



Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities

Newsletter Issue -1-

9/2018



The vision of the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation is to strengthen the right of persons with disabilities to a decent life, and provide them access to equitable opportunities to make a living, hold jobs, and assume their place as effective actors within the structure of the Palestinian economy. This is done through building sensitized and accessible formal and informal employment programs, as well as an economic empowerment process, which focuses on a range of direct interventions that seek to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities, and alleviate the state of chronic marginalization that they experience.

The program currently implements a group of interventions as part of different project, one of which is Mustaqbaluna project. The project aims at increasing the employment opportunities for the vulnerable population, through the support of inclusive business initiatives implemented by youth with disabilities, women and low-income artisans. The project also aims at increasing awareness on the right of persons with disabilities to decent work, through different media tools, of which this newsletter is one.

This quarterly newsletter sheds light on the latest and most prominent developments related to reality of persons with disabilities, with a focus on the results and achievements of the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities, and the relevant events and activities at the program or national level. This is the first in a series of newsletters that will be issued on quarterly basis.

This issue will particularly address disabilities and the legislative framework, in addition to highlighting experiences and actions related to the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities within the program.

This publication has been funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation within the Project "Mustaqbaluna (Il nostro futuro) - Incremento delle opportunità di lavoro per la popolazione vulnerabile in Palestina". Code AID 011.464, in partnership with AVSI Foundation



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About the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities:

The Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities adopts an inclusive approach that aims at improving the social, economic and civic status of persons with disabilities within an enhanced regulatory environment inclusive of all stakeholders and actors. This is especially important given that persons with disabilities are considered among the most marginalized groups in Palestine in terms of access to education and employment opportunities, social services, and the fact that they are deprived of their right to acquire skills for employment and lack support that enables them to access the labor market.

The program targets persons with disabilities and their families, representatives of official government units particularly the Ministry of Labor, public and private employers, vocational training centers and micro-finance institutions. The program aims at preparing the society to work towards empowering persons with disabilities so that they would live a decent life, and contribute socially and economically to the development of their families and society. This is achieved through facilitating access of persons with disabilities to vocational training centers that provide them with proper training and capacity-building leading to economic independence. The program also works with private sector institutions and companies to become more open to mainstreaming qualified persons with disabilities in the Palestinian labor market and provide them with financing opportunities to establish their own businesses.

The program seeks to achieve different objectives through the following interventions:

- Empowering persons with disabilities to take well-informed decisions regarding their choices in education, vocational training, and work by facilitating their enrollment in career counselling, vocational training, necessary capacity-development programs, employment and self-employment opportunities.
- Providing and facilitating access of persons with disabilities to various financing opportunities to establish their own businesses and micro-enterprises.

- Working with private sector companies to become more open to mainstreaming persons with disabilities. This is done through connecting qualified persons with disabilities with available job opportunities and vacancies offered by companies willing to adopt an inclusive employment environment. The program also cooperates with private sector companies to make their internal and employment policies more inclusive of persons with disabilities, in addition to offering necessary consultations and advice to make their facilities more accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Increasing awareness among civil society organizations and government institutions on disability issues, through conducting training and sensitization workshops on the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and disability mainstreaming in the workplace. These workshops are targeted at recruitment and employment officers at Palestinian ministries, Civil Service Bureau, and other civil society organizations.
- Providing technical support for vocational training centers, and training their staff on the rights and requirements of persons with disabilities, in addition to providing them with the mechanisms and support for adapting their training programs and tools, and creating more accessible training programs, thus facilitating the enrollment of persons with disabilities in vocational training centers.
- Assessing the needs of governmental vocational training centers under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor, and accordingly adapting their physical environment, tools, and training materials to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Building the capacities of persons with disabilities, their families, and institutions working on the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work.
- Lobbying decision-makers to activate and implement national laws and policies related to equal job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and facilitating their integration in the labor market to ensure that they and their families can live in dignity.



Program accomplishments from January 1- June 30, 2018.

The program, and through its various interventions, was able to achieve the following:

1. Registered and nominated 512 persons with disabilities to receive economic empowerment services by the program.
2. Implemented 11 career counseling workshops and carried out vocational assessments for 113 persons with disabilities, in order to determine their potential professional and career paths corresponding with their interests, values, and professional capacities.
3. Registered and enrolled 27 persons with disabilities in vocational training programs.
4. Helped in employing and facilitated the access of 27 persons with disabilities to formal employment opportunities in the Palestinian labor market.
5. Conducted visits to 17 private companies to raise their awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities, identify vacancies, and refer qualified persons with disabilities to work for them.
6. Provided 13 assistive devices for 8 persons with disabilities.
7. Conducted two studies to assess the preparedness and willingness to mainstream persons with disabilities at Al Qasrawi company/Hebron, and World Technical Elite vocational training center in Tubas and Jenin.
8. Conducted two trainings for administrative and human resource management employees at Reach Company on the concept of disability, communication etiquette with persons with disabilities, and disability-based discrimination.



In terms of advocacy efforts, the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities works according to its philosophy on disability as a human rights issue that requires the society in all its sectors to work collectively according to a unified vision, direction and strategies rooted in the belief in change and the need to create it. The following are the most important accomplishments of the advocacy unit this year:

1. Participated in preparatory activities preceding the drafting of the shadow report about monitoring the extent of the government's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), in partnership with the Palestinian General Union for Persons with Disabilities.
2. Developed drafts and recommendations regarding the national legislative framework governing the rights of persons with disabilities, by reviewing national legislations to identify existing gaps in comparison with provisions of the UNCRPD.
3. Implemented in-depth interventions with some institutions, companies, and private sector vocational training centers to strengthen their capacities to mainstreaming disability issues within their structures, agendas, work policies, and activities thus becoming more sensitized to disability issues and requirements.
4. Contributed to the establishment of the Palestinian National Coalition for Disability in partnership with other major stakeholders in the disability sector. The coalition aims to undertake advocacy work for the issues and rights of persons with disabilities.
5. Contributed to the establishment of the National Alliance for Employment of Persons with Disabilities. Since its establishment, the Program has contributed towards developing the alliance's mandate according to a human rights-based philosophy.
6. Contributed towards the establishment of district committees to coordinate efforts of various parties to enhance access of persons with disabilities to their right to decent work. Several district committees were established in the governorates of Hebron, Nablus, Qalqiliya, and Ramallah. Each committee consists of representatives of the Employment Directorate within the Ministry of Labor, Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, the General Union for Persons with Disabilities, the YMCA, and the Chamber of Commerce in each governorate.



Disability and the national legislative system: prospects for change

It is well known that the legislative framework is crucial for the state of affairs of any social group, or rather the society as a whole. This significance and prominent status are derived from the nature of the legislations' impact and the change they create. This significance can be summarized but not limited to two aspects that are presented below given their comprehensiveness:

1. **Impact:** while it is not necessary to describe the impact of the legislative framework on the society since it is self-evident, yet it is important to reiterate that this framework represents the society's overall image and compass. Through the legislative framework, the rights are determined, relationships are regulated, responsibilities are assigned, justice and equality are safeguarded, and the various society segments are organized within a harmonized context that embraces everyone.
2. **Civilizational awareness:** the legal and legislative framework is considered an important indicator of the society's level of development, human advancement, enlightened awareness of its citizens, and culture. The legislative framework is also a vital necessity for the stability of the individual within the group and the integration of the part within the whole in a coherent system. It forms an important basis, on which the society can depend while it works towards its development, in order to become regulated by a rights-based system.

As a group in the society, persons with disabilities have been recognized and are present within the legislative framework. This presence is evident at two levels:

1. **Special legislation** in the form of the Palestinian Law for the Disabled number 4 of 1999. This is a national legislation that regulates a range of rights for Palestinian persons with disabilities in various fields and aspects. However, the law failed to bring about the necessary change whether at the philosophical level or the level of

rights and access to services associated with it.

2. **Different legislative provisions** within several national legislations that regulate the rights of other societal groups such as the Children's Act, or legislations that regulate issues, themes, and sectors such as the Labor Law, the Civil Service Law, the Local Government Law, the Education Law, among others. However, these provisions did not achieve any noticeable difference in terms of the reality of persons with disabilities.

Since the reality of persons with disabilities remained unchanged, the need for change continued to persist. This has in turn become a real motivation to reconsider the most important factors that could bring about the aspired change, including the status of current national legislations. This process became even more urgent and necessary following Palestine's ratification of the UNCRPD in 2015, which should contribute to bringing the legislative framework in line with the developmental rights-based approach. Given these developments, changing the legislative framework governing disability has become both an entitled demand. Discussion about the need to amend relevant national legislations that regulate the rights of persons with disabilities started to gain momentum recently, particularly in view of attempts for change and the existence of a special committee that works on harmonizing national legislations with the international agreements and conventions that Palestine has joined and ratified. This work towards legislation amendment has also been motivated by the evolving rights-based approach prevalent among disability activists on the individual and institutional levels, thus allowing them to critically review the Palestinian Law on Rights of the Disabled and other relevant provisions, and demand its amendment as a national priority. The question that we should ask ourselves and try to answer, is what made a national legislation such as the Law on Rights of the Disabled ineffective and unable to achieve the expected impact?

Gaps in the Law on Rights of the Disabled number 4 of 1999

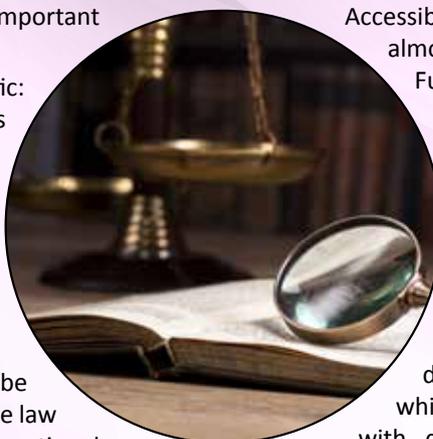
The Law on Rights of the Disabled was subject to frequent criticism from legal and human-rights perspectives by many concerned individuals and expert researchers, who provided detailed description of its flaws and shortcomings.

We provide below highlights of the most important shortcomings:

1. **The absence of the mandatory characteristic:** in other words, the law lacks mechanisms for accountability, oversight, and penalties. The provisions of the law lack any stipulation regarding penalties against those who violate it. In fact, this law is the only Palestinian law that lacks penalties in the case of violating any of the rights stipulated by it.
2. **Philosophy and direction:** which might be the law's most important shortcoming. The law views disability from the perspective of functional incapacity of the individual, and is based on the individual medical model without reference to external obstacles and barriers in the physical, regulatory, and cultural

environments making disability a societal responsibility rather than an individual one.

3. **A weak level of inclusiveness:** in several articles, the law addresses some of the rights but only partially. Accessibility and adaptation, for example, are almost completely limited to physical disability. Furthermore, civic and cultural rights were briefly discussed.
4. **Contradiction between the provisions of the law:** while the Law for the Rights of the Disabled stipulates some rights, its executive regulations restrict them. For example, the executive regulations restrict access to customs exemption to persons with physical disabilities in the lower part of the body, while the law stipulates it for every person with disability. Furthermore, there are some contradictions between some of the provisions of this law and other effective laws. These factors and others subjected the law and its associated regulations to criticism and demands for change.



The Palestinian Law for the Rights of the Disabled: the process of change and development

In a very important and courageous step, the Ministry of Social Development, as the competent ministry, took the initiative to put the Law for the Rights of the Disabled on the table for discussion and amendment, in response to the needs and demands for change. In this context, the following has been undertaken:

a. The Ministry held a session for national consultations that included the majority of organizations working in the disability sector, to discuss the aspired change in the law. The proposals focused on two levels:

1. Partial amendment of the law by introducing some improvements in certain areas, while maintaining the current structure and philosophy of the law.
2. Draft a completely new law for the rights of persons with disabilities, through the introduction of new provisions, using a rights-based approach and philosophy that uses the mandate of the UNCRPD, unlike the approach employed by the current law.

Participating parties agreed to adopt the second approach, namely to draft a modern law for persons with disabilities. Additionally, a national committee consisting of several active organizations was set up to oversee all stages of the drafting and development process.

b. A work methodology for drafting the new law was prepared, to ensure an effective and participatory implementation of the rights-based and developmental approaches, thus resulting in an output that corresponds to the realities, visions, and philosophies stipulated under the human rights system.

c. The Institute of Law at Birzeit University was contracted to undertake the responsibility for drafting a new modern law that regulates the rights of persons with disabilities with a specialized team of researchers and experienced academics. By the end of 2017, the team started working on a general review of the legislative framework in relation to the law. Work on the law is expected to continue until the end of 2018.

National legislations under the microscope: rights-based critical review

In an initiative by the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, and in cooperation with the Palestinian Coalition for Disability, and based on a belief in the importance of complementarity and synergy of efforts, a rights-based review of Palestinian national legislations will be conducted, to identify existing gaps between them and the provisions of the UNCRPD. Given the need to ensure complementarity with the efforts to draft a modern law for persons with disability, the Institute of Law at Birzeit University was contracted to carry out this review and identify the work methodology on a participatory basis. In this regard, work will be done on two levels:

1. Conducting a comprehensive review of the national legislative system and identification of areas where disability is mentioned or addressed, and identifying the gaps between Palestinian law provisions and the provisions of the UNCRPD.
2. Drafting recommendations for inclusive legislative provisions that can be incorporated in Palestinian laws, with a focus on laws that highly affect the lives of persons with disabilities.

Work on the revision of laws is expected to continue throughout 2018. These efforts will also benefit from the process of drafting a new Palestinian disability law. However, the final outcome of this two-part process is pending the government's position regarding this change once the work is completed.



Mainstreaming disability issues at Galaxy Training Center: A turning point towards development

Through its program for economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation works towards enhancing access of persons with disabilities to enjoy all their social and economic rights and participate effectively in the development process. The aim is to make the issue of disability part of any developmental effort in a way that allows for the transformation of persons with disabilities from the state of marginalization, to that of participation and liberation from the constraints of common stereotypes. To achieve that, the program developed an assessment tool to evaluate the readiness of vocational training centers to accommodate and mainstream persons with disabilities. The tool has four main themes: (1) institutional structure, (2) physical environment and functional adaptation, (3) socio-cultural environment, and (4) programs and training methods.

Using this tool, the program was able to analyze the status of Galaxy Vocational Training Center, identifying the main gaps within its policies, regulations, measures, administrative and vocational plans, training environment, infrastructure, vocational adaptation, training programs, curricula, training methods, and social acceptance in terms of disability mainstreaming. Based on this assessment, an intervention plan was designed to increase the readiness of Galaxy center to accommodate and integrate persons with disabilities within its training programs improve accessibility of persons with disabilities to the center and facilitate their enrollment in vocational training programs, and build the capacities of trainers at the center to better engage with persons with disabilities and design accessible training programs. This was possible through the following:

1. Holding a series of trainings for the staff and teachers of the center on the concept and approaches of disability, communication etiquette with persons with disabilities, disability-based discrimination, and disability-based violations. The training also focused on adaptation

and facilitative arrangements that could make training programs and facilities more accessible to persons with disabilities.. Furthermore, this was followed by a series of trainings on Palestinian sign language for the teacher at the center, thus building their capacity in communicating with persons with hearing disabilities.

2. Drafting a disability inclusion and mainstreaming policy, that encompasses the guiding principles for building an accessible and inclusive training environment at Galaxy.
3. Conducting an accessibility audit for the center's facilities, by a specialized engineer from Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation. The audit aimed to assess the center's accessibility to persons with disabilities. A report with recommendations and was then prepared, in order to adapt the physical environment of the center.
4. Meeting with Hebron Municipality to dedicate special parking spaces for persons with disabilities in front of Galaxy training center, and make the necessary adaptations for the pavement.

On 3/4/2018, Galaxy training center officially adopted the disability inclusion and mainstreaming policy, during a ceremony that gained local media coverage. Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation was also present among a group of prominent governmental and non-governmental institutions working in the disability sector in Hebron governorate.

The program's intervention and collaboration with Galaxy training center is considered a major success achieved by the Economic Empowerment Program in 2018. Galaxy center has become more responsive to the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities within its policies and programs. This success would not have been possible without the efforts and will of the management and staff at Galaxy center, who showed great cooperation and interest in becoming a disability-inclusive center.



Mohammad Fatafta: A success story



Opportunities coupled with inclusive environment create success and excellence. This was the case with Mohammad Rajab Fatafta from Tarqumya, who is in his thirties. Mohammad demonstrated a distinguished model of success. When Mohammad's qualifications were matched the right opportunities within an inclusive environment, his road to success began. He currently serves as the Quality Controller at Universal Company for Mattresses.

Mohammad was hit by an Israeli bullet at the age of 24, which led to the amputation of his right hand. This posed a new reality for him, along with new challenges, and new questions for which he often failed to find answers. Mohammad was mostly concerned about his ability to overcome barriers and obstacles facing him especially with societal stereotypes, and his ability to move on with his life and realize the future for which he has always strived.

After a long time of self-reflection, Mohammad discovered that it was inevitable for him to be determined, move on, and face challenges. This is when his journey to reach his future goals started. Mohammad learned about the Palestinian General Union for Persons with Disabilities in Hebron, and he took the initiative to volunteer for it, thus gaining professional job experience.

After gaining professional on-job experience, the the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation invested in Mohammad's abilities and qualifications, and recruited him as a field coordinator for the program in Hebron. The program has also worked closely with Mohammad through its empowerment and capacity building interventions. As a result, Mohammad eventually landed a job as Quality Control Officer at Universal Company for Mattresses, after the company was targeted by the Economic Empowerment Program to promote inclusive employment of persons with disabilities. When this opening was available at the company, Mohammad was nominated for it, and he was successfully recruited given his experience and qualifications. Mohammad has since been a successful employee, enjoying the respect and support of his manager and colleagues.

This is the idea of success; it cannot become a reality unless there is an inclusive society that respects diversity, and opens opportunities for its members without discrimination. A society that offers its members a chance for a decent life and a bright future. No bright history or future could be achieved without a society, a workplace, and a state capable of investing in the potential of its members, including persons with disabilities who possess both the abilities and qualifications through which they can contribute to the development process when opportunities are available.

The Palestinian National Alliance for Employment of Persons with Disabilities

At the end of 2015, and following a series of meetings and discussions, a group of DPOs and civil society organizations working in the disability sector agreed to establish an alliance for strengthening and operationalizing the right to decent work for persons with disabilities in Palestine, in partnership with the General Directorate for Employment at the Ministry of Labor. Organizations working in the disability sector agreed on this initiative based on their responsibility towards the empowerment of persons with disabilities, as well as advocating for a rights-based approach and influencing official policies to become more inclusive. They believed that this initiative will contribute towards better coordination of efforts, and the creation of strategic approaches and methodologies that would enhance the access of persons with disabilities to decent work in public and private sectors. The alliance was established and officially launched through a press conference that was held at the Star Mountain Rehabilitation Center in Ramallah, in the presence of its founding committee. Members of the alliance include the General Directorate for Employment at the Ministry of Labor, Star Mountain Center for Rehabilitation, Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, Stars of Hope Society, Thalassaemia Patients Friends Society, YMCA Jerusalem-Rehabilitation Program, the Palestinian General Union for Persons with Disabilities, and Ufoq Organization for Youth Development.

The alliance aims to achieve the following objectives:

Objective 1: Enhancing the legal framework that regulates the right of persons with disabilities to decent work in Palestine in line with the rights-based approach.

Objective 2: Increasing the percentage of persons with disabilities mainstreamed in the Palestinian labor market who contribute effectively to the production processes.

Objective 3: Improving decent work conditions for persons with disabilities who are already enrolled in the Palestinian labor market, and ensuring compliance with decent work standards and conditions.

Objective 4: Contributing towards unifying and regulating the efforts of all stakeholders in the disability sector, to guarantee better access of persons with disabilities to economic empowerment programs and services in Palestine at the national and district levels.

Since its establishment, the alliance has organized several activities and events, that include:

1. Holding a series of meetings between the alliance and Bank of Palestine to assess the funding applications for micro-enterprises submitted by persons with disabilities.
2. Conducting a workshop to discuss potential cooperation between labor unions and the alliance, for enhancing syndicate representation of persons with disabilities and establishing standards for decent work.
3. Conducting a workshop to review the Palestinian labor law and discuss the means through which it can be amended to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to decent work.
4. Establishing district committees to follow up on employment of persons with disabilities in the governorates of Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, and Qalqiliya.
5. Hosting an employment career fair for persons with disabilities in Hebron governorate.

Supporting companies:



Universal Company for Mattresses



Herbawi Company for Mattresses



Zmzm for Plastic Industries



Royal



Abdo Insurance Company



Soft Life



Al-Juneidi Dairy & Food Products



New Tossetti



Papers Industries Company



World Technical Elite



Abou Mazen Company and Hotel



Al-Ahli Hospital



United Company for Iron Manufacturing



Qawasmi Jewelry Co.
Qawasmi Investment Group



Al-Jebrini Group for Food Industries



Galaxy for Training



Al-Rahma for Plastic Industries



Wafaa Plastic Industries



Al Faloja

If you wish to hire a person with disability or need any information about adaptations and accessibility at the workplace, please contact the team of the Economic Empowerment Program at the following numbers:

+970-598951072

+970-592744052

+970-594594430

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This publication has been funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation within the Project "Mustaqbaluna (Il nostro futuro) - Incremento delle opportunità di lavoro per la popolazione vulnerabile in Palestina". Code AID 011.464, in partnership with AVSI Foundation. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.

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