

Side event on

Empowering entrepreneurs with disabilities: unlocking inclusive opportunities for socio-economic impact

20 November 2024

8:30–11:00 a.m. | The Pearl Room

Event description

Entrepreneurs with disabilities, like all entrepreneurs, are driven by the desire to create something significant and make a difference. Globally, one in seven persons with a disability is self-employed in an entrepreneurial area. This is similar to the share of the self-employed among working persons without disabilities, suggesting that entrepreneurship is a viable route into work for many and that there is significant untapped potential of self-employment and entrepreneurship as a route to labour market participation for many persons with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities face greater barriers in business start-up and development due to structural barriers and negative social attitudes. In addition to challenges related to skills and finance gaps, obstacles to entrepreneurship include limited access to support and difficulties in building networks.

In this context, this side event aims to promote inclusive entrepreneurship and empower persons with disabilities to start and grow their businesses in the Arab region. Building upon the efforts of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to promote inclusiveness for persons with disabilities in the labour market, the event will highlight the socio-economic benefits of inclusive entrepreneurship, identify barriers and proposed solutions to entrepreneurial access, and showcase successful case studies. The event also seeks to raise awareness and inspire action among policymakers, business leaders, and the public in the Arab region on the importance of inclusive entrepreneurship. It will provide a platform for dialogue, networking and knowledge sharing to foster a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for persons with disabilities.

Event objectives

The primary goals of this event include the following:

- **Promote inclusive entrepreneurship:** Advocate for policies and practices that create a supportive environment for persons with disabilities to start and grow their businesses.
- **Raise awareness of the socio-economic benefits of inclusive entrepreneurship:** Inform policymakers, business leaders and the public about the positive impact of inclusive entrepreneurship on economic growth, social inclusion and community development.
- **Empower entrepreneurs with disabilities:** Provide access to training, mentorship and resources to help persons with disabilities develop entrepreneurial skills, access funding and build successful ventures.

Topics to be covered

The event will provide a platform to explore and discuss the following topics:

Topic 1: The socio-economic impact of inclusive entrepreneurship

- Explore the positive impact of inclusive entrepreneurship on economic growth, social inclusion and community development.
- Highlight how entrepreneurship can empower individuals with disabilities, create jobs and generate revenue.

Topic 2: Barriers to entrepreneurial access for persons with disabilities

- Identify specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities in starting and running businesses, such as accessibility issues, financial constraints, attitudinal barriers and lack of support services.
- Propose policy solutions to overcome challenges and boost entrepreneurship opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Topic 3: Success stories and best practices in inclusive entrepreneurship

- Present inspiring examples of successful entrepreneurs with disabilities and their ventures denoting innovative approaches and strategies that empower individuals to overcome barriers and achieve entrepreneurial success.

Target audience

The target audience includes decision makers and government officials in the Arab region who can influence policy to shape an inclusive entrepreneurship environment. Participants also include financial institutions, business leaders, entrepreneurs with disabilities, and representatives of organizations for persons with disabilities (OPDs). Engaging this diverse group aims to create a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers persons with disabilities to achieve their full potential.

Language

To ensure accessibility for all participants, the event will be conducted in both Arabic and English. Sign language and live close captions will be available. Interpretation from English to Arabic and vice versa will also be provided.

Contact information

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Agenda

8:30-9:00 a.m.

Inclusive entrepreneurship: a catalyst for economic growth and social inclusion

- **Muhannad Al Azzeh**, Secretary General of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jordan
- **Mohammad Al Ghayeb**, Director of Social Affairs – Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs in Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCCLSA), Bahrain
- **Nawaf Kabbara**, President, International Disability Alliance, Lebanon
- **Ahmed Berkia**, Secretary General, Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Morocco
- **Mohammed Al Dosari**, Social Specialist, Shafallah Center, Qatar

Moderator

Rania Al Jazairi, First Social Affairs Officer, Manager of the Economic Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Project, ESCWA

9:00-10:00 a.m.

Empowering entrepreneurship: breaking down barriers for individuals with disabilities

- **Nejah Cherif**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), HandiSuccess International, Tunisia
- **Jahda Abou Khalil**, Executive Director, Arab Organization for Persons with Disabilities, Lebanon
- **May Zeinedine**, Founder and President, Al Hassan Foundation, Egypt
- **Batool Muheisen**, Digital entrepreneur, Jordan

Moderator

Alaa Sebeh, Regional Advisor on Disability, ESCWA

10:00-11:00 a.m.

Innovating for inclusion: success stories and best practices in inclusive entrepreneurship

- **Safiya Al Bahlani**, Artist and Creative Designer, Oman
- **Hussayn Hilal**, CEO, Holy Buns, Egypt
- **Elias Tawk**, Owner of Sajry, Lebanon
- **Tarek Salem**, Founder, Access Life, Egypt

Moderator

Mona Fattah, Regional Advisor on Social Protection, Coordinator of Josour Initiative