

Policy brief

Integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market in Lebanon: opportunities and challenges



Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



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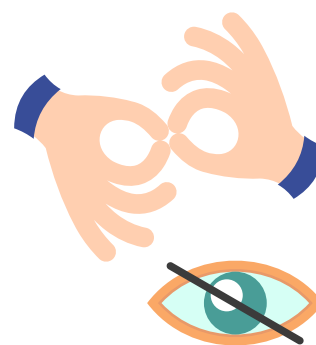


Key messages

The number of persons with severe disabilities is estimated at 169,000 and of persons with mild disabilities at 488,000.

Only one in five men with severe disabilities is employed, compared with one in twenty-two women.

The employment rate of persons with disabilities does not exceed 4 per cent in medium-sized enterprises and 3 per cent in large enterprises.



Labour force participation among persons with severe disabilities is approximately half that of persons without disabilities. Among young persons with disabilities, participation drops to one-third of the rate of their peers without disabilities.

Two-thirds of workers with severe disabilities, around 11,924 people, are engaged in informal employment.

Persons with severe disabilities account for only 1.6 per cent of Lebanese employers.

The employment gap between persons with severe disabilities and those without disabilities results in an estimated annual loss of \$817 million, equivalent to 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Key challenges that persons with disabilities face include the following:

- In job searches: unsuitable recruitment procedures, discriminatory treatment during interviews, and lack of accessible transportation.
- In entrepreneurship: restricted access to information, difficulty securing financing, and lack of accessible technical support.

Employers believe that:

- Intellectual disability is the most difficult to integrate.
- Persons with disabilities are suited to specific stereotypical jobs, and employers are concerned about effective communication with them and reduced productivity.

Introduction

The prevalence of severe disability among Lebanese people in 2019 was around 4.4 per cent, encompassing approximately 169,213 people of all age groups, including around 90,503 older persons (52,579 women and 37,924 men).¹ The prevalence of mild disability stood at 12.7 per cent, or around 488,000 people.²

Although Lebanon has a legislative framework to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including [Law 220 of 2000](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (which Lebanon ratified in 2025), implementation remains limited. A 3 per cent employment quota exists; however, enforcement in the public sector has not exceeded 1.6 per cent.³ In 2023, the Government launched a cash allowance programme to support around 20,000 Lebanese persons with disabilities. Targeted initiatives, such as [ProAbled Recruit](#), [the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities](#) and [arcenciel](#), also contributed to training and employing hundreds of persons with disabilities and to promoting inclusion in the labour market.⁴ Nevertheless, the employment rate among Lebanese persons with severe disabilities was only 11.8 per cent, compared with 42.3 per cent among those without disabilities. Only one in five men with severe disabilities was employed, and just one in twenty-two women.⁵ Labour force participation of persons with severe disabilities reached 24.7 per cent, compared to 56.2 per cent for persons without disabilities. Among young people aged 15–24 years with severe disabilities, participation dropped further to 9.4 per cent, compared with 33.3 per cent among their non-disabled peers.

Limited access to formal employment opportunities has pushed around 63.8 per cent

of persons with severe disabilities – approximately 11,924 individuals – into informal employment, compared with only around 43.4 per cent of persons without disabilities. Most workers with severe disabilities are employed in small enterprises (93 per cent), while their employment in medium and large enterprises remains low (4 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively), compared to 14.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent among persons without disabilities.

Marginalization also extends to entrepreneurship, as persons with severe disabilities account for only 1.6 per cent of employers, indicating limited participation in business ownership and leadership. In terms of income, persons without disabilities earn on average 1.5 times more than those with severe disabilities, who face greater challenges to cover basic expenses and access essential services, especially healthcare. Around 56 per cent of persons with severe disabilities reported forgoing medical care due to cost, compared to only 24 per cent of those without disabilities. Meanwhile, 73 per cent of those without disabilities reported that they did not need care, compared to only 39 per cent of persons with disabilities, highlighting a clear structural gap between need and accessibility.⁶

Persons with disabilities are an integral part of the Lebanese society, and their exclusion from the labour market represents a loss of human resources and a missed opportunity for economic growth. According to ESCWA estimates, the employment gap between Lebanese persons with severe disabilities and those without disabilities generates an annual loss of \$817 million, equivalent to 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).⁷

This policy brief draws on findings from a survey conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Lebanon in 2024–2025, on the perceptions of both persons

with disabilities and employers regarding the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market.⁸

1. Labour market participation from the perspective of persons with disabilities

A. Entrepreneurship

- Around 94 per cent of persons with disabilities who participated in the survey expressed a desire to start a business, 51 per cent had been seeking employment for more than six months, 50 per cent were in the 30–39 age group, and 71 per cent resided in rural areas.⁹
- Around 45 per cent of persons with disabilities who were interested in starting a business had physical/mobility disabilities.
- Three main challenges that persons with disabilities face in starting a business are: difficulty in obtaining funding, lack of information on how to start a business or obtain financial support, and lack of training opportunities that cater to their needs.

B. Employment

- Around 87 per cent of persons with disabilities expressed a desire to work, 53 per cent had been actively seeking employment for more than six months, and 51 per cent resided in urban areas.
- Among those not interested in working, the main reason cited was the difficulty of leaving their home, especially when living on upper floors of buildings without elevators or electricity.
- Around 83 per cent of persons with disabilities faced challenges during their job search, most notably a lack of consideration for their needs, discriminatory treatment, and negative attitudes during interviews.
- Around 37 per cent of persons with disabilities reported that employers lacked sufficient awareness of their rights. Some indicated that

discrimination stemmed from a limited belief in their ability to perform tasks.

C. Financial status

- Most people with disabilities lacked a sustainable income. Around 80 per cent had no source of income, while a third of those with income relied on family assistance.

D. Accessibility

- Around 36 per cent of persons with disabilities faced difficulties that limited their ability to access the workplace, 55 per cent had difficulty accessing information related to job postings, and 63 per cent had difficulty using transport to reach their workplace.
- Around 50 per cent of persons with disabilities faced difficulties that limited their full ability to use modern technology, and 25 per cent found it impossible to use.

E. Utilizing support services in the field of economic empowerment

- Around 78 per cent of persons with disabilities did not receive any empowerment-related support services, and this percentage rose to 82 per cent in rural areas. Among those who received support, vocational training was the most common (23 per cent), followed by training on starting, implementing and evaluating a business (19 per cent), rights-related support (15 per cent) and employment support (9 per cent).

- Around half or more of economic and social support for persons with disabilities was provided by organizations of persons with disabilities, followed by international organizations at 28 per cent, and local civil society organizations at 12 per cent, while the role of government programmes did not exceed 4 per cent. Around 54 per cent of persons with disabilities expressed dissatisfaction with the available economic support services.

F. Solutions proposed by persons with disabilities

- Amend existing legislation or enact new laws to promote economic empowerment.

- Adopt flexible working hours.
- Provide accessible platforms that enable persons with disabilities to start their own businesses or obtain support and funding, an intervention they view as the most important for facilitating entrepreneurship.
- Provide training on personal skills, the use of modern technology, marketing and social media management, in addition to technical skills relevant to their fields of work or areas of interest.

2. Labour market participation from the perspective of employers

A. Perspectives of companies employing persons with disabilities

1. Policies and practices

- Four of the five companies that responded to the survey¹⁰ had a formal policy on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Most companies had incorporated disability into their human resources policies, which included key components such as non-discrimination, communication and outreach guidelines, the provision of reasonable accommodations and professional development and promotion.¹¹
- Reasonable accommodations primarily targeted physical disabilities, with limited reference to intellectual disabilities, even though 80 per cent of companies had trainers capable of identifying such accommodations.
- Nearly two-thirds of companies adopted policies or programmes that targeted women with disabilities and supported their professional development in ways that differed from those for men with disabilities, focusing on targeted recruitment of

women, bias-free hiring practices, and policies to prevent discrimination and harassment.

- Company policies were almost entirely free of exclusionary criteria and made no distinction between employing women and men with disabilities.
- Most inclusive companies did not adopt specific recruitment strategies to attract applicants with disabilities.
- Nearly two-thirds of companies had marketing policies that targeted customers with disabilities.

2. Perceptions of inclusive employment

- The companies believed that inclusive employment did not have a direct impact on their operations, but they recognized general benefits, including promoting equality and diversity, fulfilling social responsibility, expanding the talent base, improving the company's reputation and public image, and developing more inclusive products and services.
- Nearly half of the companies considered the provision of reasonable accommodations to be difficult or expensive.

- The companies considered psychosocial disabilities to be the most challenging to integrate.
- Nearly half of the companies identified specific jobs that they considered suitable for certain types of disabilities. These jobs were largely based on stereotypes, such as assigning persons with visual disability to work in fields related to taste, or persons with psychosocial disabilities to office-based positions.
- The main challenges that might hinder the employment of persons with disabilities included the perceived higher risk of accidents and injuries in the workplace, difficulties in effective communication with persons with disabilities, and the discomfort of some customers when interacting with them. The most important measures needed to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities included financial incentives and tax exemptions, accessible and affordable transport, specialized training programmes for employees and employers, and reasonable accommodations.

B. Perspectives of companies not employing persons with disabilities

1. Policies and practices

- More than half of the companies that responded to the survey¹² had plans to employ persons with disabilities, and were in the process of developing formal inclusion and diversity policies.
- The companies that did not have inclusive plans or policies attributed this to the fact that employing persons with disabilities had not yet been considered, or to the impact of war, which generally hindered recruitment.
- The companies did not require candidates for certain positions to be free of disabilities.

2. Perceptions of inclusive employment

- Less than half of the companies considered providing reasonable accommodations difficult or expensive.
- The companies considered integrating persons with intellectual disabilities to be the most challenging, followed by persons with visual disabilities.
- Most of the companies did not consider employing women with disabilities to be more challenging than employing men with disabilities.
- The companies believed that certain jobs should be assigned to persons with disabilities based on the type and nature of their disability. Based on this traditional stereotype, the companies, for example, considered persons with hearing disabilities suited to packaging-related jobs, and persons with visual disabilities suited to telephone-related jobs.
- Challenges that might hinder the employment of persons with disabilities included concerns of low productivity, incompatibility of flexible work arrangements with job requirements, high costs of health insurance and insurance against occupational risks, communication difficulties, and the discomfort of some customers in interacting with them.
- The most prominent policies and procedures proposed to overcome obstacles included amending national employment policies, plans and programmes to make them more inclusive of persons with disabilities, providing financial support to employers to cover reasonable accommodations, and ensuring accessibility in the workplace.
- Most companies expressed their desire to receive support to promote inclusion through financial incentives, the use of relevant experts, and the availability of information and resources on good practices in inclusive employment.



Opportunities to strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market

- **Legislative and policy framework supporting economic inclusion:** This is achieved through the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Lebanon recently ratified, and the inclusion of a component on economic inclusion in two national strategies: the National Social Protection Strategy and the draft Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.
- **Positive developments in the status of women in employment:** Despite the significant challenges that women with disabilities face, some inclusive companies have policies or programmes specifically targeting women. In these companies, the highest-ranking position was held by a woman, and a substantial proportion of companies reported no difficulties or challenges in employing and retaining women with disabilities.
- **Political stability:** The election of the President of the Republic and the formation of the government provided an opportunity to advance the disability agenda through a commitment to implement the Convention after ratifying it, to review Law 220 of 2000, and to finalize the draft National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.
- **Success of non-governmental organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities in supporting inclusive work:** This was achieved by connecting employers interested in employing persons with disabilities with trained persons with disabilities seeking employment, in addition to developing labour policies within companies, and training persons with disabilities.

3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the ESCWA study, the following recommendations are made to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, addressed to the State, organizations of persons with disabilities, and donors:

A. Activating and reviewing existing legislation and policies



- Ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, establish a committee to monitor its implementation, and apply relevant national strategies.
- Allocate the necessary budgets to implement legislation and policies related to the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, in particular by establishing mechanisms for the effective implementation of Law 220 of 2000, such as implementing decrees, and ensuring the application of the quota as a minimum for the employment of persons with disabilities.
- Review Law 220 of 2000 to ensure its consistency with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by Lebanon.
- Finalize and announce the draft National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.
- Review and amend national employment-related policies, plans and programmes to make them inclusive of persons with disabilities.
- Consider enacting laws that protect persons with disabilities from harassment, violence and discrimination in the workplace.
- Ensure the election of members of the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities in Lebanon, and enhance its role in guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities, especially in the economic field.
- Launch campaigns to raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.

B. Promoting inclusive work through support, training and accessibility



- Develop support services in the field of economic empowerment and provide access to them in all regions, especially in rural areas.
- Provide training programmes for persons with disabilities to enhance the skills required for the labour market, particularly for persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with severe disabilities, and non-Lebanese workers with disabilities. These trainings include developing their personal skills and capacities related to marketing, social media management and use of modern technology; developing technical skills specific to their fields of work or interests; and developing their capacities and enabling them to identify the types of accommodations that meet their individual needs and introducing them to the mechanisms to request such accommodations.
- Address the specific needs of women with disabilities, and provide specialized training for them, in addition to the trainings available to all persons with disabilities seeking employment/interested in starting a business.
- Assist employers in developing plans for the employment of persons with disabilities, support them in dealing with the challenges associated with inclusive work, provide training programmes on how to communicate with persons with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Financial and tax incentives (exemptions or reductions) should also be given to encourage the private sector to employ persons with disabilities in barrier-free work environments, in addition to providing assistive technologies to persons with disabilities, raising awareness of their abilities, and removing stereotypes that assign each type of disability a specific job or tasks.
- Provide accessible and affordable public transportation in all regions, especially cities, to help persons with disabilities access workplaces.
- Make buildings accessible for persons with disabilities.

C. Encouraging entrepreneurship



- Facilitate access for persons with disabilities to entrepreneurship-related information and resources, including platforms, websites, and business registration and organization applications.
- Provide high-quality training for persons with disabilities interested in starting their own businesses.
- Facilitate access to funding by providing concessional financing mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises led by persons with disabilities, including providing access to bank loans, opening bank accounts or dealing with banks.

D. Activating the role of civil society organizations



- Support organizations of persons with disabilities to enable them to provide and improve support services related to economic inclusion, especially in rural areas.
- Establish cooperation and coordination mechanisms between government agencies, the private sector, and civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, to ensure the effective implementation of laws and policies that support economic inclusion.



E. Collecting data, monitoring and evaluation

- Data collection: support implementing bodies, through specialized United Nations agencies and international organizations, to build accurate, up-to-date, and regularly updated official databases on the employment of persons with disabilities. These databases should include the number of employed, unemployed, and job seekers, and the number of those classified as underemployed, categorized by disability, gender, age, region of residence, type of work, workplace, and the various economic empowerment services they have benefited from.
- Progress monitoring and policy evaluation: establish mechanisms to monitor progress made in integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market, evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programmes, and make necessary adjustments based on data collected periodically.

Endnotes

1. ESCWA calculations based on the Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey in Lebanon (2018-2019).
2. International Labour Organization (ILO), [Living with disabilities in Lebanon](#), 2023.
3. Arabic article by Rajana Hamia on the rights of persons with disabilities law, available at <https://lphu.com/category/almarsadnews/>.
4. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), [The Ministry of Social Affairs introduces a social protection programme for people with disabilities in Lebanon](#), 2023.
5. ESCWA calculations based on the Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey in Lebanon (2018-2019).
6. Ibid.
7. Due to the limited data available on the actual productivity of persons with disabilities and the costs of integration, ESCWA calculations are based on the highest estimate of potential losses and on basic assumptions, most notably that all persons with disabilities can be integrated into the labour market without a crowding out effect and without additional costs to the work environment, and that all non-employed persons with disabilities («missing from the labour force») will earn the same income as persons with disabilities currently employed (based on the Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey in Lebanon).
8. ESCWA 2025. The first questionnaire for persons with disabilities included a sample of 217 individuals. The second questionnaire for private sector companies included a sample of 5 companies employing persons with disabilities and 11 companies that do not. This paper builds on the results of these questionnaires. The results cannot be generalized statistically to the society as a whole and have been used to provide a preliminary qualitative understanding of the priorities and challenges this group faces, both from the perspective of persons with disabilities and from the perspective of employers.
9. From Lebanon, 217 persons with disabilities participated in the survey, most of them in the 30-39 age group (54 per cent). In terms of gender, the proportion of males exceeded that of females (61 per cent compared to 39 per cent). In terms of education, the highest percentage of participants had a primary school certificate (29 per cent). With regard to family status, more than half of the respondents were married (53 per cent). With regard to types of disabilities, mobility disabilities topped the list (44 per cent). In terms of geographical distribution, the rural population was the most represented (53 per cent).
10. Five companies employing persons with disabilities responded to the questionnaire. They were small companies, mostly national, with no more than 25 employees.
11. Reasonable accommodations include modifications to the physical environment, and/or time arrangements and/or procedures to provide an environment free of physical and behavioural barriers for persons with disabilities, provided that offering such arrangements does not cause disproportionate harm to the employer. These accommodations shall be determined in accordance with objective standards and controls set by specialized bodies with the participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations.
12. Eleven companies that do not employ persons with disabilities responded to the questionnaire. Most of them were small national companies working in various sectors, such as accommodation and food services; professional, scientific and technical activities; wholesale and retail trade; vehicle repair; and education.



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