

Inclusion of People with Disability into the Labor Force



By Mounir Kleibo

What is disability? The ILO defines a disabled person as an individual whose prospects of securing, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical or mental impairment. Disabled people are not a homogeneous group. Like all people, their identities, personal situations and needs are shaped by a multiplicity of factors including their gender, age, personality, location, education, ethnicity, color, class, family, religion and sexual orientation. Disability is another dimension of human diversity. It is a normal part of human experience and anyone in society may experience disability at some time in life.”ⁱ

According to a study titled “Work and Employment of People with Disabilities,” published in March 2013 by the Human Rights Council (with a contribution by the International Labor Organization), persons with disabilities are less likely to be in full-time employment than non-disabled persons. In fact, the unemployment rates of persons with disabilities are up to twice as high as for non-disabled people in countries for which data are available, such as



Europe and OECD countries. However, many people with disabilities (PwD) are not registered, whether as employed or as unemployed, and are thus invisible in the labor market, surviving either through the support of their families or through social security payments. This situation represents a serious bank of untapped potential in these countries. Moreover, disabled women worldwide are less likely to have decent jobs than either non-disabled women or men with disabilities, and persons with intellectual disability and mental-health disabilities are reported to face greater difficulties in finding decent work. When persons with disabilities are employed, they are more likely to be in low-paid jobs with poor working conditions and few, if any, promotional prospects.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, a bi-directional link between disability and poverty leaves persons with disabilities and their families more likely to be among the poor in any given society.

Although the International Labor Organization stated its commitment to promoting social justice and achieving decent work for people with disabilities as early as in the 1920s,^{iv} equal opportunities for persons with



disabilities in the world of work through all its means of action clearly have not yet been realized. Nevertheless, efforts in that direction are notable as a number of agreements aimed to improve the situation of PwD have been passed: the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons)



Over 1 billion people (15 percent of the world's population) have some form of disability, and 785 million women and men with disabilities are of working age but have no jobs. It is estimated that the world economy is experiencing a 3 to 7 percent loss of GDP by excluding people with disabilities from the labor force.ⁱⁱ



Convention of 1983 (No. 159), the Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace of 2001, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 (which, among other provisions, promotes fundamental principles and rights at work and social protection), and the ILO's Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization of 2008 that emphasizes non-discrimination as a cross-cutting theme. These codes and conventions exemplify a major international-policy shift towards a human-rights-based approach to disability and greatly emphasize the promotion of disability inclusion and the tackling of discrimination faced by people with disabilities.

In the last decades, greater focus has been placed on people with disabilities accessing the general labor market, and employment-related programs and services have been adopted with the aim to foster disability inclusion in a wide range of areas. Efforts include skills development, employment promotion, social protection, and non-discrimination. Both as a human right and a development issue, disability inclusion requires a cross-cutting approach throughout all employment-related activities and means of action, and such efforts are widely supported and frequently initiated by the International Labor Organization.

The ILO's interventions that aimed at inclusion of persons with disability in employment policies was fully supported in the occupied Palestinian territory by the Palestinian Consultative Staff for Developing NGOs in Jenin as the implementing agency, without whose dedication and commitment the level of success in executing the ILO part of the joint program of the UN could not have been reached.

Without such efforts, the goal of decent and productive work for women and men everywhere cannot be achieved.

The Palestinian context

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs stated in their 2011 Disability Survey that almost 113,000 Palestinians (2.7 percent of the total population in the occupied Palestinian territory) suffer from at least one disability: 7.6 percent with mental-health disability, 4.6 percent with physical disability, and 5.2 percent

with learning disability. The prevalence of disability among persons aged 18 years and over was 3.8 percent (4.0 percent in the West Bank and 3.4 percent in the Gaza Strip), with 3.9 percent males compared to 3.7 percent females. In the West Bank, the highest percentage of disabilities was in the Jenin Governorate, reaching 4.1 percent, whereas the lowest was in Jerusalem at 1.4 percent.^v

In Gaza, the highest prevalence of disability was in the Gaza Governorate with 2.5 percent, followed by the North Gaza, Rafah, and Deir Al-Balah governorates, at 2.4 percent each,

dropped out of school, which has led to an illiteracy rate of 53.1 percent.

Efforts towards improvement

In 2012, nine UN agencies^{vii} joined forces in piloting a joint UN program that aimed to strengthen respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory. Targeting specifically the age group of 0 to 24 years, the focus was on interventions related to legislation, policies, programs, activities, services, and empowerment, with the aim to change attitudes and create a more inclusive environment for PwD. The

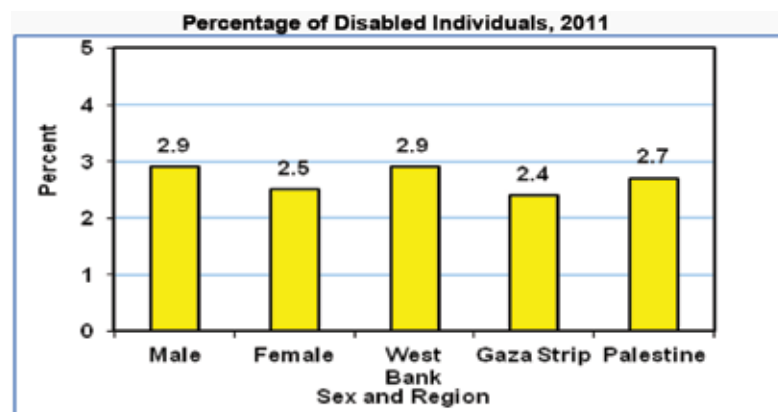


Figure 1: Percentage of Disabled Individuals in Palestine, 2011^{iv}

whereas the lowest prevalence was recorded in the Khan Yunis Governorate at 2.2 percent. Of the disabled persons in the oPt, 87.3 percent were unemployed during the implementation period of the survey in 2011 (85.6 percent in the West Bank and 90.9 percent in the Gaza Strip). This excessive exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labor market represents a significant waste of potential. The local educational system does not help alleviate these problems as some 37.6 percent of all people with disability aged 15 and above have never been to school, and 33.8 percent have

joint program also requested that UN agencies review their own measures, not only to mainstream disability rights in their own policies, programs, and practices, but also to support their counterparts in following suit. Partners and constituents were encouraged to identify the main gaps in legislation, policies, and practices; to formulate recommendations to address these gaps by targeting key ministries such as the ministries of education and higher education, labor, health, local government, and social affairs; and to implement the changes that were found

Notable efforts that aim to improve employability include a workshop targeting 85 youth with disability that was carried out at the Irada Program of the Islamic University, Gaza (IUG), in collaboration with the ILO.

necessary in order for services and institutions to be in compliance with the Disability Law and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).^{viii}

Aiming to assure the success of these endeavors, the International Labor Organization worked extensively with its tripartite constituents (government, employers, and workers), targeting in its efforts specifically the Ministry of Labor (MoL), the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), and the Palestine Federation for Chambers of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry (PFCCIA). In full collaboration with Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) operating in the oPt, and with actively engaged national and international organizations and relevant stakeholders, a full analysis was obtained on how current policies, legislation, strategies, regulations, and programs either enable or create



barriers for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Palestinian labor force. The analysis was based on the Palestinian Labor Law (2000), the Strategic Plan for the Disability Sector (2013–2016), and the Labor Sector Strategy (2014–2016).

A key factor in the success of these interventions was the establishment of the National Committee for People with Disability in 2014, led by the MoL, which includes representatives from among PwD, tripartite constituents, and relevant civil society organizations. Among the main objectives of the committee was the reforming of the Palestinian Labor Law and other related legislation. It also extended efforts towards advancing the rights guaranteed in the CRPD and the Palestinian Disability Law – the Right to Work and Employment in particular – in order to assure that all persons with disabilities benefit from the positive impact of an environment that enables them to gain better skills and allows for all PwD of working age to enter the active workforce. The committee's efforts resulted in the Aqaba Declaration, a national agreement that includes 17 key action points for mainstreaming disability in policies, programs, and services. Fully adopted by the MoL in December 2014, the declaration stipulates enhanced outreach efforts to other stakeholders, including key PA ministries and authorities, the General Union for People with Disabilities (GUPWD), and, of course, DPOs in order to improve their services and as such increase the employment of PwD.

In this context, a rapid assessment of three vocational training centers was conducted with the objective of examining their accessibility to PwD and identifying the main gaps in mainstreaming disability; the main findings and recommendations were presented to MoL for further consideration and inclusion. A series of training and capacity-development courses were held throughout 2014 and



As is true for those without disabilities, people with disabilities have a right to fair and equal wages, working hours, opportunities, and the cultural benefits of being employed in the community. To achieve this goal, individuals with disabilities need to be in customized or supported employment rather than in sheltered and segregated settings.

2015 that targeted more than 150 PwD with the objectives of developing their skills and capacities when applying for a job and increasing their awareness of services provided by the employment offices of MoL; these courses were built mainly on *Getting Hired: A Guide for Job-Seekers with Disabilities*.^{ix} Another workshop, aimed at training workshop trainers, was delivered to twenty PwD from various geographical locations throughout the West Bank;

it utilized material based mainly on *Getting Hired: A Trainer's Manual for Conducting a Workshop for Job Seekers with Disabilities*,^x and aimed to ensure that the material and skills could be shared further among PwD. In addition, a specific database for job seekers among PwD was designed in order to facilitate their access to information on job opportunities within the programs implemented by the MoL. At the conclusion of these workshops, 103 participants (70 percent) were successfully registered at MoL's employment offices.

Since employing people with disabilities has a positive impact on employers by increasing the overall GDP of a given country's economy,^{xi} increases in customized and supported employment will not only help individuals with disabilities but will also benefit the workforce and society as a whole.^{xii} Unfortunately, throughout the world, individuals with disabilities remain employed at lower rates than people without disabilities, and when employed, they are frequently in sheltered settings. For employment outcomes to improve for people with



Article photos were taken for the project “Support to Persons with Disabilities in Gaza” during ILO’s Emergency Response to the Crisis in the Gaza Strip, 2015, implemented by the Islamic University of Gaza, IRADA Program. Photos courtesy of ILO

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disabilities, policy makers must continue to move from the medical model of disability to more comprehensive models such as the social and bio-psychosocial models of disability.

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- ⁱ See Resource section for the ILO *Convention on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons)*, (No. 159), 1983.
- ⁱⁱ Promoting Jobs, Protecting People, *Disability and Work*, International Labor Organization, 2016, available at http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_475650/lang--en/index.htm.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011, available at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf.
- ^{iv} Founded in 1919, the International Labor Organization aimed to improve workers’ rights and, for a large number of veterans injured or disabled in WWI, it provided a venue to fight for their right to employment.
- ^v *Disability Survey, 2011: Press Conference Report*, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Social Affairs, available at http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/disability_e2011.pdf.
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} FAO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNSCO, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP and WHO.
- ^{viii} The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol (OP) 2 provide the normative framework for Member States to address the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure that they are included in all development efforts.
- ^{ix} ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, *Getting Hired: A Guide for Job Seekers with Disabilities*, International Labor Organization, 2008, available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_098145.pdf.
- ^x ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, *Getting Hired: A Trainer’s Manual for Conducting a Workshop for Job Seekers with Disabilities*, International Labor Organization, 2008, available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_132676.pdf.
- ^{xi} Richard Florida in *Releasing Constraints: Projecting the Economic Impacts of Increased Accessibility in Ontario*, 2010, states that over time, improved access to employment and education of PwD could reduce the likelihood of poverty and improve the income of everyone by shifting the economy towards employing a more educated workforce; it would thus potentially attract more businesses and make Ontario’s economy more prosperous. “There are opportunities ... to realize non-trivial economic gains through enabling a higher number of Ontarians to participate fully in the province’s economy.”
- ^{xii} *Achieving Equal Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities through Legislation: An Education and Training Guide*, ILO and Irish Aid, 2011, available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_162169.pdf.