitalist labor market disqualify many people with disabilities and forces their exclusion from the labor market.<sup>20</sup> Where women face gender-based exclusions from career bias, women with disabilities are likely to experience what is known as double oppression.

The politics of disability has also captured the imagination of area specialists. Meekosha and Soldatic (2011), who examined the politics and trends of disability as a human rights issue in the Global South, concluded that in these areas there is a big gap between the lived experiences of people with disabilities and the legal rhetoric on their rights.<sup>21</sup> They also investigated the root causes of the crises in the Global South and traced it to the ills of imperialism and colonialism. They cite a legacy of massive human rights violations and environmental degradation as an enduring legacy of imperialism and colonialism in the Global South.<sup>22</sup> This is the legacy of European colonialism that the Global South must deal with for generations to come, creating structural dependencies that make the liberation of former colonies a challenging cause. Throughout the exploitative era of colonialism in the Global South, priority was given to identifying “physically fit” people of the colonies for hard labor. As such colonial labor laws were designed to subjugate, exploit, and control so-called physically fit people. By default, PWDs became invisible and vulnerable in society as colonial laws offered no protection. In addition, the political economy of colonialism was such that most of the “physically fit” family members, relatives, and caregivers of PWDs were unavailable to provide the much needed care because the former was often away from home and being exploited.

Area specialists have also identified health insurance as a main obstacle for disabled individuals in receiving sufficient and necessary care. Alang et al. (2014) observe that if public insurance programs are expanded to provide care for the uninsured through state and federal policy decisions, the lives of persons with disabilities will be significantly improved.<sup>23</sup>

The employment and workforce integration of people with disabilities is also a central point in practitioners’ and area specialists’ contributions in the field. Milner et al. (2017) found that unemployment is detrimental to the mental health of disabled people and recommended that policymakers address unemployment as a health issue.<sup>24</sup> If this is the case in underemployment,

<sup>18</sup> Lollar, D.J. (2002, March-April). Public health and disability opportunities. *Public Health Report*, 117(2), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Lollar, D.J. (2002, March-April). Public health and disability opportunities. *Public Health Report*, 117(2), 131.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2005, September). Disability, work, and welfare: Challenging the social exclusion of disabled people. *Work, Employment & Society*, 19(3), 533.

<sup>21</sup> Meekosha, H., & Soldatic, K. (2011). Human rights and the Global South: The case of disability. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), 1394.

<sup>22</sup> Meekosha, H., & Soldatic, K. (2011). Human rights and the Global South: The case of disability. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), 1394.

<sup>23</sup> Alang, S.M., McAlpine, D.D., & Henning-Smith, C.E. (2014). Disability, health insurance, and psychological distress among adults. *Society and Mental Health*, 4(3), 174.

<sup>24</sup> Milner, A., King, T.L., LaMontagne, A.D., Aitken, Z., Petrie, D., & Kavanagh, A.M. (2017). Underemployment and its impacts on mental health among those with disabilities: Evidence from the HILDA cohort. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 71(12), 1201.



the consequences of total unemployment would be detrimental to the health of disabled individuals, who feel that they are a burden to society instead of realizing their self-worth and contributions. This helps explain the increasing suicide rates among both disabled and non-disabled people as with no job opportunities, life can lose its meaning. Women carry a disproportionate burden of household labor. It would be important to understand how this labor is distributed for POD by gender to better appreciate the kinds of challenges women face with regard to reproductive and productive labor.

The link between gender roles and disability status in the UAE and most traditional and conservative societies has peculiar challenges for women with disabilities. This is evident in the reproductive burden on women as well as non-disabled expectations placed upon them in the workplace. Thus, a complex form of inequity has been created as a result of entrenched traditional views on women as domestic matrons (Crabtree, 2007)<sup>25</sup> and compounded by obstacles faced by individuals with disabilities at the workplace (Khater & Imad, 2024).<sup>26</sup> Although tremendous progress has been made in the UAE in terms of disability rights and gender equality (Al Gharaibeh & Al Remailh, 2022),<sup>27</sup> women with disabilities are still confronted with the challenges of balancing caregiving, household work, and participation in the labor market (Al-Hendawi et al., 2022).<sup>28</sup> Hence, to fully understand the challenging experiences of women with disabilities and formulate appropriate interventions, more research is needed.

Another major focus of disability studies is stigmatization with its damaging impact on people with disabilities. The social stigma associated with disability influences disabled people's health, psyche, and role in society as they feel they are a burden to society instead of contributors to it, especially as, according to the stigma theory, such persons are often devalued and mistreated by others (Namkung & Carr 2020).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the governments of the UAE, Norway, Denmark, and other countries have invested tremendous resources in massive media campaigns to remake and rebrand disability. The UAE has specifically excelled in this aspect, making disability seem like a normal aspect of society and frequently showing disabled people on public media with the head of the state and senior government officials. However, it is important to point out that the nature of stigma differs for men and women as the latter faces the double jeopardy of gender bias and ableism.<sup>30</sup>

Gender and disability are a major focus as well, as we have indicated throughout, and which is addressed in some greater depth below. In a study on women with disabilities in the UAE, Al Gharaibeh and Al Remailh (2022) illustrated how the UAE's national policy on PODs has led to

<sup>25</sup> Crabtree, S.A. (2007). Family responses to the social inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in the United Arab Emirates. *Disability & Society*, 22(1), 49-62.

<sup>26</sup> Khater, M., & Imad, D. (2024). The rights of women with disabilities at work in Islamic countries the United Arab Emirates as an example. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(9), 1101-1109.

<sup>27</sup> Al Gharaibeh, F., & Al Remailh, S. (2022, September). Disability as an inspiration: Rich experiences of women with disabilities in the UAE. *Information Sciences Letters*, 11(5), 1727-32.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Hendawi, M., Thoma, C.A., Habeeb, H., & Khair, M. (2022). Emerging themes on factors influencing career and employment decisions: Voices of individuals with disabilities from four Gulf countries. *Social Sciences*, 11(8), 371.

<sup>29</sup> Namkung, E. H., & Carr, D. (2020). The psychological consequences of disability over the life course: Assessing the mediating role of perceived interpersonal discrimination. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 61(2), 192.

<sup>30</sup> Disability Portal. (n.d). *How do we support women and girls with disabilities to overcome stigma against them? Evidence brief*. [https://www.disabilityevidence.org/sites/default/files/content/question\\_brief/files/2021-06/DEP\\_Evidence\\_Brief\\_Stigma%20Reduction%20Women%20with%20disabilities.pdf](https://www.disabilityevidence.org/sites/default/files/content/question_brief/files/2021-06/DEP_Evidence_Brief_Stigma%20Reduction%20Women%20with%20disabilities.pdf)

the empowerment of Emirati women and enhanced their agency in the public sphere.<sup>31</sup> However, they emphasized the need for improvement in infrastructure and services to meet the demands of women with disabilities as recommended in the UAE National Report (2019).<sup>32</sup> Research has established that disabled women, as opposed to disabled men, suffer from gender discrimination. Buttressing this point, Abu Habib (1995) argues that disabled women suffer more from poverty and deprivation than disabled men; they have more difficulty in accessing services and receive less support from the family and the community.<sup>33</sup> In fact, women's involvement in disability issues is a multifaceted process from conception throughout life and to the end of life. Women who deliver a disabled child are mostly responsible for caring for them throughout their lives. Besides this lifelong mission, these mothers are judged as responsible for the child's disabilities, which is a completely unfair and incorrect assessment of disability and its associated health issues.

Disability studies have emphasized the issue of education, which includes specialized education, customized programs, mild intellectual disability education, physical disability education opportunities, and the integration of disabled students with their non-disabled counterparts. According to Bouck (2017) the life outcomes of students with mild intellectual disabilities can be improved by focusing attention on their individual needs rather than on their participation in particular assignments.<sup>34</sup>

Studies on law and disability have also underlined aspects of rights relative to federal and state law in countries such as the United States. Courts have addressed a substantial number of cases to ensure public access to restaurants, the use of service animals in emergency rooms, housing and zoning, and private rental facilities.<sup>35</sup> In a pioneering study on education in critical fields such as law, Payne-Tsoupros (2020) found that even in the United States, which enacted the most comprehensive disability legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act, an extremely low percentage of students with disabilities have had the opportunity to join law schools. The study called for a drastic change in the support system, facilities, and accommodations to allow students with disabilities to join an essential field such as law so that they can contribute to society and build their own successful careers. Citing 2019 data from the U.S Department of Education, the study points out that about 12% of students in post-baccalaureate programs reported having some form of a disability.<sup>36</sup> The data does not distinguish between subfields of education, however.

No aspect of disability is as disheartening as exclusion from participating in social, political, and intellectual spaces (Titchosky 2002).<sup>37</sup> The social exclusion process of this segment of society and the marginalization of more than 1.2 billion people worldwide represents a global deficiency in the treatment of people with disability. While this is not the norm in many societies such as the UAE, it is most certainly a major problem for the international community.

<sup>31</sup> Al Gharaibeh, F., & Al Remailh, S. (2022, September). Disability as an inspiration: Rich experiences of women with disabilities in the UAE. *Information Sciences Letters*, 11(5), 1731.

<sup>32</sup> Al Gharaibeh, F., & Al Remailh, S. (2022, September). Disability as an inspiration: Rich experiences of women with disabilities in the UAE. *Information Sciences Letters*, 11(5), 1731.

<sup>33</sup> Abu Habib, A. (1995, June). 'Women and disability don't mix!': Double discrimination and disabled women's rights. *Gender and Development*, 3(2), 49-53.

<sup>34</sup> Bouck, E.C. (2017). Educational outcomes for secondary students with mild intellectual disability. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 52(4), 378.

<sup>35</sup> American Bar Association. (2008). March-April 2008. *Public Accommodations Source: Mental and Physical Disability Law Reporter*, 32(2), 295-297.

<sup>36</sup> Payne-Tsoupros, C. (2020). A starting point or disability justice in legal education. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 6(1), 167.

<sup>37</sup> Titchkosky, T. (2000). Disability studies: The old and the new. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 25(2), 198.



Sweed (2020) examined the experiences of people with disability in novels and states that the narratives of pain and suffering they present offer more realistic depictions of the struggles and challenges of the protagonists.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach calls on area specialists to examine the link between literature and disability. Disability studies must expand their inquiry to current trends in social media, literature and poetry, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, the metaverse, current methods of communication with a significant impact on disability as an institution, and the quality of services and processes of PODs' integration into the larger international community.

### **Constitutional Rights, Justice, and People of Determination**

Justice is the underlying foundation and spirit of the UAE Constitution, which, through Articles 14, 25, and 35, establishes absolute equality among UAE citizens and residents with no discrimination based on "race, nationality, religious belief or social position."<sup>39</sup> Article 14 states that "equality, social justice, the provision of safety and security and equality of opportunity to all citizens shall be the bases of the community, mutual cooperation and respect shall be a firm bond between them."<sup>40</sup> Article 25 promulgates that "all persons shall be equal before the law. No discrimination shall be practiced between citizens of the Union by reason of race, nationality, religious belief, or social position,"<sup>41</sup> while Article 35 highlights the principle that "public service shall be open to all citizens on the basis of equality of circumstances between them, in accordance with the provisions of the law."<sup>42</sup> These underline the concept of equality of opportunity for all citizens, including PODs.

Article 16, titled "Protection and Services of Vulnerable Segments of the Society," provides protection for children, mothers, minors, and other persons rendered vulnerable by sickness, incapacity, age, and joblessness. The law also provides for the rehabilitation of such persons.<sup>43</sup>

It provides a thorough constitutional basis for societal responsibility in protecting several vulnerable categories, which include the following:

1. Childhood: a comprehensive approach to children in the country that includes issues of marriage and family-building, marriage and financial support, education, healthcare, social services, prenatal services, birth services, child-rearing, etc.
2. Motherhood: women's health and the institution of motherhood.
3. Minors: A comprehensive approach to the protection of minors and raising them as good citizens.
4. Vulnerable segments of society: those who cannot care for themselves, primarily PODs and the elderly. The constitution and the law entrust relevant ministries to provide all services required by both people with special needs and the elderly.

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<sup>38</sup> Sweed, Y. (2020). New directions in disability narratives: Cyborgs and redefining disability in young adult literature. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, (4), 205.

<sup>39</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 9.

5. Ill and sick people: here, the UAE has excelled in providing comprehensive healthcare services for its people at home and abroad.
6. Disabled people's care: a state responsibility through different ministries, agencies, and governmental entities.
7. Forced employment.: protecting vulnerable people from forced labor is a major aspect of the UAE's labor market. The government has signed relevant international protocols and treaties that protect people from the threat of forced labor and loss of self-determination.
8. Social security legislation and public assistance services: The UAE also excels in this field, operating one of the most generous social security systems and public assistance services.

The UAE Constitution recognizes education as the country's main vehicle for development. Article 17 emphasizes the importance of education as "a fundamental factor for the progress of society."<sup>44</sup> The state guarantees free education for all UAE nationals from kindergarten to postgraduate level. State-of-the-art educational institutions provide services and specialties in the social sciences, humanities, and applied sciences.

Article 24 stipulates that the foundations of the national economy will be based on the principle of social justice.<sup>45</sup> In the past 50 years, to meet this goal, the government has established several institutions and an efficient legal system as well as semi- and nongovernmental institutions to ensure that the articles of the constitution are translated into policies, programs, and services.

The UAE is described as a multinational, multiethnic, and multicultural country that is home to nationals and foreigners representing more than 200 nations. Non-nationals account for the overwhelming majority of residents at a ratio of 9:1<sup>46</sup>. As such, the constitution recognizes the contributions of expatriates to state-building, prosperity, and progress. Foreigners enjoy a wide range of rights, services, and obligations in accordance with international agreements and the UAE Constitution. Non-nationals can also avail of private and governmental disability services. According to Article 40, non-citizens in the UAE are entitled to the same rights and freedoms enshrined in international charters which are in force as well as in treaties and agreements to which the UAE is a party. The Article also stipulates that non-citizens shall be subjected to the equivalent obligations in enjoying these rights.<sup>47</sup>

### **Emiratis with Disability Act: Federal Law No. 29 of 2006**

In 2006, the UAE government issued Law No. 29, which is similar to the Americans with Disability Act, titled "In Respect of the Rights of the People with Special Needs." It provides the most comprehensive approach to PODs and clearly defines people with special needs<sup>48</sup> and their protection, services, rights, and privileges. This section discusses some highlights of this law,

<sup>44</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 11.

<sup>46</sup> UAE Ministry of Economics. (2024). An open multicultural society. <https://www.moec.gov.ae/en/-/an-open-multi-cultural-society>

<sup>47</sup> Federal National Council. (2015). *United Arab Emirates Constitution*. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Although the term is outdated, it is used in the article because of its use as a legislative nomenclature. Disabled is used here to connote people with physical impairment while special needs connote people with both physical and mental impairment.

which was issued by the late President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, acting upon recommendations from the late founding father Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan.

Article 1 defines persons with special needs as “every person suffering from temporary/permanent, full/partial Impairment or infirmity in his/her physical, sensational, mental state, in communication, education, or psychological faculties that decrease his/her daily functions compared to people without special needs.”<sup>49</sup>

Article 2, which focuses on the objectives, seeks to safeguard the rights of individuals with special needs and to provide them with all the needed services within the scope of their abilities and capacities. It stipulates that the special needs status of an individual should not be a hindrance in the acquisition of such rights and services, particularly when it comes to accessing welfare, social, economic, health, education, professional, cultural, and promotional services.<sup>50</sup> This law aims to uphold people’s confidence and trust in the state and its institutions.

Article 3 names the UAE government as the guarantor of equality for all persons including persons with special needs, and in all policies and programs.<sup>51</sup> This law gives PODs and their families peace of mind in guaranteeing that the state and its institutions are on their side.

Article 4 highlights education as a main pillar of the policy on PODs and their families while Articles 5, 6, and 7 emphasize comprehensive justice and the protection of PODs’ legal rights and privileges. Indeed, Article 5 guarantees that the state will take all the necessary steps to ensure that persons with special needs enjoy these rights and liberties and prohibit any infringement on them.<sup>52</sup> These articles cover all legal matters involving PODs (women and men), especially those related to inheritance, a controversial aspect of PODs’ lives in the region.

Article 9 obligates the Ministry of Social Development to provide the institutional capacity needed for the training and care of people with disabilities and special needs. It also mandates the ministry to ensure their professional qualification as part of the training.<sup>53</sup> These institutions aim to implement an integrated approach to PODs that involves incorporating them into their communities, providing them with special education and professional training programs, and training their families and caregivers on caregiving best practices and skills.

Section 2 of the act provides a detailed list of rights and privileges of PODs, especially in health and rehabilitation services.

Article 10 contains four sections on the provision of comprehensive healthcare services for UAE nationals. These include the right to health and rehabilitation services, surgery, medical

<sup>49</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 2. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 4. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

examinations, general practice medicine, specialized medicine, dental procedures, all at the expense of the State.<sup>54</sup>

Article 11 establishes the mandates and goals of a specialized committee on health and rehabilitation services for people with special needs, while Article 12 guarantees PODs the right to education. Article 13 directs the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to take the leadership in designing the appropriate curriculum and pedagogical techniques for achieving these goals.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Article 14 also assigns these ministries the responsibility of equipping caregivers with the necessary academic skills so that they can assist people with special needs in diagnosis and early discovery as well as in their psychological, educational, medical, and rehabilitation needs.<sup>56</sup>

Article 11 of the act establishes the formation of a specialized committee on the education of people with special needs in terms of goals, mandates, and methods to provide services, conduct research, and develop policies and programs for PODs.<sup>57</sup>

Article 16 sets up the legal framework for employment nondiscriminatory in the public and private sectors. It stipulates that citizens with special needs are entitled to employment as well as the opportunity to hold public office. This is so long as their special needs status does prevent them from seeking and being selected for jobs.<sup>58</sup> The law entrusts the Ministry of Social Development to care for PODs.

Article 17 permits the Ministry of Social Development to enter into contracts with other entities to undertake rehabilitation projects for the benefit of people with special needs. In addition, the ministry is entrusted with the setting up of the terms, conditions and regulations required for the execution of such projects.<sup>59</sup> It authorizes the ministry to contract the private sector and home caregivers to provide services for PODs, especially in rehabilitation.

Article 18 provides specific guidelines to guarantee the right to work in both the private and public sectors. These include guidelines for employment, working hours, quotas, vacations, pension, and the end of employment entitlements. It also examines the issue of quotas and the determination of the percentage of positions occupied by PODs in both the private and public

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<sup>54</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 5. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 7. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 7. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 6. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 9. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 9. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

sectors.<sup>60</sup> These quotas are determined by the council of ministers. (“Council of ministers” refers to the Cabinet Ministry, and “minister” refers to the Minister of Social Development who provides recommendations to the council.)

Article 19 establishes a specialized committee for the employment of persons with special needs with a mandate that includes major issues such as articulating policies necessary for the employment of PODs; encouraging and supporting PODs eligible for economic projects and small businesses; providing financial support, loans, funding, and labor market information and making such information available to PODs; encouraging the private sector to train and employ PODs and giving them tax incentives; proposing procedures to protect PODs from all kinds of exploitation; and submitting periodic reports to the minister and the Cabinet Ministry on matters related to PODs.<sup>61</sup>

Chapter 4 of Article 21 focuses on cultural inclusiveness and mandates the state (federal, emirate, and local governments) to make the necessary arrangements to include people with disabilities in all cultural activities, entertainment, and sports.<sup>62</sup> These arrangements must develop PODs’ creative, artistic, and intellectual capacities; provide the literary and cultural materials they need to foster their cultural and sports skills as well as provide them with media platforms. Most importantly, the arrangements should lead to increased participation of people with disabilities and special needs at all levels of sporting activities organized on the national, regional, and international levels.<sup>63</sup> This last point prompted the UAE to host the 2019 Special Olympics to highlight the importance of PODs in society and showcase the country’s remarkable achievements in this field.

Article 21 also establishes a specialized committee on sports, culture, and recreation for PODs and mandates it to provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in sports, cultural and recreational activities<sup>64</sup>; and to expand the scope of such activities to all PODs; augmenting such activities with educational programs; developing cadres’ capacities to care for PODs; and encouraging PODs’ integration with their non-special needs peers in cultural, sports, and recreational activities and clubs. Finally, the law requires the submission of periodic reports to the Council of Ministers with recommendations on the continued development and prosperity of PODs.

Article 22 aims to create an environment that allows PODs to reach their potential. People with special needs have the right to an environment that helps them excel, enjoy their lives, and

<sup>60</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 9. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates\\_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 9-10. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates\\_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 11-12. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates\\_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 11-12. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates\\_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 11-12. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates\\_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates_The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf)



maximize their growth.<sup>65</sup> These ambitious goals require institutional mandates, social support, and an intellectual framework that views PODs as a component of society with full rights and obligations. Indeed, being a POD must not hinder the enjoyment of one's life or prevent them from contributing positively to society in economics and culture or by holding public office.

Section 3 of the legislation (Articles 23–37) addresses issues surrounding facilities that provide care for PODs. Article 23 discusses the engineering codes and standards for providing access to PODs. Article 24 highlights state-sponsored public housing for people with special needs and their families. Besides construction codes for roads, highways, airports, and public vehicles as well as land, air, and maritime means of transportation to meet the needs of PODs, Article 26 underlines their right to secure vehicle insurance from providers on an equal basis.

Section 4 of Article 24 lists exemptions and privileges for PODs. Exemptions include all taxes and fees for POD vehicles (Article 27); parking fees (Article 28); all fees for POD centers and facilities, including construction and municipal fees (Article 29); legal fees when filing legal claims (Article 31); and postal service fees, including the shipment of books, magazines, and newspapers (Article 32).<sup>66</sup>

Section 4 sets penalties and punishment for individuals and institutions that take advantage of people with special needs for their own interests. Article 33 specifies the penalty for using government-issued POD cards that entitle PODs to services and privileges, while Article 35 discusses the method to obtain these cards. The last part of section 4 deals with issues related to the private sector and its role in providing services and care for PODs. Article 36 requires the Ministry of Social Development to license nongovernmental institutions that provide care, training, and rehabilitation to persons with special needs and to determine procedures, regulations, penalties, and obligations in case of violations of the law. Most importantly, the legislation has entrusted the Minister of Social Development with the issuance of “the necessary bylaws and decisions to implement the provisions hereof.”<sup>67</sup> Article 38 nullifies all previous contradictory or conflicting provisions, and Article 39 instructs the publication of this law in the UAE's official gazette and puts it into effect starting August 13, 2006. The legislation was issued by the late President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The Emirate of Dubai issued Law No. 2 of 2014, in congruence with the above federal law. Its structure, services, privileges, protections, and mechanisms of penalties are modeled after Federal Law No. 29 of 2006. Article 4 is the heart of the legislation on the rights of PODs, providing a detailed list of these rights. These rights are in addition to those of the people of the emirate and include no-cost healthcare and treatment services, rehabilitation, habilitation, education, access to worship facilities, access to public services, and employment opportunities. This includes all other rights or services that fall under the implementing bylaws of this law.<sup>68</sup> The last section of the legislation allows for flexibility and space for extending these rights.

<sup>65</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 12. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 12-13. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> United Arab Emirates Government. (2006). *Federal Law No. 29. In respect of the rights of people with special needs*. 15. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/United-Arab-Emirates-The-Rights-of-People-with-Special-Needs.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Emirate of Dubai. (2014). *Law No. (2) concerning protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the Emirate of Dubai*. <https://www.cda.gov.ae/ar/search/pages/results.aspx?k=Law%202%202014>



## PODs and International Agreements and Protocols

Part 3 of this article examines the implementation of the legislations mentioned in the previous section and the UAE's international commitments. One of the most noticeable aspects here is the UAE's commitment to international agreements, protocols, and conventions on issues related to people with special needs. The UAE's government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which was adopted on December 13, 2006. The United Nations has described the convention as the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st Century. In addition, it is the first human rights convention that welcomes the signature of regional integration organizations.<sup>69</sup>

The convention catalogs the most exhaustive list of rights and freedoms that people with disabilities are entitled to enjoy. There are specific mentions of rights and obligations to the most vulnerable groups of people with disabilities: women, children and the aged. Collectively, these rights are aimed at honoring the dignity of persons with disabilities as well as providing them the necessary services to cope with their disability while creating opportunities for their inclusion in all spheres of society. The convention seeks to set out universal principles and standards in dealing with people with disabilities. The UAE, as a signatory to the UN Convention, has incorporated key principles of the convention into its own legislation and policies. This includes the convention's eight general principles, which focuses on the inherent dignity, autonomy and freedom, and independence of PWDs; nondiscrimination; full and active participation in societal affairs; respect for differences and acceptance of PWDs; equality; accessibility; and respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities.<sup>70</sup>

The UAE also signed the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which addresses parties that recognize the competence of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as its mechanisms of operation, communications, contact with parties, requests for information, and reports.<sup>71</sup>

## 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing

In 2004 the UAE ratified the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), the Child Protection Convention, the Equal Remuneration Convention, and the Convention on Minimum Age. All of these have the frameworks to protect against double oppressions. This international commitment was further incorporated into UAE's labor laws in 2018 with the promulgation of the "the Law on Equal Wages and Salaries for Men and Women" which stipulated women were paid the same wages for the same work done by men.

<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2023, May 16). *Convention on the rights of persons with disability*. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

<sup>70</sup> For more information, see Article 3. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-3-general-principles.html>

<sup>71</sup> The United Nations. (2007). Resolution A/RES/61/106 on 24 of January 2007. *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Annex II Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/handbook-for-parliamentarians-on-the-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-ares61106-2.html>

<sup>72</sup> WAM. (2018). *Mohammed bin Rashid approves new Law on Equal Pay*. <https://www.wam.ac/en/details/1395302680881>

In 1995, the UAE participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and has since made unprecedented progress in women's empowerment and equality. In 2019, the UAE government provided a detailed National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality, employment, education, women and poverty, training and empowerment, violence against women, women in decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women in positions of power, and others. In the women and disability section, the report underlines the progress made in this field. Article 3 of the report affirms impaired women's right to services, equality, and nondiscrimination and highlights their rights in all fields.<sup>73</sup> In 2004, the UAE ratified the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), the Child Protection Convention, the Equal Remuneration Convention and the Convention on Minimum Age. All of these have the frameworks to protect against double oppressions and should be mentioned in this section.

### **2019 Special Olympics, Abu Dhabi**

In March 2019, the UAE hosted the Special Olympics, the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa. The government mobilized the state and institutions to ensure the success of the games. The bidding, organization, and hosting of the games was led by Crown Prince and current President Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed, whose patronage, efforts, supervision, and organization added an unprecedented dimension to the games. He walked with delegates, attended the games, and honored participants in heartfelt and touching scenes expressing his appreciation for this segment of the international community. He also celebrated their success and recognized their valuable contributions to society. A total of 7,000 athletes representing 177 countries took part in the games.<sup>74</sup> The organizing committee developed and outdoored an impressive program to raise awareness for and educate about the Special Olympics and to encourage acceptance and understanding of people with special needs.<sup>75</sup> The committee used state-of-the-art technology during the event, designed a special app for the games and broadcasted it around the world.

### **National Efforts for the Empowerment of PODs**

The UAE's framework and approach toward PODs include legislation, institutions, infrastructure, mechanisms, instruments, and well-governed procedures of care, empowerment, and integration. The following provides an overview of this framework.

### **The 2017 National Policy for Empowering People with Disabilities**

On April 18, 2017, the UAE's Prime Minister and Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashed launched the National Plan for Empowering People with Disabilities, considered a turning point in the country's efforts to highlight their contributions to society. The plan is based on seven main pillars: health and rehabilitation, education, vocational

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<sup>73</sup> United Arab Emirates. (2019). The United Arab Emirates' national report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +25. *UN Women*. [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/UAE\\_en.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/UAE_en.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Special Olympics Games. (2019). *World Games. Abu Dhabi*. <https://www.abudhabi2019.org/beyond-sports/community-engagement>

<sup>75</sup> Special Olympics Games. (2019). *World Games. Abu Dhabi*. <https://www.abudhabi2019.org/beyond-sports/community-engagement>

rehabilitation and outreach, employment, mobility, social protection and family empowerment, and public life and sports.<sup>76</sup>

The plan also provides an overview of the status of PODs and charts a comprehensive and improved future path for them. This strategy aims to allocate national resources and institutional abilities to uplift PODs and highlight their issues, status, contributions, and goals. It defines the roles of the stakeholders and governmental agencies involved in the process, such as the Ministry of Health and Prevention, Ministry of Community Development (MCD), Ministry of Education, local health authorities, and higher education institutions.

The MCD provides services and care for UAE citizens, particularly PODs. MCD statistics show that a substantial number of its services are accessed annually by PODs (Table 1).

**Table 1: Most Frequently Used Services Provided by the Ministry of Community Development, 2019–2023 (January 1–June 15)**

Number	Service/category/type	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
1.	Requests for social financial assistance	1,778	13,775	8,668	5,781	5,781
2.	Applying for official letter	3,794	25,094	25,427	33,088	50,318
3.	Renewing cards for PODs	3,684	8,779	6,732	4,881	4,483
4.	Issuing new cards for PODs	3,200	5,775	4,633	4,456	8,809
5.	New requests for grants	1,455	2,745	3,617	3,529	2,644
6.	Issuing replacement of lost/damaged cards for PODs	214	446	292	265	376
7.	Requests for jobs for PODs	92	258	257	165	327
8.	New requests for mass weddings	101	244	194	141	NA
9.	New request for Productive Families membership	NA	235	190	NA	300
10.	Employment requests for PODs	NA	214	117	NA	NA

Source: Ministry of Community Development - Most Used Services,<sup>77</sup> <https://www.mocd.gov.ae/en/services/most-used-services.aspx>.

Table 1 indicates the volume and types of services accessed by PODs in the past five years. In 2023, the MCD added two new categories: abuse reports/complaint forms (134 cases) and registrations of students in governmental care and rehabilitation centers for PODs (132 cases). The MCD publishes statistics on reported cases of POD abuse in compliance with Federal Law No. 29 (2006), Federal Law No. 3 (2016), and the National Policy for the Empowerment of the People of Determination. In coordination with relevant governmental agencies and ministries such as the Ministry of Justice and law enforcement agencies, the MCD works to remedy cases of abuse and protect PODs from any harm inflicted or that might be inflicted upon them. In 2020, the MCD listed requests for assistance in family consultations (147 cases) as one of its most frequently accessed services and added inquiries as an important service provided that year with 425 cases. In 2019, the ministry added the issuance of the Massara Credit Card for the elderly as one of its

<sup>76</sup> UAE Ministry of Community Development. (2017). *The National strategy for empowering people with disabilities*.

<sup>77</sup> United Arab Emirates Ministry of Community Development. (2023). *Most used services*. <https://www.mocd.gov.ae/en/services/most-used-services.aspx>

most frequently used services with 2,538 cases. Notably, the above statistics cover January 1–June 15, 2023.<sup>78</sup>

### **The March 2019 POD Retreat**

In March 2019, the UAE government organized an unprecedented event—the POD Retreat—in cooperation with the Special Olympics organized in Abu Dhabi to mobilize national efforts for PODs’ empowerment and integration in society. It also aimed to highlight their contributions to societal development. Major national figures such as senior government officials, rulers, and ministers attended the event to underscore its importance. A total of 31 national initiatives and programs were adopted to strengthen PODs’ future, covering major issues such as sports, quality of life, education, empowerment, international representation, health, culture, services, media, access and accessibility, and other related rights and privileges.<sup>79</sup> The retreat received extensive media coverage on national and international channels along with the Special Olympics.

### **2020–2024 Comprehensive Strategy for the People of Determination**

The government of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi designed its own plan on POD empowerment based on national plans and strategies. Official government statistics indicates that there are around 20,000 people with disabilities and special needs within the Emirates of Abu Dhabi. This figure includes both citizens and non-citizens.<sup>80</sup> The 2020–2024 Abu Dhabi Comprehensive Strategy for People of Determination comprehensively deals with the provision of quality services and the sustainability of financial assistance to PODs and their families within an integrated framework that allows their social participation.<sup>81</sup> To implement this strategy, the Department of Community Development established six working teams on health, education, employment, social care, accessibility, and an enablers team led by the department itself. In the past four years, the department has mobilized emirate and national resources to elevate the process of integration of PODs.

### **Media Campaigns and People of Determination**

The UAE government realizes the importance of the media in expanding the scope of services and care as well as the integration of PODs in society. Therefore, it designed media campaigns to change the current image and perception of PODs. Ads in the media and on social platforms were the focal point of the 2019 Special Olympic Games and the POD Retreat, highlighting PODs as possessing sufficient skills and knowledge to contribute to society if given the chance. The government and the media campaigns encouraged private businesses to offer PODs employment opportunities to realize their self-worth and potential.

<sup>78</sup> For more information on the categories: United Arab Emirates Ministry of Community Development. (2023). *Most used services*. <https://www.mocd.gov.ae/en/services/most-used-services.aspx>

<sup>79</sup> United Arab Emirates. (2019). The United Arab Emirates’ national report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +25. *UN Women*, 12-13. [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/UAE\\_en.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/UAE_en.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> Abu Dhabi, Department of Community Development. (n.d.). *Abu Dhabi strategy for the People of Determination (2020-2024)*. <https://addcd.gov.ae/People-of-Determination-POD/About-the-Strategy>

<sup>81</sup> United Arab Emirates. (2024, January 16). *Abu Dhabi comprehensive strategy for the People of Determination 2020-2024*. <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/social-affairs/abu-dhabi-comprehensive-strategy-for-people-of-determination-2020-2024>

## POD Organizations and Institutional Framework in the UAE

The federal, emirate, and local governments in the UAE established organizations and institutions that provide a wide range of services for PODs. Besides the cabinet ministries and federal agencies such as the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, the following section provides an overview of other leading institutions in the country.

In 2004, the UAE government established the Zayed Higher Organization for the People of Determination (ZHO) as part of its commitment to the welfare of people with disabilities and special needs. The aim of ZHO is to serve as the umbrella organization for the coordination of all humanitarian organizations, social services, and institutions providing support for PODs. It is also responsible for the regulation of future humanitarian-based entities in the UAE. The ZHO provides an integrated range of services aimed at rehabilitating PODs for inclusion into the community. The range of services it provides includes psychological care, family counseling, training and education, and vocational and therapeutic rehabilitation. The latter also includes assessment, early intervention, physiotherapy, functional therapy, speech therapy, and vocational training workshops. Additionally, ZHO supports the educational and sport activities of PODs.<sup>82</sup>

The Dubai Community Authority (CDA) also offers PODs and their families a wide selection of services “through empowering and integrating them into society by providing social protection and securing a decent life that will enable them to reach their potential and fulfill their dreams.”<sup>83</sup> These include the Dubai Early Childhood Development Center, the Sanad Relay Center, and POD Protection and Empowerment. The Sanad Card provides PODs with special services and privileges in the Emirate of Dubai. The Rashid Center is a major institution that excels in raising awareness about PODs and highlights their integration in society.

Founded in 1981, the Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services (SCHS) is one of the oldest influential institutions in the country. In the past four decades, the SCHS has successfully changed the society’s attitude towards people with disabilities and affected government policies and disability-related issues, and it continues to work towards creating a bright future for children with mental and physical challenges.<sup>84</sup> It provides services in five key areas: early intervention to prevent and reduce disabilities, education, training and rehabilitation of children and adults with disabilities, job placement and awareness, and public education on disability issues

Similar to Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi, the Emirates of Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, and Umm Al Quwain have also established several mechanisms and institutions to provide care for PODs. In Ras Al Khaimah, the Department of Economic Development, the Emirates’ Association for Social Development, and the Department of Health implement a comprehensive approach toward PODs’ needs, and exhibitions and local media usually highlight their accomplishments and contributions.

Meanwhile, the Emirate of Fujairah has the Dibba Al Fujairah for Welfare and Rehabilitation Center for People of Determination, the Fujairah Public Health Center, and the nonprofit Rising Sun Center for Children with Special Needs. Umm Al Quwain (UQ) also provides

<sup>82</sup> Zayed Higher Organization for the People of Determination. (2023, May 19). *ZHO in brief*. <https://zho.gov.ae/en/About-ZHO/About-Us>

<sup>83</sup> The Government of Dubai Community Development Authority. (n.d.). *Determined ones*. <https://www.cda.gov.ae/en/socialcare/PeopleWithDisabilities/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>84</sup> Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services. (n.d.). *Our history*. [https://www.Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services \(SCHS\).schs.ae/en/our-history](https://www.Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services (SCHS).schs.ae/en/our-history)



services to PODs through the UQ Public Health Center and the Department of Health in association with federal agencies. Similarly, the government of Ajman, through the Department of Health, Department of Social Services, the Ajman Public Transport Authority, and other agencies, provides services such as medical facilities, assessment, program registrations, POD cards, rehabilitation, mobility, and recruitment.

### **Women with Disabilities in the UAE: The Legal and Policy Framework**

The 2017 Federal Law No. 10 that became the main disability framework of the country and re-designated people with disabilities as “People of Determination” is also the main legal foundation for social policy aimed at safeguarding the rights and needs of girls and women with disabilities. The law recognizes the unique gender and disability challenges that girls and women face and mandates continuous policy interventions. This has guided targeted governmental policies aimed at enhancing their social inclusivity which are discussed below.

#### *Education*

Under a policy initiative titled, “School for All” introduced by the UAE Ministry of Education, the government seeks to mainstream all POD including women with disabilities into regular schools while providing them the necessary resources to thrive and succeed academically. Central to ensuring the success of the “School for All” initiative is ensuring the provision of qualified special education teachers, wheelchair accessibility, and suitable learning environment tailored to the needs of POD.<sup>85</sup>

The above support for POD including women with disabilities is also available at the tertiary level of education. Indeed, all UAE universities are mandated to establish programs and support centers dedicated for the support of students with disabilities throughout their university education. For example, the United Arab Emirate University has a “Disability Support Center” that offers a range of support services to students with disabilities. This includes individual Accommodation Plan (IAP), counseling services, extra tutoring, assistive technologies, etc.<sup>86</sup> Women university students with disabilities are bound to disproportionately benefit from the aforementioned initiatives because, just as the global trend indicates, majority of university students in the UAE are also women.

#### *Employment*

In order to economically empower POD and to make them financially independent, the UAE government has introduced several initiatives aimed at creating employment opportunities. At the forefront of the empowering agenda is the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation which has introduced quotas in the hiring of POD in both the public and private sector. Another empowering initiative is the “National Policy for Empowering People of Determination,” which includes policy guides to increase employment opportunities for POD with a specific emphasis on

<sup>85</sup> United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education Special Education Department (n.d.). *General rules for the provision of Special Education programs and services (public and privates Schools)*.

<https://www.moe.gov.ae/Ar/Legislation/Documents/English%20Side%20Final.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> United Arab Emirates University. (n.d.). *Students of determination services*. <https://www.uaeu.ac.ae/en/student-services/special-needs/services.shtml>



women with disabilities. One of the central pillars of the aforementioned initiative is increased vocational training for PODs with the aim of making them more competitive for the job market.<sup>87</sup>

In furtherance of the government's policy of increased vocational training for POD, partner organizations such as the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children have established vocational training programs and offer job placement services that are specifically designed for women with disabilities.<sup>88</sup> These initiatives further empower women with disabilities through the development of their skills and competencies. Newly acquired skills increase their chances of obtaining meaningful employment. Ultimately, the ability of women with disabilities to obtain employment as a result of skills acquisition enables them to achieve financial independence and social inclusivity.

### *Healthcare*

Overall, the UAE has made significant advancement in providing quality health care for people with disabilities and women with disabilities have been big beneficiaries. This is evidenced by the setting up of specialized health and rehabilitation facilities throughout the country by The Ministry of Health and Prevention to cater for the unique needs of girls and women with disabilities. In addition, there is a multi-agency approach in ensuring that women with disabilities have access to a variety of health care services. For example, The Ministry of Community Development issues cards to POD that entitles them to receive free medical care for themselves and their children.<sup>89</sup> This is significant, because women in the UAE are still the primary caretakers of children, and women with disabilities are no exception to this. Therefore, granting the latter and their children the same medical privileges will go a long way in reducing their care burden.

In addition, as part of efforts to improve the physical health and mobility of POD, the UAE has made significant investments in research and development of assistive technologies. The country through its institutions such as The Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination is constantly seeking international partnerships to produce quality of life enhancing devices that will alleviate or manage any physical impairment that POD face.<sup>90</sup> Access to assistive technology will greatly enhance the functioning capabilities of women with disabilities, boost their self-efficacy and self-esteem.

### *Social Inclusion and Awareness*

Several awareness and educational initiatives aimed at changing negative societal attitudes towards people with disabilities, particularly women have been launched in the country. Such initiatives also seek to promote social inclusion. One notable initiative is the "My Community... A City for Everyone" initiative, which seeks to transform Dubai into a disability friendly and

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<sup>87</sup> United Arab Emirates. (2023, March 2). *The National policy for empowering People of Determination*.

<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/policies/social-affairs/the-national-policy-for-empowering-people-with-special-needs>

<sup>88</sup> Dubai Foundation for Women and Children. (n.d.). Building strong bonds for life. <https://www.dfwac.ae/services>

<sup>89</sup> United Arab Emirates. (2024, June 25). *Health of People of Determination*. <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/health-and-fitness/health-of-vulnerable-groups/specialneedshealth>

<sup>90</sup> Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination. (2024, July 6). *Launching a workshop for producing high-quality hearing solutions including medical ear devices for People of Determination and their charging devices*. <https://www.zho.gov.ae/Media-Centre/News/Understanding-between-Zayed-Higher-Organization-and-Topland-Company>

inclusive city.<sup>91</sup> In furtherance of this goal, Dubai has mandated the inclusion of disability friendly designs and equipment in all major public and private facilities to promote the mobility and inclusion of its residents and visitors.

An avenue that the UAE uses to promote the inclusivity of POD including women with disabilities is sports. The country has a track record of hosting major international conferences and events dedicated to promoting disability rights and inclusion. For example, in 2019, the country successfully hosted the Special World Games in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Also, it was the first Special Olympics held in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The event attracted 7,000 athletes from 170 countries.<sup>92</sup> Prior to the world games, Abu Dhabi also hosted the ninth edition of the MENA version which attracted a record number of women participants who represented 40% of all participants.<sup>93</sup> Therefore the UAE can be said to be an emerging norm entrepreneur in women with disabilities rights for offering platforms for girls and women with disabilities to showcase their sporting talents and capabilities.

### **Challenges of Welfare Policy for Women with Disabilities**

Although there has been major progress in the UAE in terms of enhancing the social inclusion of POD and especially girls and women with disabilities, there are still challenges which are discussed below.

#### *Societal Stigma and Stereotypes*

Girls and women with disabilities in the UAE still face deep rooted negative cultural attitudes and societal perceptions about gender and disability that continue to impede their well-being.<sup>94</sup> The difficulty lies in the fact that deep-rooted stigma and cultural attitudes are difficult to eliminate with policy prescriptions. Such negative beliefs and attitudes lead to the social exclusion of women with disabilities in all spheres of life including employment, education, and public engagement.

#### *Inadequate Access to Specialized Services*

According to Chapman et al. (2022), there is a global shortage of qualified care providers for the most vulnerable people in society such as the aged and people with disabilities. While the severity of the shortage varies regionally and from country to county, the shortage is structural and poses a major challenge to the well-being of the most vulnerable in society.<sup>95</sup> The UAE is not immune to this challenge and is particularly vulnerable because an overwhelming percentage of its healthcare labor force are foreigners who have no long-term attachment to the country. This is

<sup>91</sup> WAM. (2015, December 9). "My community ... a city for everyone" reinforces its commitment to transform Dubai into disability-friendly city by 2020. <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395289031185>

<sup>92</sup> Special Olympics Games. (2019). *World Games. Abu Dhabi*. <https://www.abudhabi2019.org/beyond-sports/community-engagement>

<sup>93</sup> Singh, A. (2019). *The Special Olympics come to Abu Dhabi and more women than ever are taking part*. <https://www.abouthr.com/node/9051/people/features/spa/aggregate>

<sup>94</sup> Al Khateeb, J. M., Al Hadidi, M. S., & Al Khatib, A. J. (2014). Arab Americans with disabilities and their families: A culturally appropriate approach for counselors. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 42(4), 232-247.

<sup>95</sup> Chapman, S. A., Greiman, L., Bates, T., Wagner, L. M., Lissau, A., Toivanen-Atilla, K., & Sage, R. (2022). Personal care aides: Assessing self-care needs and worker shortages in rural areas: Study examines selfcare needs for people with disabilities and worker shortages in rural areas. *Health Affairs*, 41(10), 1403-1412.

compounded by limited availability of specialized services that can effectively deal with gender specific needs of people with disabilities.

### *Poor Decision-Making Representation*

While the UAE has made significant progress in increasing women representation in all spheres of government, the same cannot be said in regard to women with disabilities. The UAE case fits the global trend where people with disabilities and women with disabilities are often underrepresented in leadership roles and decision-making. They are often infantilized and paternalized both in policy making and implementation. Furthermore, the policy emphasis on empowerment of people with disabilities conflicts with the normative Islamic and Arab cultural view on people with disability which calls for complete societal and family charity for them. Hence, decisions concerning the well-being of POD and women with disabilities are viewed through the lenses of charity rather than empowering them to cater for themselves.

### *Educational Challenges*

Although education is widely viewed as one of the most effective tools for the empowerment of people with disabilities, many women with disabilities in the UAE still face challenges in accessing quality education. These challenges can be classified as structural and operational. Structurally, due to deeply held societal views about the role of POD in society, some families may think limiting the educational experience of their POD relatives and providing for them for life at home is the best option for them. Women with disabilities may also be discouraged to venture out to pursue an education due to limited specialized infrastructure, specialized teachers, and inadequate assistive technologies in educational and public settings.

### *Employment Discrimination*

Women with disabilities still face employment challenges in the form of discrimination even though laws prohibit their discrimination and even call for employment quotas for their benefit. In addition, employers' prejudices against women with disabilities could reduce their employment and professional advancement.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, because of the cost in accommodating the physical needs of women with disabilities in terms of building designs (i.e. designating parking spaces for them and building modifications to facilitate their mobility), employers in the private sector could discriminate against them in terms of employment.

### *Gender and Disability Challenge*

Women with disabilities face the double jeopardy of sexism and ableism and thus can be discriminated against based on any of their status. Additionally, policies and initiatives do not often address this intersectionality.<sup>97</sup> This is further compounded by the fact that there are limited employment opportunities in the highly preferred UAE public sector. Women with disabilities are not attracted to working in the private sector because of the low wages and perception of a more demanding work culture just as the general population. Furthermore, women with disabilities may have unique concerns about the capacity of the private sector to accommodate their needs such as the provision of disability friendly buildings, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Al Gharaibeh, F., & Al Remaih, S. (2022). Disability as an inspiration: rich experiences of women with disabilities in the UAE. *Information Sciences Letters*, 11(5), 1727-32.

<sup>97</sup> Al Gharaibeh, F., & Al Remaih, S. (2022). Disability as an inspiration: rich experiences of women with disabilities in the UAE. *Information Sciences Letters*, 11(5), 1727-32.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges faced by women with disabilities in the UAE and to enhance their inclusiveness in society.

### *Educational and Awareness Campaigns*

The stigmatization and stereotyping of people with disabilities, especially women, is an intractable global problem that cannot be easily legislated or regulated away. This is because it involves deep seated cultural and societal attitudes that have been formed over a long period in a given society. Therefore, combating negative perceptions about women with disabilities requires a sustained educational and awareness campaign in all spheres of society. In general, respect for people with disabilities should be part of the curriculum of the entire educational system. Furthermore, qualified women with disabilities should be given leadership positions where they can be visible to the public and their accomplishments showcased.

### *Increased Legal Protections*

Although the UAE has strong constitutional and legal protections to protect the rights of people with disabilities and is a signatory to international protocols on disability rights, more can be done. There is the need for legal protections centered on fighting both gender and disability-based discrimination. This should be backed by a strong enforcement regime to ensure universal compliance across all sectors of society.

### *Promote Inclusive Education*

There is the need to improve the skills and competencies of POD educators in inclusive education. Hence, policy makers should provide additional resources to schools to ensure they can handle the peculiar needs of women students with disabilities. This should be in tandem with mentorship programs aimed at supporting girls and women with disabilities throughout their educational journey. In addition, the government should invest in the training of more special needs educators who are citizens in order to minimize the overdependence on expatriate educators.

### *Expand Employment Opportunities*

Policy makers need to strongly incentivize employers to hire, train, and maintain the employment of women with disabilities. The incentives could be in the form of a publicized ranking system of companies with the highest number of women with disability employees. High ranking companies and organizations could be rewarded with preferential treatment in the award of government contracts and grants. To further boost the employment prospects of women with disabilities, there is the need for enhanced and targeted vocational training that align with market demands. This should be supplemented with long term job mentorship programs and on the job accommodations to facilitate successful workplace experiences.

### *Enhance Healthcare Services*

It is commendable that citizens of the UAE enjoy free medical care. Although this aids the well-being of women with disabilities in the UAE, there is the need for specialized healthcare services that cater to the unique needs of women with disabilities. Such needs include mental and reproductive health services. Also, in order to effectively deliver the aforementioned services, there is the need to periodically train health care professionals on the latest disability-inclusive and gender-sensitive care practices.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The UAE's approach to disability is distinct, achieving remarkable outcomes in the past five decades. It developed ambitious legislations, acts, and laws inspired by its constitution, emphasizing justice and equality. It also ratified international agreements, protocols, and conventions on disability and related human rights treaties as well as established federal, emirate, and local institutions to provide care, rehabilitation, and social integration for PODs. The MCD created a central portal of services as well as published a unified sign language for hearing-impaired individuals. The highlight of its international efforts was its hosting of the 2019 Special Olympics in Abu Dhabi along with the POD Retreat. The UAE also created an unmatched framework of services including full healthcare programs for PODs at the best hospitals in the country and abroad. However, the UAE is not included in the top 10 countries that offer the best care and access for disabled people, which include Canada, the Netherlands, and Japan. Hence, the media should cover the UAE's efforts.

The UAE also expanded its special education system to include this segment of society. In addition, it extended financial support to families of PODs and educated them on best caregiving practices. The country organized image-making campaigns that highlight PODs as an integral part of society. The UAE should coordinate with international media to promote its accomplishments in free healthcare and education at home and abroad as well as in rights and privileges, which are unmatched by any other country, to familiarize other countries with its approach with the hope that they will adopt and share this with regional and international government and nongovernment organizations in the field of disability. Finally, the UAE should promote the term "People of Determination" to replace outdated terminologies that refer to this segment as handicapped, impaired, incompetent, or disabled. Indeed, PODs are an active part of society and help strengthen our development and cultural life.

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