



Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities

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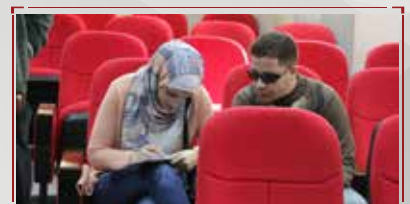
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The vision of the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation is to strengthen the right of persons with disabilities to a decent life, and provide them with access to equitable opportunities to make a living, become economically independent, 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, in addition to a sensitized and accessible economic empowerment process, that focuses on a range of interventions that seek to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities, and alleviate the state of chronic marginalization that they experience.

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 and national levels. This issue is the second in a series of newsletters, and will particularly address formal employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector, as one of the major interventions of the program. The issue will highlight success stories and progress achieved under this component.

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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 opportunities, leading to economic independence. It also envisages working 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:

- Empower 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 opportunities and self-employment.

- Provide and facilitate access of persons with disabilities to various financing opportunities to establish their own businesses and micro-enterprises.
- Work 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.
- Increase 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.
- Provide technical support for vocational training centers, and train their staff on the rights and requirements of persons with disabilities. In addition, provide them with mechanisms and support to adapt their training programs and tools, and create more accessible training programs, thus facilitating the enrollment of persons with disabilities in vocational training programs.
- Assess the needs of governmental vocational training centers under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor, and accordingly adapt their physical environment, tools, and training materials to meet the requirements of persons with disabilities.
- Build the capacities of persons with disabilities, their families, and private and public institutions on the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work.
- Lobby decision-makers to enforce and implement national laws and policies related to equal job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the labor market to ensure that they and their families can live in dignity.



Program Achievements from July 1, 2018 until December 31, 2018

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

1. Reach and register 387 persons with disabilities to receive economic empowerment interventions by the program.
2. Implement 7 career counseling workshops and carry out vocational assessments for 73 persons with disabilities, in order to determine the potential professional and career paths that correspond to their interests, values, and professional capacities.
3. Register and enroll 54 persons with disabilities in vocational training programs.
4. Conduct visits to 55 private companies to raise their awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities, identify vacancies, and refer qualified persons with disabilities to work.
5. Conduct 4 trainings on soft and employability skills for persons

with disabilities in the governorates of Nablus, Bethlehem, and Hebron. The trainings aimed at providing participants with a set of skills that would prepare them for the job market, such as CV writing, preparing for job interviews, communication, and team work.

6. Conduct 2 trainings on micro-enterprise management for persons with disabilities who are interested in starting their own businesses. The trainings which were held in the governorates of Qalqiliya and Jenin aimed at providing participants with the skills needed to develop their business ideas, such as financial management, marketing, and developing business plans and feasibility studies among other skills.
7. Facilitate the access of 38 persons with disabilities to formal employment opportunities in the Palestinian labor market.
8. Provide 56 assistive devices to 30 persons with disabilities.



In terms of advocacy efforts, the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities, and in line with its philosophy, continues to approach disability as a developmental human-rights issue that requires all members of the society to work collectively under unified visions and strategies that promote the need for creating change for persons with disabilities.

The following are the most important accomplishments of the advocacy unit during this period:

1. Enhancing the rights-based approach to disability within the framework of national legislations. In this context, a study has been conducted to review national legislations from the perspective of the rights of persons with disabilities. The study was carried out by the Institute of Law at Birzeit University. In its first phase, the study reviewed and critically examined the Palestinian legal framework that regulates the rights of persons with disabilities in light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In its second phase, the study developed specialized policy papers concerning the right to healthcare, the right to work, the right to accessible environments, and the right to legal protection/criminal justice for persons with disabilities. These policy papers presented several recommendations in terms of amending the legal frameworks that regulate the aforementioned rights in a way that would guarantee the access and enjoyment of these rights by persons with disabilities. Work will be undertaken with the various stakeholders to lobby official and governmental institutions to incorporate the recommendations of the study and the policy papers within the relevant legislations.
2. Launching an advocacy campaign to raise public awareness and lobby decision-makers to improve access of persons with disabilities to rights and services. The campaign involved a range of media products that focused on the need for amending the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 4 for the year 1999, and drafting a modern law that is more responsive to the rights of persons with disabilities. The campaign also demanded that persons with disabilities are guaranteed access to accessible health facilities and comprehensive healthcare services.
3. Mainstreaming disability issues in the policies and programs of World Technical Elite vocational training center. As part

of its efforts to support inclusive training environments, the Economic Empowerment Program has conducted an evaluation study for the center, on which an action plan was developed. As a result, a series of trainings targeting the trainers and staff of the Northern branches of the center were conducted. The training tackled many issues such as the concept of disability and inclusion, communication etiquette with persons with disabilities, accessibility, mainstreaming PWDs in vocational training programs, adaptation and accessibility, in addition to Palestinian sign language. Furthermore, the program supported the center in developing an inclusive training policy that was adopted by the center, and launched during a press conference held in Nablus. The center's interest and commitment in mainstreaming persons with disabilities, and the knowledge its trainers have gained as a result of the trainings, have all positively impacted the quality of training received by registered PWDs.

4. Conducting the national workshop for Palestinian businessmen and businesswomen in partnership with the Palestinian National Alliance for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. The workshop focused on the importance of increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in the Palestinian labor market, while highlighting successful models.
5. Conducting a workshop on the right of persons with disabilities to decent work in partnership with Bethlehem local employment committee. The workshop was attended by representative of private sector companies and institutions from Bethlehem Governorate, and collaboration mechanisms were discussed.
6. Networking with private sector companies with the aim of increasing the access of persons with disabilities to work opportunities.

The right of persons with disabilities to access decent work opportunities an overview of the reality

The Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities adopts a philosophy which believes that work holds a great value. It also believes that work represents the widest gate to acquiring other basic rights such as housing, food, independence and living in dignity. Despite this importance, many economic and social factors and circumstances have contributed to increasing unemployment rates in Palestine, and has limited people's access to decent employment.

Although the overall unemployment rate remains high among Palestinians, official statistics by the PCBS and the Ministry of Social Development indicate that the unemployment rate among PWDs is 3 times higher than the average, and reaches 87.6%. This indicates that there are factors and variables that are exclusively related to persons with disabilities, that have led to this significant negative impact, and resulted in this high rate of unemployment and the exclusion of PWDs from the labor market.

The most important factors can be identified as follow:

1. The negative stereotypes prevalent among employers regarding persons with disabilities:

Despite the tremendous efforts undertaken by several parties to improve social attitudes towards persons with disabilities searching for work, yet a perception that views persons with disabilities as an unproductive and unqualified group is still prevalent among many employers. This has affected employers' faith in the capacities of PWDs, and has limited their chances in accessing decent work opportunities that respect their capacities and potential.

These stereotypes have resulted in the rejection of employment of many qualified persons with disabilities, or has led to their exploitation by some employers who offer them very low-paid job.

2. Accessibility :

This factor is the most important since it constitutes a real barrier that hampers the participation of persons with disabilities in the labor market, and limits their access to other spaces of social activities. The issue of accessibility is demonstrated in several areas, the most important of which are the following:

- Barriers within the physical environment, public

facilities and public transportation. Overall, these environments and systems have been designed in a way that does not accommodate the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities.

- Barrier to access information. Many of the websites on which jobs are announced do not offer appropriate accessibility arrangements that allow all persons with disabilities to access them and use them.
- Barriers to accessing empowerment and capacity building opportunities, such as training. Many of the institutions that offer such opportunities do not offer inclusive programs for persons with disabilities.
- Barriers to accessing educational opportunities that correspond with the needs of the labor market. In addition to the high illiteracy rates among persons with disabilities, one can also notice a high tendency to pursue studies in humanities, a specialization that does not correspond with the needs of the labor market.

In light of this, the importance of rights-based empowerment activities becomes evident. Such activities are needed to devise a range of interventions that address the root causes of the problem and develop appropriate methodologies to resolve them in line with rights-based developmental approaches.

3. The legislative aspect:

The legislations governing the right to work for persons with disabilities are clearly insufficient and ineffective. The lack of enforcement mechanisms and penalties, low oversight, and failure to design policies and programs that correspond to the right to work are among the major issues in the legislative system.

Additionally, one of the most important issues in the Palestinian legislative system is the absence of decent work standards that should be present at work environments, the lack of oversight and accountability mechanisms, and the lack of inclusive occupational safety and health standards.

One of the main issues that can be tackled in the year 2019 is the mainstreaming of inclusive articles that ensure the access of persons with disabilities to empowerment and employment opportunities, within the Palestinian disability law, the labor law, and the civil service law.



Methodology for facilitating the access of persons with disabilities to decent work

In order to respond to the challenges facing persons with disabilities in regards to access to decent work, it was essential to develop a substantial and urgent intervention that would address the problems, and support the efforts conducted in this regard. As a result, the Economic Empowerment Program adopted a multi-dimensional employment methodology that involves the following strategies:

1. Empowerment strategy, which includes:

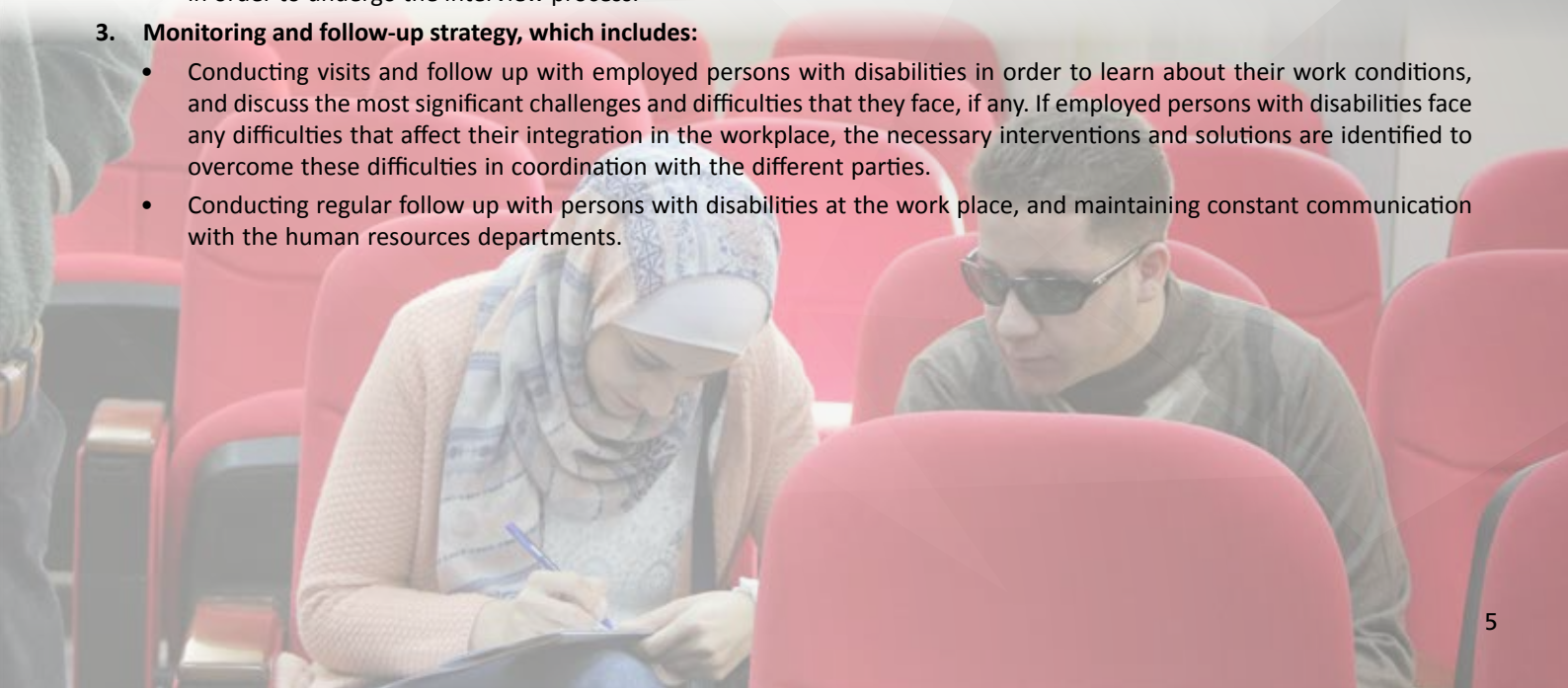
- An individualized assessment for persons with disabilities, through an intensive review and analysis of the information collected from each individual referred to the program. Data collection is done through a comprehensive questionnaire that includes information on the social and economic situation, qualifications, skills, capacities, and needs. Based on the data analysis, an individualized intervention plan is developed. The plan could include the referral to any intervention provided by the Economic Empowerment Program, such as career counseling and vocational assessment, vocational training, self-employment, or formal employment. In the case of PWDs who are ready to be integrated in the labor market, they are referred to the program's employment unit by which a work plan is developed for each of them, in order to facilitate their access to job opportunities.
- The empowerment of persons with disabilities through capacity building and training. In order to achieve that, the employment unit carries out a range of necessary trainings to enhance the competitive advantage of PWDs, and prepare them to the job market. These trainings include the following modules:
 - * Enhancing PWDs' understanding of decent work standards, and their right to decent work, based on national legislations and international agreements.
 - * Enhancing PWDs' skills in communication and teamwork.
 - * Developing PWDs' capacities in CV writing, and preparing for job interviews.
 - * Developing PWD's skills in the job search process which include online job search and online applications.
 - * Raising PWDs' awareness on work ethics and the professional code of conduct.
- The provision of assistive devices for PWDs who need them, in order to facilitate their access to the work environment, and enable them to carry out their tasks in an independent and efficient manner

2. Job identification strategy, which includes:

- Identifying available job vacancies by monitoring job advertisement platforms (such as jobs.ps, shobiddak.com, the General Personnel Council of Palestine, the Palestinian Labor Market Information System), coordinating with chambers of commerce throughout the different governorates of the West Bank, and conducting visits to companies during which available vacancies are identified and documented using a special questionnaire designed by the Economic Empowerment Program for this purpose.
- Conducting visits to companies in order to raise employers' awareness on the right of persons with disabilities to work, and influence their attitudes in a manner that enhances employment opportunities for persons with disabilities within these companies when vacancies become available. The visits are also an opportunity to strengthen coordination and cooperation for this purpose.
- Matching qualified persons with disabilities with available job vacancies. The employment unit screens the database of persons with disabilities and shortlists those who are qualified and whose educational and professional capacities correspond with the announcements and available vacancies.
- The referral of qualified persons with disabilities to available vacancies at the companies with whom the program works, in order to undergo the interview process.

3. Monitoring and follow-up strategy, which includes:

- Conducting visits and follow up with employed persons with disabilities in order to learn about their work conditions, and discuss the most significant challenges and difficulties that they face, if any. If employed persons with disabilities face any difficulties that affect their integration in the workplace, the necessary interventions and solutions are identified to overcome these difficulties in coordination with the different parties.
- Conducting regular follow up with persons with disabilities at the work place, and maintaining constant communication with the human resources departments.



Highlights from Selected Events

- **The national workshop for businessmen/women in Palestine:**

The Palestinian National Alliance for Employment of Persons with Disabilities, in coordination with the Palestinian Businessmen Association, and under the auspices of the Prime Minister, organized a national workshop for businessmen/women in Palestine, in order to shed light on the developmental benefits of employing persons with disabilities, who are an integral part of the Palestinian workforce. During the workshop, stories of successful employed persons with disabilities were presented and shared. The workshop which was attended by 40 persons with disabilities searching for work, and 80 prominent businessmen and women, opened a space for networking, and became a platform to sensitize participants and change their attitudes towards employing persons with disabilities and developing mechanisms that would facilitate that. The workshop will be followed by other meetings at the executive level to facilitate the engagement of persons with disabilities in the work force, and build on the results achieved during it.



- **A workshop for employers in Bethlehem governorate:**

As part of the efforts undertaken by the local committees for the employment of persons with disabilities, established under the National Alliance for Employment of PWDs, Bethlehem local employment committee conducted a workshop targeting employers in Bethlehem governorate. The committee, whose members include Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, the General Palestinian Union for Persons with Disabilities/Bethlehem branch, YMCA East Jerusalem – the Rehabilitation Program, Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Qader Institute for Community Development, and UNRWA/Bethlehem office, conducted the workshop in coordination with the Bethlehem Multi-Disciplinary Industrial Park (BMIP). The workshop was attended by Dr. Ali Sha'ath - the CEO of the General Commission for Industrial Cities and Free Industrial Zones, Mr. Elie Shehadeh - Director General of BMIP, and a number of businessmen and business women, representatives of companies, banks, civil society organizations and public institutions in Bethlehem Governorate. During the workshop, participants discussed the importance of employing persons with disabilities and the positive social and developmental effects. The meeting also highlighted the need for networking with companies and institutions to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities without any discrimination. Potential joint work between the private sector and the committee for employment of persons with disabilities was also discussed. Participants agreed that individual follow up visits are to be conducted for each company in order to identify all available vacancies for which qualified PWDs can be referred.

- **Training on soft and employment skills for persons with disabilities :**

The search for jobs in the Palestinian market has become a job in itself, and the skills currently required for succeeding at the workplace are no more limited to academic and professional qualifications. As a response to that, it was essential to empower persons with disabilities through the provision of training on soft and employability skills that could increase their competitive advantage as they search for jobs. In this regard, the Economic Empowerment Program has carried out the following activities:

- * Built the capacities of the program staff through the provision of a Training of Trainers (ToT) on soft and employability skills. The training aimed at preparing the program's staff to become equipped with the knowledge and skills that would allow them to train persons with disabilities, and support them as they pave their way to employment.
- * Conducted 4 training courses on soft and employability skills for a total of 75 persons with disabilities searching for work. The training focused on skills for CV writing, job interview skills, communication skills, workers' rights, teamwork, and work ethics. These trainings have been implemented as part of Mustaqbaluna project, which aims at increasing job opportunities for vulnerable people in Palestine through a series of empowerment activities and interventions.



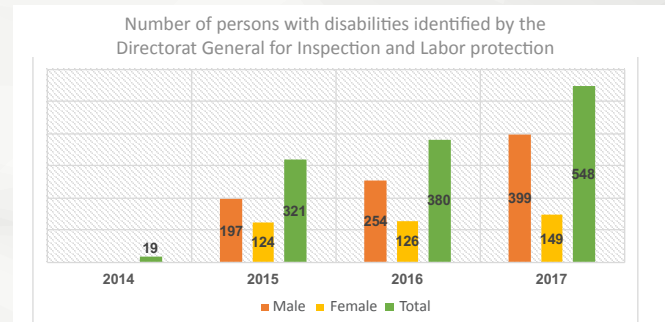
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Training for the Inspectors of the Palestinian Ministry of Labor

In the context of raising the efficiency, knowledge, and skills of employees at the Directorate General for Inspection and Labor Protection at the Ministry of Labor, a series of trainings were conducted on disability issues and decent work standards. The most recent training workshop targeted 20 inspectors from various district offices of the Ministry of Labor. The training which was held in partnership with YMCA East Jerusalem – the Rehabilitation Program, aimed to shed light on the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work, and focused on the most important obstacles and challenges that they face in this regard. The training also addressed the role of inspectors in terms of oversight on the enforcement of the labor law, which states that 5% of total workers at every economic establishment with more than 20 workers should be persons with disabilities. During the training, the development of inspection forms incorporating indicators about the labor rights of persons with disabilities was also discussed.

This training came as an inevitable result of the impact of the previous trainings on the work conditions of employed persons with disabilities. Statistics issued by the Directorate General for Inspection and Labor Protection indicate that the process of tracking persons with disabilities in work environments has improved significantly in the reports of the various inspection departments at different governorates. The figures indicate that the number of persons with disabilities listed in the

2014 reports did not exceed 19 PWDs, while the year 2015 witnessed a significant increase in these figures reaching 321 persons with disabilities (197 males, 124 females). These figures continued to rise in 2016 and 2017 consecutively as indicated in the diagram below. This increase reflects an increase in the knowledge and skills of the inspectors in identifying issues and rights of persons with disabilities. This can be attributed to several variables and factors, the most important of which, are the specialized trainings that the inspectors received on of the rights of persons with disabilities to work, according to decent work standard and the existing legislations governing it.



The Story of Mr. Abdo Idrees



Mr. Abdo Idrees is a businessman and the owner of Abdo Insurance Company. He is also a member of the Hebron Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mr. Abdo believed in the right of persons with disabilities to work on the basis of equality and competency. Since our first meeting with him at a workshop organized by the Economic Empowerment Program for businessmen in Hebron governorate, Mr. Abdo showed great interest to work with the program towards making a lasting change in terms of employment of PWDs. Following that, he became a member of the local committee for employment of persons with disabilities that was established in Hebron governorate.

In coordination with the committee, Mr. Abdo took it upon himself to communicate with companies and businessmen and arrange visits, during which the committee members discussed the importance of employing persons with disabilities, identified available job opportunities, and referred qualified persons with disabilities to apply and attend job interviews at these companies. Mr. Abdo also hired three persons with disabilities at his company, setting an example for other companies to follow. This had helped in growing a more inclusive culture among employers in Hebron, thus facilitating the access of more persons with disabilities to decent employment.

Mr. Abdo's experience in advocating the right of persons with disabilities to work had a major impact on his peers. Mr. Abdo stated that the rate of employment among persons with disabilities in Hebron governorate has been increasing due to the successes of the employed persons with disabilities. He also stated that the committee has succeeded in employing 200 persons with disabilities in Hebron, which is considered a major accomplishment and a model to be followed and an experience to build upon.

Success story:

A glimpse from a real-life experience

Opportunities and development of capacities lead to achieving one's objectives. Ammar is a young man who has a motor disability since birth. Neither his disability, nor the surrounding community deterred him from pursuing his goals and seeking to achieve them. His most important goal was to develop his capacities and achieve personal career growth, through which he can fulfill himself socially and economically. Ammar also seeks to contribute towards changing the stereotypical view, which assumes that his disability limits his capacity and productivity.

In his search for an empowerment opportunity that would allow him to achieve his objectives and help him enter the labor market, Ammar knocked on several doors, including the Economic Empowerment Program for Persons with Disabilities at Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation. The Program referred Ammar to career counseling and vocational assessment, as to assess his capacities, explore his interests, as well as help him identify the appropriate professional career path for him. Consequently, Ammar started his journey to work on developing his capacities, and the Program registered him in a vocational training program on computer maintenance at the Sheikh Fatima Center for Vocational Rehabilitation, from which Ammar graduated and obtained his diploma. When he could not find a job, Ammar decided to look for other options. He received a funding opportunity that enabled him to open his own internet café with the support of his family. His

project faced several challenges, forcing Ammar to close it down. Ammar started searching for new employment opportunities, and participated in several training courses organized by the Economic Empowerment Program on soft and employability skills. The training allowed him to prepare a professional CV that reflects his qualifications and capacities, and prepared him in the best way possible for job interviews.

Ammar was invited by the Program to participate in a career day that was held at Hebron Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The career day was held after close coordination between the Economic Empowerment Program, Hebron local employment committee for PWDs, and the private sector companies in Hebron governorate. Ammar dedicated his capacities and potentials to excel at the interview, and succeeded in landing a job opportunity at Al Ramez Company in Tarqumia. Ammar was happy about this opportunity, which made him more enthusiastic to work, more aspiring to the future and achieving his independence. Ammar expressed satisfaction with his current job, particularly in terms of his relationship with his colleagues. Through work and diligence, Ammar was able to achieve his objectives and rights to a decent and equitable life.

Ammar is a young man who continued to search for and make the best use of opportunities, and worked hard to advance his qualifications, which led him to achieve his objectives.

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.



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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