

Emancipatory research On the Dynamics of Social Inclusion and Exclusion from the Perspective of Persons with Disability in Tunisia

Project

For an Independent Life in Tunisia (PUVI) AID 012590.01.03

Research Report of January 2024 - June 2025

*"Hope has two beautiful daughters.
Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are,
and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."*

St. Augustine



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Emancipatory Research on Disability in Tunisia

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» 1. Preface

Preface by Prof. Faouzi Bouaziz, sociologist, associate professor at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, University of Tunis, and member of the Technical Research Support Group (GST)

“For an Independent Life - PUVI in Tunisia: Emancipatory research on disability in Tunisia”, a turning point in the lives of researchers

First and foremost, I wish to extend my congratulations to the entire team for the outcomes achieved. In my opinion, this success is attributable to the conditions under which the project is being implemented. The initiative is conducted in a spirit of deep and shared joy, reflecting the concerted efforts of coordinators to realize the objectives set. The project has provided participants with a conducive environment in which they consistently felt at home. This was the aspect that struck me the most during my initial engagement with the project team (at the meeting held in Tunis). This encounter, convened in July 2024 in Gammarth, was highly valued by all researchers, who continue to attest to its positive and immediate impact (especially for those facing communication challenges) on, both, their societal participation and private lives.

It is evident that the ongoing project has fostered, among the majority of researchers, an increasing awareness of the significance of this experience for their daily and prospective lives. According to the data collected, this project represents a pivotal juncture in their personal trajectories. The life projects undertaken within the framework of the initiative are assuming an increasingly central role in the participants' lives. As can be seen from the testimonials (self-assessment exercise), their impact is visible and perceptible. For some, the change is radical, constituting a life-changing experience that has engendered a new perception and heightened self-awareness.

In summary, thanks to this project, participants are now quite convinced that disability constitutes a social condition for which they bear considerable responsibility. Researchers are now able to view their circumstances and disabilities from a renewed perspective. Their conditions are no longer perceived as inevitable constraints or as circumstances of victimhood. Disability is no longer equated with fragility (whether physical, social, psychological, or emotional) but is, instead, recognized as a catalytic force for action.

The activities carried out have instilled in them the confidence necessary to approach subsequent phases with great enthusiasm and determination. At the beginning, the researchers felt uncertain, hesitant and apprehensive about facing a challenge for which they were not fully equipped.

Thanks to the various activities conducted as part of the project, the participants have become increasingly aware of their potential and of the resources acquired through this experience - resources that they must preserve and strengthen to prevent any form of dependency or vulnerability in the future. In my view, the most significant change observed during this phase of project implementation is the perception of disability as a situational condition.



- This experience has also enabled them to acquire;

- » New legal knowledge

“Today, my perspective has changed: I have become a person who defends my own rights and those of other persons with disabilities, thanks to my involvement with the AIFO association. I no longer feel embarrassed or shy when speaking about the rights of persons with disabilities,” — Saif.

- » Participants have developed new skills that allow them to approach the future with optimism and composure and to challenge all forms of discrimination and social inequality encountered in daily life (particularly through enhanced communication abilities). Following a period of intensive engagement within the project, many participants reported substantial growth in these capacities.

- » Self-confidence

“Since then, I have gained a great deal of self-confidence,” — Kahoula

“In conclusion, this experience has given me much more confidence in myself,” — Amira

- » Independence

Participants feel increasingly independent from external actors and, to a lesser extent, from their families.

- Researchers highlight the central role of the family in developing autonomy and acceptance of their child’s disability (without denying the role of other actors, such as associations and intermediaries).
- They report fewer complaints about the lack of services and are increasingly aware of the very limited role of specialized associations in their respective regions in the health sector. According to the majority, existing structures do not provide adequate responses to their needs.
- This observation (that the possibilities offered are very limited) represents a general and current problem. To compensate for these shortcomings, some individuals are compelled to revise their expectations of the actors involved and to rely on themselves or on those close to them (particularly their families) to overcome the difficulties encountered in developing their life plans or in their personal lives.
- Researchers are now aware of their role and responsibility, particularly the need to stimulate collective awareness in their region. They are committed to supporting others and acting as intermediaries.
- Thanks to this project, participants feel concerned about other persons in difficulty and recognize their duty to support them.
- On a regional scale, this project has contributed to the emergence of new social (and, to a lesser extent, institutional) dynamics whose effects on the lives of participants have already begun to be felt. In the regions covered by the project, new social relationships have started to develop (among the participants themselves and between them and the partners involved, such as the media).

» 2. Introduction

Inclusive development entails the full and effective participation of all individuals, including persons with disabilities, in all decision-making processes, as stated in article 4.3 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD–UN 2006). To promote the capacity of persons with disabilities to exercise meaningful influence over these processes, it is necessary to provide them with significant opportunities to collect, analyze and disseminate information regarding their lives and the societies in which they live.

This emancipatory research on disability was conducted within the framework of the project “PUVI – For an Independent Life in Tunisia” (AID 012590.01.03), funded by the MAECI through AICS. The research forms an integral part of the project’s methodological approach, which consists of conducting development cooperation activities based on guidelines drawn by persons with disabilities. Consequently, the research enables participants to influence the development of inclusive solutions identified by the people at the heart of the project: persons with disabilities in Tunisia. The work was carried out in three governorates of the country: Médenine, Kasserine and El Kef, located in the South-West, Central-North and South-East of Tunisia, respectively. These regions are characterized by limited access to educational activities, inclusive employment and healthcare services, particularly specialized medical services, especially for persons with disabilities.

In 2018, the AICS developed guidelines on disability in international cooperation, which envisage and promote the use of emancipatory research to achieve sustainable inclusion objectives “that provide for the active participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations in decision-making processes concerning policies and programs in this field.” The application of this methodology has been tested by AIFO on several occasions and in various countries and has proven to be an innovative and effective tool, as it empowers persons with disabilities.

It allows them to become active agents in the production of knowledge regarding their condition, to identify barriers preventing their equal participation, and, consequently, to determine their actual rights. This methodology can lead to the production of sector-specific publications in accessible formats, validated by the very persons who co-directed the research.

To understand the concept of emancipatory research, it is important to recognize that the process involving individuals in situations of marginalization and/or exclusion consists of identifying the “barriers” to the equitable enjoyment of rights within their community, identifying persons or institutions that act as facilitators, acquiring the confidence necessary to assert their rights (empowerment) and establishing relationships with the community and institutions to implement appropriate measures to overcome these barriers. The life plan defined by each individual strengthens their potential and simultaneously contributes to the consolidation of an inclusive society for all and to the common well-being.

Origins and initial applications

The methodological approach of emancipatory research was developed based on participatory methodologies adopted since 2010, particularly in development cooperation projects in rural contexts, where the direct participation of local community members was ensured throughout all processes, namely the project design, the definition of priorities and the allocation of responsibilities. This approach is essential for addressing the needs expressed by the very target audience of the project.

This participatory action research methodology was adopted in the mid-1990s by Brazilian researchers and sociologists to include marginalized populations in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of project outcomes. The ideas of the Brazilian educator and thinker Paulo Freire significantly influenced the development of this methodology. In this purely qualitative research context, it emerged that the process of inclusion is closely linked to the analysis of lived realities and engagement in the process of rights advocacy, full participation in decision-making processes and the assertion of those rights. In summary, emancipation is the result of reflection and experience sharing; the identification of convergences regarding barriers and facilitating factors; and interactions with the community and civil society associations to raise awareness, promote the rights of persons with disabilities and initiate constructive and pragmatic dialogue with institutions, primarily at the local level. The assertion of rights is subsequently extended to regional and national institutions to ensure the initiation and implementation of this process.

Based on the experience of the emancipatory methodology, it is essential that marginalized individuals and communities have the opportunity to put these principles into practice. For this reason, the emancipatory research activity has been considered a foundational element and incorporated into the “For an Independent Life” project, with the aim of creating a pathway toward autonomous living with and for persons with disabilities who conducted the research together with their peers, families, community members, associations and institutions.

For AIFO, the application of emancipatory research to international development projects, placing the most vulnerable and excluded populations at the center of development processes, gained new momentum when combined with community-based rehabilitation (CBR) interventions in the Mandya district in southern India, coordinated between 2009 and 2010 by Dr. Sunil Deepak, the then AIFO Scientific Director. Following that specific experience, AIFO has developed emancipatory research in multiple countries worldwide, adopting the principle of inclusive community development within international cooperation projects.

Since 2016, AIFO has initiated numerous emancipatory research projects in various countries, in collaboration with academic institutions, such as the University of Florence and its research laboratories (ARCO-PIN), the Italian Disability and Development Network (RIDS) and other partner NGOs, such as EDUCAID. It should be noted that the emancipatory research methodology was systematized and published in the United Kingdom in the «Research Handbook on Disability Policy» in June 2023, by the Italian promoters of the research methodology, namely Professor Mario Biggeri, Professor Federico Ciani, Dr. Giampiero Griffo and Dr. Sunil Deepak.

The impact of emancipatory research

The fundamental effect of emancipatory research, as defined by Mike Oliver (1996), is to reverse the hierarchy of control in research. The study participants gradually become the agents who control the research process and direct its various decision-making stages, with the assistance of academic researchers acting as facilitators and providers of technical assistance. This process implies the representation of different types of disabilities and a diversity of social, educational, rural and urban contexts, in order to identify, both, the common barriers encountered by persons with disabilities and the specific barriers experienced according to their individual situations and conditions. Above all, this process entails a significant investment in building the capacities of the group of persons with disabilities acting as researchers.

Often, researchers are persons with disabilities who have very limited social networks, interacting primarily within their families or with civil society associations. The initial task of the research, therefore, is to work on group dynamics and communication, in order to elicit from the group itself the guidance needed to advance the research process and to discuss the topics chosen for joint work. This phase involves a series of dialogue simulations, debates and the use of socialization tools,

allowing participants to share their perspectives while simultaneously reaching group consensus on the methods and tools to be employed in the research. This initial stage is perhaps the most delicate and challenging to manage, as it requires the creation of a climate of trust between the facilitator and the researcher with a disability.

The basic principle of emancipatory research

Persons with disabilities involved as co-researchers gradually assume control over all stages of the research process: identifying research questions, developing research methods, creating a common guide for data collection and analyzing and sharing the data and information collected.

Throughout this process, the group of researchers can rely on the technical support and close monitoring provided by selected local university facilitators in each geographical area where the project is being carried out.

This support encompasses logistical and organizational oversight of individual interviews conducted with persons with disabilities outside the group, as well as translation of these interviews from the local language (in this case, Tunisian Arabic) and from the language of the international experts involved, who also ensure the proper conduct of the research process (in this case, French).

This collaborative and enriching work for all participants fosters trust, as it is based on the principle that every decision and subsequent step is discussed and determined collectively by the group.

As previously mentioned, all stages of the research implementation are undertaken jointly, from training and data collection, through analysis and the identification of potential solutions; from setting priorities to the consensual design of an action plan; and from dialogue with communities and institutions to the implementation of measures that overcome barriers to the exercise of rights and promote community awareness of disability perceptions.

“Disability is not in the body, but in the mindset of society,” says Walid, a 38-year-old man with a motor disability from Médenine.”

<https://www.aics.gov.it/settori-di-intervento/sviluppo-umano/disabilita/#page-accordion-1>

» 3. Emancipatory research on disability in Tunisia

Conducted in three regions of the country (Médénine, Kasserine and El Kef) within the framework of the PUVI project

The five-step research process



The research protocol

The process commenced with the development of a research protocol that was shared with the Technical Support Group (TSG), which brought together academics and international development cooperation professionals.

The areas of intervention were identified by the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs (MAS) on the basis of criteria assessing accessibility to services for persons with disabilities. Within this framework, potential researchers were selected among persons with disabilities, taking into account differences in gender, age and type of disability. The selection process was guided by the principle of diversity among group members across the three regions where the research was conducted.

To this end, a questionnaire derived from the internationally recognized Washington Group Extended Set (WG-ES) was administered by local facilitators during individual interviews with prospective candidates, making it possible to form heterogeneous groups of researchers.

The composition of the groups and the subsequent training phases are outlined below.

Identification and training of researchers

» Composition of the Kasserine group

The group consisted of seven (7) men and six (6) women, most of whom (10) were between the ages of 18 and 29, with the remainder (3) between the ages of 30 and 44. Four (4) of the 13 delegations representing the governorate were present: North Kasserine, South Kasserine, Feriana and Zouhour. It should be noted, however, that ten (10) out of the thirteen (13) participants came from the governorate's central area (North Kasserine and South Kasserine). Nearly 85% of participants live in

urban areas. One person passed away during the course of the research, bringing the total number of participants to twelve (12).

With regards to types of disability, the group consisted of five (5) persons with motor disabilities, four (4) with hearing disabilities, three (3) with visual disabilities and one (1) with multiple disabilities. Seven (7) participants reported a moderate disability, while six (6) a severe one. At the outset of the research, only one (1) person was a member of an organization of persons with disabilities (OPD).

Despite their young age, almost 70% of the researchers had not completed basic education. Three (3) hearing-impaired participants had followed a parallel special education system; another participant had never attended school; and only two (2, i.e., 15%) had a higher education level. Only two (2) out of the thirteen (13) researchers reported having undergone vocational training without obtaining any formal qualifications.

Although nine (9) of the thirteen (13) participants (approximately 70%) reported being employed (full-time, part-time or self-employed), only 15% were able to subsist on income generated through their work. On the other hand, the remaining 85% relied primarily on financial support from their families. All participants were unmarried and continued to live with their families, which constituted the principal source of economic support for the majority (9 out of 13). Four (4) participants reported having a professional activity: three were employed in the public sector (as an administrative assistant at ISAM, a switchboard operator in a hospital, and a receptionist in a secondary school), while one participant was a self-employed entrepreneur who had recently established and managed a coworking space, which serves as the venue for workshops conducted in the Kasserine governorate.

» **Composition of El Kef Group**

The group consisted of nine (9) men and four (4) women, most of whom (9) were between the ages of 30 and 39, with the remainder (4) between the ages of 21 and 29. The group represented three (3) delegations from the South-Western part of the governorate, out of a total of 11: Tajerouine, Jerissa and Kalaa Khasba. It should be noted that for El Kef region, the workshops were held in Tajerouine and not in the county town of the governorate, as nine (9) out of the thirteen (13) participants come from this delegation. Rural and urban areas were represented in almost equal proportions, making this group the least urbanized among the three (3) regions covered by the research. During the course of the research, three (3) researchers withdrew, bringing the total number of participants who completed the process to ten (10).

With regards to the types of disability, the group consisted of seven (7) persons with motor disabilities, three (3) with hearing disabilities, two (2) with visual disabilities and one (1) with an intellectual disability.

Over 60% of participants had completed secondary or higher education, making El Kef group the most educated among the three research groups. It is also noteworthy to mention that almost half of the participants acquired their disability as a result of an accident.

As for their employment status, ten (10) out of thirteen (13) (approximately 80%) participants reported being unemployed or seeking employment. Two participants were self-employed and one was a student. The two individuals who run their own businesses (a parapharmacy and an upholstery workshop) were able to support themselves through their work-related income, while the others relied primarily on financial support from their families. All participants are single, except for one. Including the married participant, all continued to live with their parents.

» **Composition of the Medenine Group**

The group consisted of six (6) men and seven (7) women, most of whom (8) were aged between 30 and 39 years, while the remaining five (5) were between 21 and 29. Four (4) out of the nine (9) delegations representing the governorate were present: North Medenine, South Medenine,

Sidi Makhoulouf and Ben Guerdane. It should be noted, however, that ten (10) out of thirteen (13) participants came from the governorate center (North Medenine and South Medenine). Nearly 70% of participants resided in urban areas.

In terms of disability types, the group consisted of eight (8) persons with motor disabilities, four (4) with visual disabilities and one (1) with an intellectual disability.

More than 60% of the researchers with disabilities (8 out of 13) did not complete basic education. One (1) participant attended high school; two (2) completed secondary education; and only two (2) had attained higher education.

Although nine (9) out of thirteen (13) (approximately 70%) of participants reported being employed (full-time, part-time or self-employed), only 15% were able to subsist on income generated through their work. On the other hand, the remaining 85% relied primarily on financial support from their families. Among the thirteen (13) participants, only one (1) was married. The latter attended higher education, had a full-time job and was one of the few able to support themselves through their income. With this exception, all continued to live with their parents.

» Members of the research team

El Kef Group	Médenine Group	Kasserine Group
Amira Cherni	Nassima Ayeub	Marwa Bennani
Bilel Rahemouni	Yacine Hajam	Mdaine Fatma
Heikel Sebei	Tayeb Atoui	Mejri Mariem
Hichem Dhief	Nozha Ben Dhiab	Hichri Riadh
Issam Khabouchi	Makram Baroudi	Aloui Talel
Mahmoud Sebei	Khaowla Mahdhaoui	Mbarki Rayen
Naoufel Khammassi	Mohamed Lamloum	Tlili Aladine
Oumayma Boughanmi	Nahed Habhab	Mdaine Imen
Rana Hamdi	Walid jebahi	Mdaine Fatma
Sihem Messaoudi	Marwa lajnef	Missaoui Sami
	Tayeb Jebahi	Hamdani Saif
	Naima Ghilen	Yahyaoui Ghofrane
	Karima Meftahi	
Technical Facilitators		
Nesrine Mansouri	Yomna Najahi	Issam Zorgui
Imed Tarchi : ATPH Coordinator		
Research coordinator		
Sonia Khelif		
International Expert		
Michele Falavigna		
Members of the Technical Support Group		
Besma Essoussi, Faouzi Bouaziz, Sami Ben Jemaa		
Managers of AIFO Tunisia		
Tito Cappellaro, Sarra Raddadi, Deborah Piccinno, Ester Facotti, Elisabetta d'Agostino		

Upon establishment of the groups, the research team invested heavily in, both, individual and group training through interview simulations, teamwork exercises and role-playing activities, with the aim of fostering mutual understanding among the researchers and creating positive and creative group dynamics, which was necessary in order to reach consensual results on which to build.

The peer-to-peer approach proved to be a key tool in overcoming the initial sense of isolation. It was particularly effective in facilitating the sharing of individual experiences among peers. Besides, discussions conducted in small groups revealed a high level of agreement on six (6) themes. Inclusion through access to employment and healthcare were the topics that received the majority of votes from researchers

Selection of research themes

Internal voting within the three regional groups

Difficulties in accessing employment	43
Difficulties in accessing healthcare and medical services	43
Difficulties at school and in education	39
The role of institutions	39
Physical accessibility	35
Psychological difficulties	30

The thematic selections of the groups underscore that, for persons with disabilities in decentralized settings, the foremost priorities are inclusion through employment and access to healthcare and medical services. Research at this stage indicates that AIFO's selection of the themes "inclusion and care" responds to the priority needs expressed by persons with disabilities within the research groups.

At this stage of the process of analyzing individual and collective experiences as a source of empowerment and awareness of rights, the national coordinator, the international expert and the technical facilitators proposed an analysis grid addressing the barriers to inclusion. This grid, already adopted in previous research, examines barriers in terms of social determinants related to the individual, family, community, local authorities and governance aspects. In short, researchers, divided into small groups in each of the three regions, identified common barriers based on social determinants, drawing from their lived experiences.

Identifying barriers based on social determinants – Outcomes of the group work

	Individual	Family	Community	Local authority	Government/ Legislation
Barriers to inclusion in employment	Fear of social interaction and a tendency toward isolation (reflected in a very limited circle of contacts)	An excessive level of control that restricts individuals' ability to develop autonomy	Denigration (systematic doubts about a person's abilities)	Rejection of job applications and failure to recognize the right to employment of persons with disabilities	Failure to enforce the legal framework on the rights of persons with disabilities (Framework Law of 2005)
	Loss of self-confidence (Fear of other people's opinions: fear that one's abilities will be questioned)	Lack of encouragement and recognition of individuals' abilities	Pitying looks and expressions of frustration	Discrimination among individuals, including practices of corruption or nepotism	Lack of contests adapted to persons with disabilities; Insufficient resources for training and coaching; Absence of legislative reform
	Lack of awareness of my rights and obligations in the workplace, combined with the absence of a culture of legal recourse when those rights are violated.	Excessive fear on the part of the family, particularly with regard to girls	Friends, colleagues and close acquaintances perceive the individual as being in constant need of assistance and end up "suffocating them."	Insufficient infrastructure and improperly equipped workstations	There are no fiscal incentives to encourage persons with disabilities to start their own projects
	Low level of education, training and qualifications	Difficult socioeconomic conditions of the family: lack of financial resources	Often negative perceptions regarding the work productivity of persons with disabilities	Lack of informational events and limited dissemination of offers (in Braille or sign language), which restricts access to information for persons with disabilities	Total exclusion of persons with disabilities: inadequate resources for training and coaching
	Low level of determination: lack of commitment and willpower	Overprotection of children with disabilities: "Ultimately, one internalizes the notion of being incapable"		Failure to enforce laws	Lack of competitive recruitment processes adapted for persons with disabilities and limited employment opportunities in internal regions
	Communication problems and learning difficulties				No priority is given to persons with disabilities, even when they have the same skills as persons without disabilities

The outcomes of the focus groups provide a detailed analysis of the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in accessing the labor market, as identified by researchers.

Within the family context, two primary dynamics are evident: first, an excessive level of control that constrains the development of autonomy; second, insufficient encouragement stemming from inadequate recognition of the abilities and potential of the most vulnerable members.

With regards to interaction with the community, participants highlighted a tendency to demean individuals perceived as “different”, an attitude that fosters isolation and reinforces retreat into the relative comfort zone represented by the family.

The analysis of the relationship with local authorities reveals a limited commitment to fostering conditions that enable persons with disabilities to exercise their rights, coupled with a constrained availability of training and employment opportunities designed to support social inclusion.

Finally, from a governance perspective, it was observed that the 2005 law was not effectively implemented, despite its provisions for specific enabling factors and priorities, particularly concerning access to employment.

A second group exercise examined the primary challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their effects, as reported during interviews conducted by the researchers in the context of employment-focused research. The difficulties identified included limited mobility due to inaccessible transportation, failure to comply with hiring quotas and physical and bureaucratic barriers within administrative systems. On a personal level, the critical role of family support was emphasized, highlighting the importance of fostering self-confidence.

These challenges have a markedly negative impact on the participants, particularly in terms of their ability to meet basic needs and to develop a life plan that, both, contributes to the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the community and promotes well-being, independence and autonomy among persons with disabilities.

Key difficulties encountered in seeking employment and their impact on persons with disabilities		
	Difficulties ranked by frequency	Impact on persons with disabilities
In the job search process	Mobility constraints (inadequate infrastructure and lack of financial resources)	A sense of emptiness due to unemployment
	Discrimination on the basis of disability	Inability to meet basic needs
	Inaccessible administrations and lack of human support services	Unemployment prevents people from establishing relationships and starting a family
	Lack of family support	Loss of self-confidence
	Lack of support from employers	Isolation
	False promises	Persons with disabilities are unable to fully exercise their rights
	Non-compliance with the law mandating the employment of 2% of persons with disabilities	
	Inability to take care of oneself	

Even among persons with disabilities who are already integrated into the labor market, the most common difficulties encountered are those related to communication, which have a negative impact on professional performance and cause psychological distress. This issue was repeatedly raised by researchers and persons with disabilities interviewed, who reported that disparaging looks, denigration and mockery undermine their dignity as individuals and as workers. Such experiences lead to a loss of self-confidence and a tendency toward isolation, understood as a form of self-protection.

It is also important to underscore the significant appeal of emancipatory and participatory research for persons with disabilities who engage, in the research process, within an inclusive cultural environment grounded in attentive listening and marked by a high level of respect from the research team and technical facilitators. This context helps lay the foundations for a new impetus towards building self-confidence and motivating the commitment to step outside one's comfort zone and face difficulties with determination, using creative and pragmatic solutions to access fundamental rights.

Community interviews for the collection of qualitative data

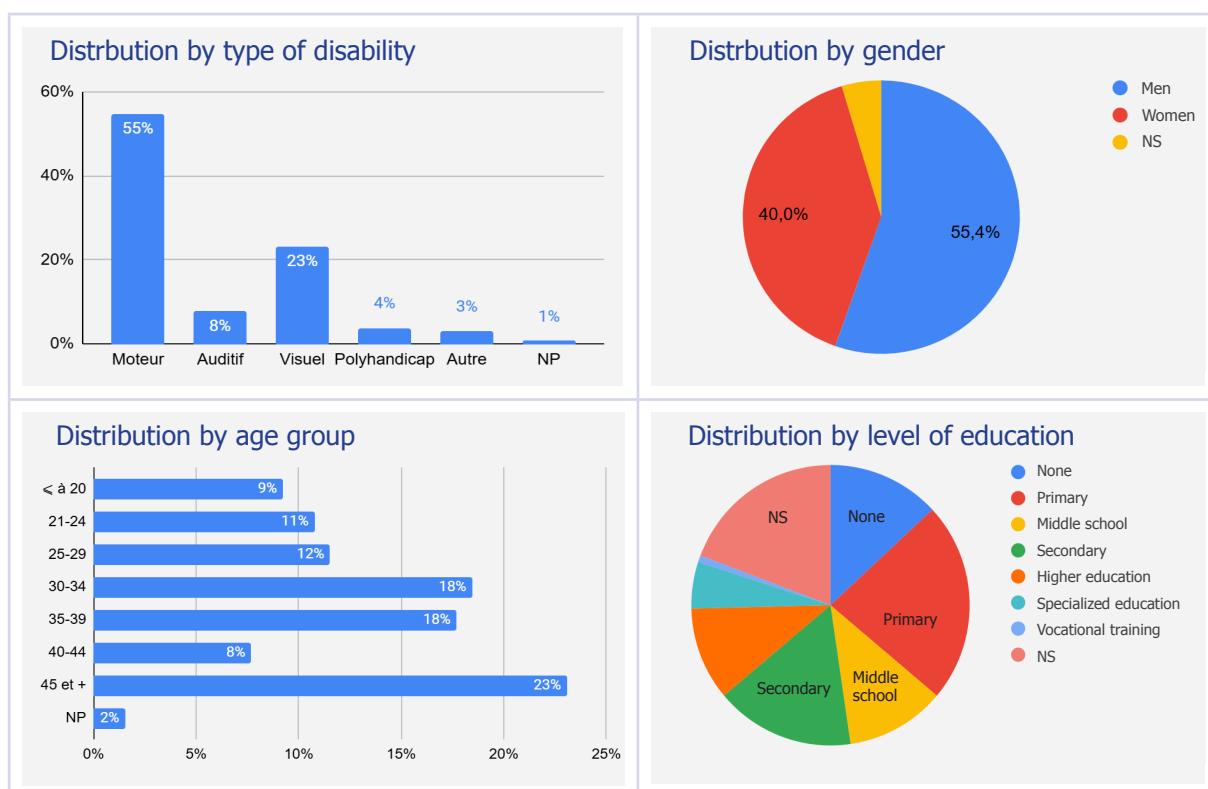
Presentation of the main findings from the analysis of data collected by the researchers

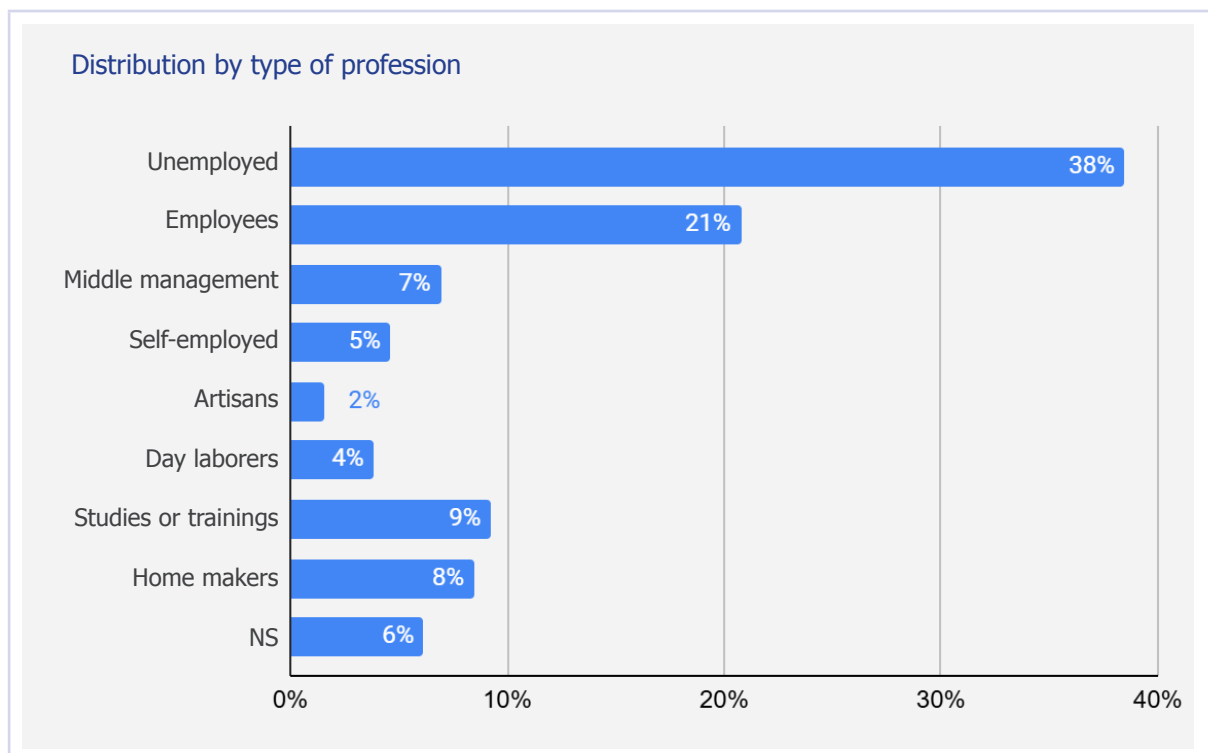
In the instructions (interview guide) adopted by researchers and developed individually by each group, particular emphasis was placed on the need to avoid interfering with the interviewee's narrative and responses, in order to minimize potential bias. For this reason, audio recordings of the interviews and the resulting transcripts serve as important tools for verifying the researchers' adherence to this approach. Understandably, the data collected during the interviews vary in terms of depth and quality, depending on the individual researcher's level of competence and engagement.

» Theme of access to employment

A total of 130 interviews conducted across the three regions were analyzed. Within the group of persons with disabilities interviewed, there was a slight majority of men (55%) and a higher representation of individuals with physical and visual disabilities.

General data on interviewees





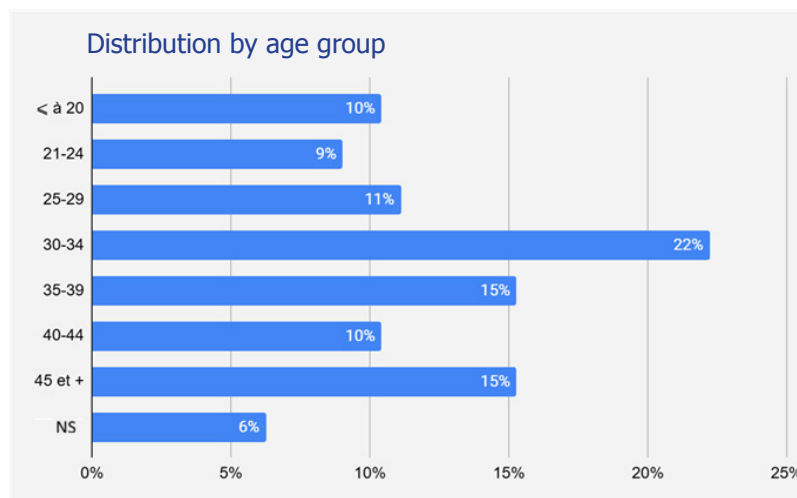
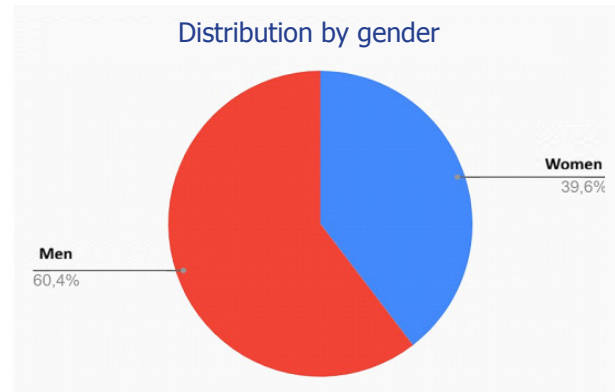
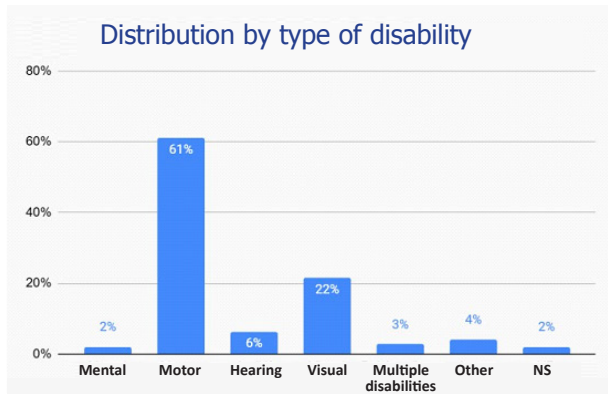
Initiated by experts and facilitators and subsequently discussed by researchers, the analysis of interviews focused in particular on common obstacles faced by the persons with disabilities interviewed and on the recurring enabling factors in the process of individual empowerment:

- » The high number of persons with disabilities with low levels of education and the factors contributing to this situation, in particular transportation difficulties, inaccessible study locations and communication barriers.
- » The role of family encouragement and support and the collaboration of educational and training institutions in enabling persons with disabilities to pursue their own learning journey.
- » Determination, which emerges as a key factor in leaving the family environment and gaining access to education, vocational training and employment opportunities.
- » The sense of belonging to a specific group of citizens advocating for rights and freedoms that remain inaccessible to them.
- » Mutual support in overcoming obstacles and identifying facilitators and solutions.
- » The role of associations in providing social and learning opportunities.
- » The importance of funding the empowerment process for persons with disabilities, who, without financial support, would remain entirely dependent on their families.

» Theme of access to health

Data collected during the 144 interviews conducted by researchers across the three project areas were analyzed to identify common (therefore systemic aspects) and specific cases in which barriers impede access to healthcare, thereby significantly impacting health outcomes.

General data on interviewees



Initiated by experts and facilitators and subsequently discussed by researchers, the analysis of interview transcripts with persons with disabilities highlighted the following points:

- » At least 40% of persons with disabilities requiring ongoing medical treatment tend to seek care outside their region of residence, traveling to major cities such as Tunis, Sfax, Gabès or Sousse.
- » Many persons with disabilities choose not to seek medical treatment due to insufficient financial resources to cover travel-related costs (transportation, accompaniment, accommodation, etc.).
- » The long intervals between appointments for specialist consultations and additional tests constitute a major factor leading to the abandonment of care.
- » About 10% of individuals have sufficient financial resources to turn to private facilities, whereas those who do not are forced to rely on public facilities and are, therefore, placed on long waiting lists.
- » Physical access to healthcare centers is often described as obstructed by multiple barriers: absence of ramps, lack of chairs in waiting areas, non-functional elevators, stairs to reach treatment rooms described as a “calvary,” unclear procedural guidelines and a lack of support staff to assist access to healthcare services.
- » Persons with communication difficulties and those who are hard of hearing reported challenges in interacting with medical staff and emphasized the need for people in the care environment who are able to interact with patients in an appropriate and empathetic manner.

- » Disability cards and entitlement to benefits provided for by the law are not systematically recognized.
- » Shortages of medications in public facilities can lead to increased costs for families who turn to private pharmacies, or even to a complete suspension of treatment protocols.
- » Solutions proposed by persons with disabilities to facilitate access to healthcare include: improving accessibility of facilities, ensuring assistance from qualified personnel, promoting initiatives by associations to support patients with disabilities and/ or advocate for their rights to care and increasing State involvement.

» Theme of family

The role of the family, previously highlighted as a priority by El Kef group, was further addressed during the development of the action plan by researchers, and more specifically in the joint seminar between the groups held in Tunis in July 2024: emphasizing the family's role in strengthening the empowerment process of children with disabilities. To this end, each group initially developed its own data collection tools before sharing them with the other groups to refine a common version.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject, researchers decided to engage both key stakeholders, by interviewing persons with disabilities and their family members. Overall, the analysis covered:

- 56 individual interviews with persons with disabilities, 55% of whom were men and over 70% of whom had motor (46%) or visual (27%) disabilities;
- 35 individual interviews with family members of persons with disabilities (mostly mothers or sisters);
- 3 focus groups with persons with disabilities (25 participants in total, including researchers);
- 3 focus groups with parents of persons with disabilities (27 participants in total, including researchers' parents).

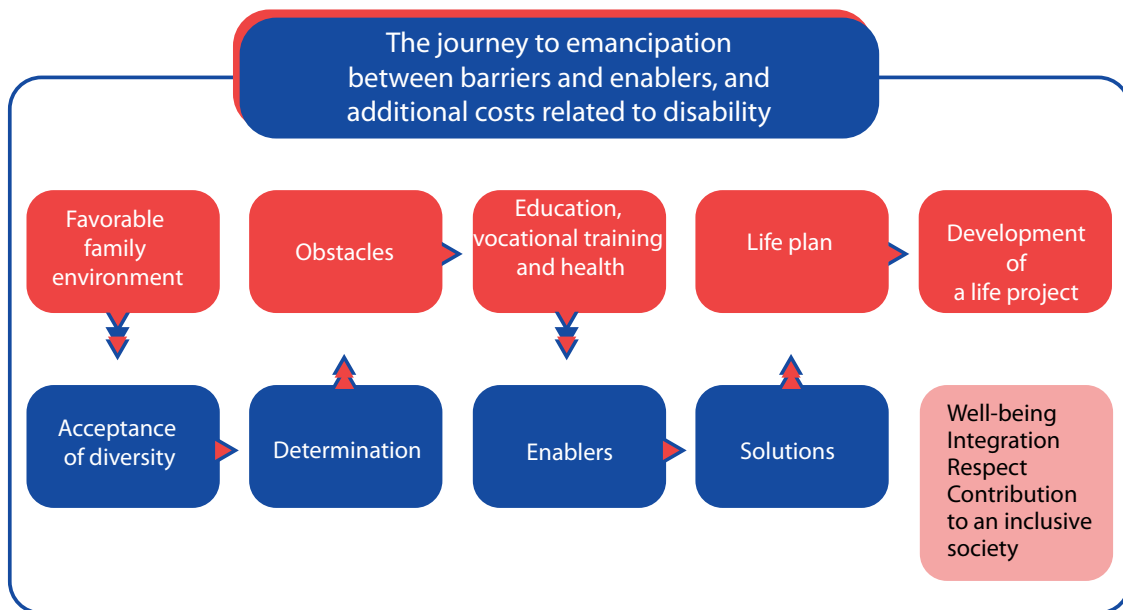
Key findings from the analysis are summarized as follows:

- » The perception of the family as a fundamental pillar in fostering the emancipation of children with disabilities, with particular attention to parents;
- » Family support spans all areas of life, with particular emphasis on health;
- » Spiritual beliefs play a significant role in initiating and facilitating the process of accepting disability, which occurs gradually (importance of the time factor);
- » The importance of supporting families in the acceptance process: providing guidance, counseling and sharing experiences through parent groups;
- » The approach of parents and siblings is often different: parents are often overwhelmed by the burden of responsibility, while siblings seem more inclined to view diversity in a positive light, thereby alleviating some of the pressure on parents;
- » Creating opportunities for dialogue among parents of children with disabilities is essential to foster mutual support and advocate with social and community actors;
- » Equal treatment and demystification of the external world are considered key factors in the emancipation of children with disabilities;
- » Persons with sensory (visual or hearing) or intellectual disabilities are considered the most vulnerable when it comes to establishing new relationships;

- » When evaluating the role of the family, persons with disabilities are more inclined to discuss relational aspects (being treated like anyone else) than the supportive role within the family;
- » Relationships within the family are generally very positive, marked by recognition and understanding;
- » Education, health and freedom of decision-making are the areas in which parents are most often criticized;
- » It is important for families to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to manage the situation in ways that promote the emancipation of the child with disabilities (including managing behavioral issues, such as anger, aggression, communication difficulties, etc.);
- » Close friends and neighbors are often described as caring and empathetic and usually serve as the first external point of contact outside the family;
- » Recourse to professionals is almost non-existent and the involvement of institutions is limited;
- » The lack of liaison structures to provide parents with support highlights the importance of parent self-help groups: mutual support, active listening, empathy, information sharing and assistance with children;
- » Particular attention is paid to health and all the costs it entails in terms of care, accommodation and medical treatment;
- » The perceptions and viewpoints of persons with disabilities and their families are very similar, agreeing on the importance of the family's role;
- » What the family does is decisive for future outcomes: it is a tremendous responsibility. Thus, families need to be supported in this process and given the necessary tools to undertake this immense responsibility.

4. The journey of emancipation

The first phase of research focused on training researchers to enhance their confidence, practice the technique of semi-structured interviews, identify priority research topics and analyze barriers to equal access to rights. During the second phase, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with persons with disabilities in their communities, based on agreed guidelines. These interviews focused on access to employment and healthcare in the regions of El Kef, Kasserine and Médenine. Analysis of the data from these interviews enabled us to identify factors common to the persons with disabilities interviewed and to highlight the essential constants in both individual and collective processes of emancipation.



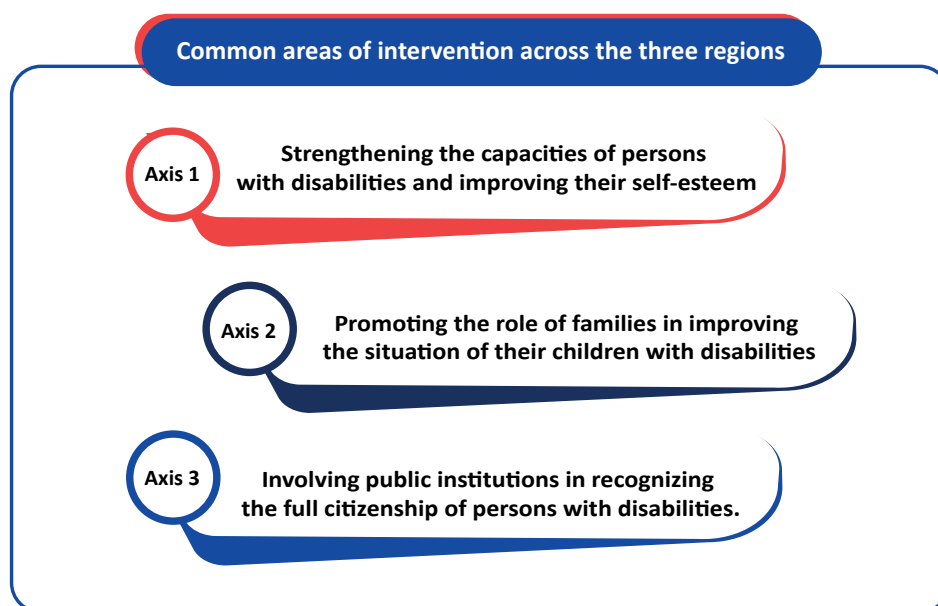
The starting point for the journey to emancipation is the family, where acceptance of the child's disability or diversity plays a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to the development of potential, the growth of self-confidence and the overcoming of initial obstacles to socialization, communication and interaction with family members and the broader community. It is at this stage that determination to overcome challenges should be encouraged. As the child with a disability reaches school age, physical, communicative and learning barriers emerge. The latter can be addressed through facilitating factors such as family support, the engagement of teachers in creating optimal learning conditions and the selection of subjects and professions aligned with the child's interests and abilities. For each obstacle encountered, the individual must be able to identify the facilitating factors and, through them, the corresponding solutions.

By the end of the learning process and the experimentation with what they want to do and how, individuals are meant to develop a life plan and identify the means to achieve it. This journey translates into a sense of both individual and collective well-being, an ability to adapt to social and work conditions, respect for the community and a contribution to the creation of an inclusive society.

However, it is important to acknowledge that this journey entails exceptional costs compared to those borne by other citizens. These additional expenses include, among others, transportation, supplementary educational support, specialized counseling and assistive technologies. When the extra costs associated with the emancipation process of persons with disabilities are not covered by public subsidies, they fall entirely on families.

Upon completing the third phase of the research project (capacity building, interviews and data analysis), the three groups moved on to the development of action plans in their respective regions. During the joint meeting held in Tunis from 22 to 24 July 2024, researchers began by identifying the main challenges related to employment and health and mapping the factors that promote inclusion. They subsequently agreed on shared objectives aimed at strengthening these facilitating factors. It was from this starting point that they agreed on three cross-cutting axes that were later translated into concrete activities in each region. In order to bring about meaningful change, the groups resolved to engage public authorities in recognizing the full citizenship of persons with disabilities.

It is particularly noteworthy that the three groups, initially composed of individuals who were unfamiliar with one another and often confined to the private sphere of the family or to civil society organizations, were able, through a process of research and collective analysis of both their own lived experiences and those of the interviewed persons with disabilities, to reach a clear and shared understanding of common lines of action at three levels that most influence their lives: self-confidence, the role of families and institutional involvement.



It should also be emphasized that the adoption of this initiative was accompanied by a qualitative shift in the researchers' attitudes and behaviors. Upon returning to their respective regions, each group committed to developing an action plan and an implementation timeline, thus marking a clear transition towards the action process ownership. This appropriation was coupled with a strong sense of accountability, as the researchers organized themselves into dedicated committees (technical, logistical and communication) to ensure the effective implementation of the activities outlined in their action plans.

Subsequently, the researchers' working groups translated the common axes into concrete activities, tailoring them to their specific regional priorities. These lines of action were then further articulated into highly detailed individual and collective activity plans for each region.



5. Individual and collective action to change the way things are

Since the beginning of the emancipation research process, both individual and collective initiatives have emerged with the aim of introducing change. In July 2024, a meeting was held between researchers from the governorates of Kasserine, El Kef and Médenine at the Centre International de Promotion des Personnes Handicapées (CIPPH), during which the initiative “The Journey toward Emancipation” was announced, with the objective of promoting a culture of citizenship among persons with disabilities. This meeting marked a genuine turning point in the emancipation research process, as the young participants proposed a new approach based on a shift from individual efforts to a collective working dynamic. A shared vision emerged, rooted in the participants’ experience, alongside a clear determination to strengthen their presence in the field through a series of concrete activities addressing the selected themes. On this occasion, researchers organized themselves into three committees to carry out different activities, thereby consolidating this participatory and committed approach. Some of these activities are described below.

» Raising awareness of urban accessibility

In Médenine, Mohamed and Walid raised awareness among the owner of a bar located in the city center. They successfully convinced him to renovate the entrance to his premises by installing access ramps for persons with reduced mobility.

Also in Médenine, Nozha noticed that flower pots had been placed on the access ramp of a public building, obstructing its use by persons with disabilities. After contacting the building manager, the flower pots were removed and the ramp was made operational again.

In Kasserine, Maroua and Riadh addressed the issue of accessibility at the local BIAT bank office with the branch management. A constructive exchange took place outside the building (since Maroua, who uses a wheelchair, was unable to access the interior) with the deputy branch manager.

In the same governorate, several researchers identified that the ramp at the Tunisie Télécom Agency did not meet accessibility standards, as wheelchair users required assistance from a second person to enter the building. Researchers formally reported the issue to the agency, which subsequently upgraded the ramp to comply with accessibility requirements.

Still in Kasserine, at a cultural café that had attempted to install a ramp following initial feedback, a group of researchers observed that the ramp did not allow fully independent access. They discussed the issue with the owner, who committed to taking the necessary corrective measures.

In El Kef, Naoufel improvised a wooden ramp to enable wheelchair users to access the cultural center and participate in an open day organized by researchers on December 8. Following this initiative, the group of researchers sent a formal letter to the director of the cultural center, highlighting the need to install a permanent ramp to ensure equal access to the services offered by this public facility.

Also in El Kef, Sihem and Amira made physical accessibility to buildings (and accessibility more broadly) a recurring topic in all their meetings with local authorities.

In Kasserine, following the initiatives carried out with two banking branches and the Télécom Agency, researchers opted for a collective action program that places primary emphasis on accessibility (namely physical access to buildings, access to information and digital accessibility). This initial project, entitled “Access,” will be implemented, in its first phase, within the formal

framework of the Tunisian Organization for the Defense of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OTDDPH), Kasserine branch, of which several researchers are already members. At a later stage, the creation of a new association may be envisaged in order to broaden the scope of collective action in support of the rights of persons with disabilities.

As part of this initiative, researchers submitted a formal request to the Governor of Kasserine, asking for his personal intervention to draw the attention of public and private institutions (particularly financial and healthcare facilities) to the need to comply with the law and ensure access to services for persons with disabilities. This includes adapting physical environments, as well as communication and information tools.

» **Raising public awareness through the organization of open days**

Between November and December 2024, each research group successfully organized an event open to the general public.

» **Médenine (November 17, 2024, Youth Complex)**

The goal of the “La Voie des Étoiles” event was to boost the self-confidence of persons with disabilities, highlight their achievements and encourage resilience in the face of obstacles. Through inspiring testimonies, the event showcased the determination and perseverance of persons with disabilities to overcome challenges in order to reach their goals.

The day featured several highlights: opening speeches, presentations of success stories across various sectors and an immersive virtual reality activity to raise awareness about accessibility issues.

Among the main speakers were prominent figures such as Ramzi Haj Salem, President of the Médenine Regional Council; Asma Thabet, President of the Amal Association for Kidney Diseases and Motor Disabilities; and Doha Miftahi, a trainer and educator specialized in services for the visually impaired. Several local associations that are active in Médenine also presented their inclusion initiatives through educational, cultural, sports and economic clubs.

Discussions highlighted the need to create spaces accessible to all types of disabilities and to extend support services to remote areas. The event served as a forum for dialogue among institutions, associations and beneficiaries to promote a more inclusive and equitable society

» **El Kef (December 8, 2024, Maison de la Culture Mondher Jebabli)**

The objective of the “Meeting for a Better Future” event was to address the challenges of inclusion for persons with disabilities. By overcoming their own fears and taking on leadership roles, researchers inspired others to become more engaged in advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. They paved the way for collective reflection on the importance of social inclusion and encouraged concrete actions through practical recommendations. Researchers and speakers also participated in interviews with Radio Friga, highlighting the significance of this event for an inclusive and equitable future.

The lively discussions helped identify solutions to improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities, with proposals such as teacher training, the creation of inclusive workshops and the establishment of funds to support local projects. These debates were enriching and fostered the development of a genuine movement committed to social inclusion.

Building on this initiative, researchers transformed their self-perception and understanding of their own capabilities. This event was not only an awareness-raising occasion, but also a collective development experience for all the researchers involved, enabling them to take an active role in shaping a more inclusive and supportive society.

Moreover, this day created new opportunities for collaboration with various stakeholders, including an architect who offered to design access ramps for persons with reduced mobility free of charge; the director of the local social promotion unit; and several members of local councils, with whom the group began to work more intensively.

» Kasserine (December 15, 2024, at the Kasserine youth complex)

The objective of the “**Citizenship, the Key to Change**” open day, entirely organized by researchers, was to raise public awareness of issues relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities and to promote their active role in society. With the support of researchers from the “Chemin de la Libération” project, the event aimed to give participants a platform to make their voices heard, share their experiences and foster public dialogue on the obstacles and levers for change. Through testimonies, inspiring success stories, local initiatives and an art exhibition, participants were able to express their experiences and creatively engage the public.

The event was distinguished by the diversity of attendees, including persons with disabilities, citizens, representatives of local associations, members of ATPH and AIFO, municipal council members and media representatives. Several associations presented their actions in support of the rights of persons with disabilities, highlighting their essential role within the local community. Representatives of the PUVI project praised the researchers’ efforts and contributions. The event also received widespread media coverage, further amplifying its impact and reach.

The day marked a significant step forward for researchers, strengthening their self-confidence, their ability to express themselves and their sense of belonging to a common cause. It also opened up opportunities for collaboration with local stakeholders, laying the groundwork for lasting civic engagement driven by the people directly affected.

Investments in media content

- In Médenine, the entire team is currently collaborating with the Médenine Youth Complex to create an **inclusive media lab**. The goal is to develop young people’s skills in content creation (audio, video, digital, etc.), with a strong commitment: all proposed activities must be accessible to all types of disabilities.
- In Kasserine, following the December 15th event, researchers leveraged a contact with local radio stations to propose a **weekly program** that includes a segment dedicated to the rights of persons with disabilities. Five motivated researchers were selected to present a structured project, which was warmly welcomed by the program director. Training courses and test recordings are planned to support their first steps on air. At the same time, the director proposed raising awareness among his team about disability issues, further strengthening the initiative’s inclusive impact.
- In El Kef, researchers have appeared several times on the local radio, both to publicize the objectives and progress of emancipatory research and to voice concerns regarding violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, mainly regarding accessibility issues.

Internships for professional integration

Most researchers signed up in response to the call launched by COPE within the framework of the PUVI project. In El Kef, 70% of researchers have already completed their internship or are currently undertaking one. According to their testimonies, this opportunity enabled some participants to strengthen existing skills or acquire new ones. It also reinforced others in their determination to pursue further training in order to improve their prospects of employment.

In Médenine and Kasserine, researchers are actively seeking internship placements and are supported in this process by the COPE teams and local facilitators involved in the emancipatory research initiative.

Strengthening civic engagement

Thanks to the contagious effect of civil society activism, many researchers are now, directly or indirectly, involved in local associations, which helps strengthen their civic engagement and social inclusion.

In El Kef, all researchers are now members of the Tunisian Organization for the Defense of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OTDDPH, El Kef branch). Three of them even serve on the executive board as members. As most of the researchers come from Tajerouine and neighboring localities, they asked the president of the regional branch to consider the establishment of an OTDDPH office in Tajerouine, which would allow them to operate closer to their communities and, potentially, implement their action plan as a group.

In Kasserine, some members of the group have also joined the regional branch of the OTDDPH.

Strengthening internal skills: research, analysis and information sharing

Throughout the emancipatory research process, several researchers agreed to jointly read and analyze legislative texts¹ relating to the rights of persons with disabilities and share the outcomes of their work with their peers within the group. This sharing also covered the mechanisms developed by various ministries to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, in particular the economic empowerment program developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

This commitment made it possible to observe a strong dynamic of meetings and almost daily group work (particularly in El Kef and Kasserine), as well as the care that researchers devoted to their presentations, which reflects not only their interest in the work, but above all, their concern to clearly communicate both the spirit and content of these texts to their colleagues.

These initiatives were all the more significant given that, for most researchers, the information shared was being discovered for the first time. Many were unaware that Tunisia has legal texts dedicated to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. This led to lively discussions, highlighting the need for greater awareness and a better understanding of disability-related rights and public policies in Tunisia.

In Medenine, this contribution was conceived as part of the action plan, where an entire day was dedicated to discussing disability-related concepts and laws, facilitated by one of the researchers. With the same objective of strengthening group members' capacities, the facilitator from Médenine also dedicated a day to researchers to strengthen their soft skills.

Besides, in order to enhance researchers' communication skills, it should be noted that each group benefited from two days of training in communication techniques delivered by a specialist in the field.

Finally, in a spirit of mutual support and collective capacity-building, some researchers who had stronger mastery of interview techniques volunteered to coach some of their peers. Both, coaches and those who benefited from it, greatly appreciated this approach, and researchers expressed genuine satisfaction in supporting one another to improve their respective skills.

¹ The 2005 framework law and its subsequent amendments, as well as the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



6. Reflections on the emancipatory impact on research groups and self-assessment of individual changes in relation to research

Reflections on the emancipatory impact on research groups: change and inclusion

External observation during the eighteen-month research period, along with the documentation produced, highlights the profound changes in personality and outlook on life that occur in an inclusive work environment. These changes affect individuals themselves, as well as their social relationships, motivating them to foster the necessary transformations within the community. The ultimate goal is to create a more inclusive society, one that provides opportunities and protects the rights of all citizens with disabilities, for the benefit of the community as a whole.



An emancipation journey reflected in researchers' self-assessments

It can be said that the emancipatory impact was real for the group of researchers, most of whom started out in isolation and then became activists, formulating community requests and proposals on key issues for access to rights. The effectiveness of emancipatory research as a tool and its relevance within development cooperation projects, as demonstrated by the PUVI project, lies in its ability to foster greater independence in the lives of persons with disabilities, to place the perspectives of the project's primary stakeholders at the center and to generate useful and necessary insights for achieving project objectives. It also provides valuable guidance for cooperation agencies and civil society actors in the implementation of inclusive projects.

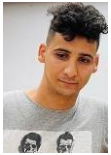



Regarding the emancipatory impact, researchers reported significant individual changes resulting from their involvement in the research process. These changes affected multiple dimensions of their lives. We wish to present these transformations in this document through the researchers' own reflections collected throughout the entire research process.

1. Moving out of isolation, with a marked improvement in social participation

	<p>Makram/M/24 years old/Middle School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>"I used to spend most of my time isolated at home. Now I have made friends, like Mohamed, and we often go out for coffee or lunch. They encourage me, and I feel much better".</p>
	<p>Bilel/M/36 years old/Secondary School Education/Service Officer/Motor disability/El Kef</p> <p>"This experience gave me the opportunity to build new connections and to open up more to others".</p>
	<p>Ghofrane/F/21 years old/Primary School Education/Unemployed/Hearing Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>"Thanks to my involvement in this project, I was able to break out of the isolation in which I had been living. Previously, I was not engaged in any activities; I spent most of my time at home, trapped in the same routine and without meaningful communication with others. By taking part in this research project, I met new people with different types of disabilities and participated in a series of activities that had a deeply positive impact on my life and on the lives of other participants".</p>

	<p>Oumayma/F/22 years old/University Student/Motor disability/El Kef</p> <p>“This experience has changed many things for me. I have reconciled with myself and feel much more integrated. Before, I did not interact with many people; I was always isolated, did not take part in any activities, and was not involved in anything. Today, thank God, everything has changed. I am no longer ashamed to ask for something or to express myself. This has transformed the way I perceive myself”.</p>
	<p>Hichem/M/36 years old/Secondary School Education/Intern/Intellectual Disability/El Kef</p> <p>“Before this experience, I was isolated at home due to the judgment of an unforgiving society. My situation affected me deeply, and I had no friends, which worsened my psychological state. From the very first sessions, I felt comfortable and thought that this group could become my friends. Before, I didn’t know how to express myself, but today things have changed. I have overcome the shyness that used to paralyze me”.</p>






2. Improvement of self-confidence and self-esteem

	<p>Rayen/M/21 years old/Middle School Education/Unemployed/Visual Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“Many things have changed in me. Now I believe I can achieve my dreams and that my disability is not an obstacle. When I was part of the logistics committee, I felt responsible and gave instructions, realizing that I am capable of handling this responsibility”.</p>
	<p>Maroua/F/32 years old/Secondary School Education/Manager of a coworking space/Motor disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“I have learned to never underestimate myself, to persevere in everything I undertake and to follow through without ever giving up. This has given me greater self-esteem. Today, I love who I am as a woman with a disability, and I believe I can achieve a lot. Before, I refused to post photos of myself in a wheelchair on social media to avoid people knowing I was disabled, and I even found it hard to admit it. But thanks to the research project, I have learned to love myself, value everything I do and, above all, not be ashamed of my disability. Now I accept myself and take full responsibility for it”.</p>
	<p>Khaoula/F/35 years old/Primary School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“November 17, when we held the open day, was one of the most beautiful moments I have ever experienced. I am very happy, and the parents were amazed at what we were able to accomplish. They did not think that people with disabilities could organize such an event. Now, their mindset has changed”.</p>
	<p>Sami/M/34 years old/Secondary Education/Receptionist/Visual Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“This experience was a major turning point for me, and I feel that I have emerged from it with a level of maturity and experience that makes me better prepared to face future challenges. I have gained greater confidence in myself and in my abilities”.</p>



3. Awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and the means to protect them

	<p>Issam/M/30 years old/University Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/El Kef</p> <p>“This experience has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the reality faced by people with disabilities and the problems they face. Before, I did not pay much attention to certain aspects, even though I had personally experienced some of these difficulties. Now, I am more aware of the obstacles that people with disabilities have to overcome”.</p>
	<p>Nozha/F/31 years old/Middle School Education/Artisan/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“Today, I perceive the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities and the priorities for action to support them differently. I now understand how to help them pursue their aspirations and enable them to be fully integrated and active members of Tunisian society”.</p>
	<p>Nassima/F/29 years old/University Education/Student/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“Now, I know that my friends in the group and other people with disabilities often face daily struggles. I did not realize that something as simple as a ramp could be a major aspiration for many persons with disabilities. Now I notice it, and I feel concerned when I see a facility without one. I feel motivated to help change the situation”.</p>
	<p>Mariem/F/25 years old/Secondary School Education/Intern/Visual Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“I discovered the law on the rights of persons with disabilities and I refer to it whenever I encounter difficulties”.</p>
	<p>Mahmoud/M/35 years old/Higher Education/Intern/Hearing Disability/El Kef</p> <p>“I turned from someone who was unaware of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities to a person informed about the laws protecting their rights and actively open to participating in all associative activities”.</p>
	<p>Naima/F/36 years old/Secondary School Education/Artist/Physical Education/Médenine</p> <p>“I discovered the rights and concerns of persons with disabilities and built new relationships with young researchers in El Kef and Kasserine”.</p>
	<p>Saif/M/24 years old/University Education/Student/Motor disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“I have become someone who advocates for my own rights and those of other persons with disabilities thanks to my involvement with the AIFO association. I no longer feel embarrassed or shy about speaking up for the rights of persons with disabilities. I defend not only my own rights, but also those of others”.</p>
	<p>Amira/F/36 years old/University Education/Parapharmacy Manager/Hearing Disability/El Kef</p> <p>“I met new people and joined the Tunisian Organization for the Defense of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Since then, I have been consistently active, participating in various events. At the most recent event we attended as a group with local councilors, we discussed laws and engaged in active debates thereon. Overall, this experience has allowed me to gain much more confidence in myself”.</p>


4. Acquisition of new skills

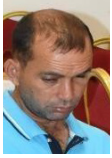


	<p>Yassine/M/34 years old/University Degree/Kinesitherapist/Visual Disability/Médenine</p> <p>“I became familiar with qualitative research methodologies and further developed my practical skills, particularly in focus group facilitation”.</p>
	<p>Alaa/M/39 years old/No Formal Education/Telephone operator/Motor disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“My involvement with AIFO has enabled me to acquire new skills and to realize that researchers within the group possess a wide range of expertise, similar to that of Sami. Therefore, the network of competencies on which I can draw has significantly expanded”.</p>
	<p>Rana/F/32 years old/Secondary School Education/Intern/Motor disability/El Kef</p> <p>“I developed new communication skills and began to approach life with renewed hope, as a more ambitious and resilient individual”.</p>
	<p>Tayeb J/M/27 years old/Secondary School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“I used to have a problem expressing myself effectively and conveying information clearly and in detail. This experience represented an opportunity for me to strengthen my communication skills”.</p>
	<p>Riadh/M/40 years old/University Education/Administrative Assistant at ISAM/Motor disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“I developed my knowledge of guidance-related legislation and learned how to conduct interviews with individuals with various disabilities, with the support of guides that facilitate understanding their needs and objectives, in order to collect information and data on a range of topics, such as employment, health and family life”.</p>

5. Acceptance of disability


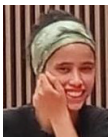



	<p>Sihem/F/35 years old/University Education/Intern/Visual Disability/El Kef</p> <p>“I began to accept my disability through interactions with individuals who had experiences similar to my own and with whom I shared common perspective”.</p>
	<p>Imen/F/20 years old/Middle School Education/Unemployed/Hearing Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“Many things have changed in my life. Most importantly, I have learned to accept my disability and no longer feel ashamed of wearing my hearing aid”.</p>

6. Strengthening the values of mutual support within and beyond the group (the group served as, both, a container and a source of inspiration)

	<p>Naoufel/M/35 years old/Secondary School Education/Upholstery/Motor disability/El Kef</p> <p>“Above all, this experience allowed me to meet new people with diverse disabilities. Their companionship was deeply enriching, and we developed a strong sense of cohesion and a solid bond among us”.</p>
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<p>Fatma/F/21 years old/Primary School Education/Unemployed/Hearing Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“Maroua and Saif offered me substantial to understand the work; and each time I carried out my tasks, I felt a strong sense of satisfaction. I no longer feel embarrassed or stressed; instead, I feel comfortable with the group and with my work. I have learned to respect my role and to make every effort to understand my responsibilities”.</p>	
	<p>Haykel/M/41 years old/Primary School Education/Unemployed/Visual Disability/El Kef</p> <p>“I was not previously accustomed to being around people with disabilities and was reluctant to engage in a conversation with them. Now, I meet them every afternoon at the café and continue to learn more about how to interact appropriately and support them in managing their disabilities. I have become more sociable and I do my best to actively support others”.</p>
	<p>Talel/M/26 years old/Primary School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“We mutually enriched one another in the group: I learnt from them, and they learnt from me. I was inspired by many participants: Maroua’s co-working space encouraged me to consider launching my own project; Saif has been successful in his ceramics studios; and Riadh is currently employed. Altogether, these experiences have motivated me to pursue opportunities and to move forward. They represent models of a form of success story”.</p>
	<p>Marwa/F/30 years old/Primary School Education/Artist/Visual Disability/Médenine</p> <p>“Interviews proved to be highly valuable, as they enabled us to collect and benefit from insightful ideas and perspectives shared by some of the individuals we interviewed”.</p>

7. Autonomy and scope for action

	<p>Nahed/F/32 years old/Secondary School Education/Artist/Visual Disability/Médenine</p> <p>“I am now more capable of relying on myself in carrying out household tasks and, above all, more mature in managing my time”.</p>
	<p>Wejden/F/19 years old/Middle School Education/Participant at a specialized center for the deaf, receiving training in sewing/Hearing Disability/Kasserine</p> <p>“I learned to go out independently and to do my own shopping. I participated in theater sessions that were highly beneficial for me. Thanks to this project, I have become more independent, learned to take the bus on my own and have become more active”.</p>
	<p>Mohamed/M/28 years old/Secondary School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“I, now, have responsibilities and know how to communicate with individuals in positions of authority, and I have learned that everyone is partly responsible for their own situation and, therefore, has the power to change it. I also took the initiative, together with Walid, to request the installation of a ramp at the café and in other institutions”.</p>
	<p>Karima/F/28 years old/Primary School Education/Artist/Visual Disability/Médenine</p> <p>“I started going out more often and became more independent”.</p>
	<p>Walid/M/32 years old/Middle School Education/Unemployed/Motor disability/Médenine</p> <p>“We broadened our network of connections among persons with disabilities and deliberated on various issues”.</p>

8. Well-being



Tayeb A/M/35 years old/Primary Education School/Unemployed/Intellectual Disability/Médenine
“I have had a very positive experience with this project... Thank you”.

9. Joining associations to advocate for legally recognized rights

Marwa, 32 years old, a person with a motor disability and the owner of a co-working space in Kasserine, explains: “Emancipatory research has been like a breath of fresh air for me, allowing me to pursue some of my aspirations, such as engaging with persons with disabilities, listening to their stories and seeking solutions to some of the challenges we face as individuals with disabilities. This is particularly true about accessibility and the importance of coming together, despite the diversity of our disabilities, to address issues that concern us all.”

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