

**United Nations Development Account**

# **Terminal Evaluation of 12<sup>th</sup> Tranche of the Development Account Project**

*“Including People with Disabilities in the Arab Labour Market”  
(2020-2023)*

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*This final evaluation report of the project "Including People with Disabilities in the Arab Labour Market" was prepared in my capacity as an external evaluator to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).*

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*In view of shared learning, I hope that this report's conclusions and recommendations will help inform ESCWA's similar programming in the future.*

*Nahed Freij* |

[This report was commissioned by ESCWA. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this report are those of the external evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ESCWA. ]

## Table of Contents

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations .....	4
Executive summary .....	5
1. Introduction .....	9
2. Description of the Project.....	9
3. Evaluation Objectives, Scope, and Questions .....	11
3.1 Purpose and Objectives .....	11
3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria, and questions .....	12
4. Methodology.....	12
5. Findings.....	14
5.1 Relevance .....	14
5.2 Effectiveness .....	18
5.3 Efficiency .....	22
5.4 Sustainability .....	24
5.5 Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues.....	25
6. Conclusions.....	26
7. Lessons Learned and Good Practices .....	27
8. Recommendations .....	28
9. Annexes .....	29
Annex 1 Evaluation TOR.....	29
Annex 2 Project results framework .....	29
Annex 3 Evaluation matrix .....	29
Annex 4 List of individuals interviewed.....	29
Annex 5 List of documents reviewed .....	29

## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRPD	Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DA	Development Account
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
FP	Focal Point
IL	Intervention Logic
ILO	International Labour Organization
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MOL	Ministry of Labour
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
NSO	National Statistics Office
OC	Outcome
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Output
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPARK	Strategic Planning, Accountability, Results and Knowledge
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOT	Training of Trainers
WG	Washington Group
IA	Indicator of Achievement
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UN ESCWA	The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

## Executive summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA), in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), implemented a Development Account (DA) entitled 'Including People with Disabilities in the Arab Labour Market'. The project was implemented between January 2020 and December 2023.

The project aimed to support "public officials and private sector employers in developing evidence-based policies to mainstream the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market". The project pursued two primary outcomes or results to achieve its objective:

- Outcome (OC) 1: OC1: Increased capacity of Governments to develop evidence-based policies that facilitate better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour markets.
- Outcome (OC) 2: Increased capacity of employers to address the main factors impeding employment of persons with disabilities.

ESCWA commissioned an independent evaluation of the project to promote accountability for results and learning. The primary audiences for the review are ESCWA and its partner, the ILO, and governments in the targeted member States. The assessment was carried out by an external consultant and facilitated by ESCWA's Strategic Planning, Accountability, Results, and Knowledge (SPARK) team between February and May 2024.

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy (2023), the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and the Development Account Evaluation Guidelines. It assesses the project according to OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. In addition, it assesses development best practices regarding promoting gender equality and a human rights-based approach, including the rights of persons with disabilities.

The review followed a mixture of objective-oriented and participant-oriented approaches. Its design comprised utilisation-focused and theory-based approaches. The methodological approach included a review and analysis of secondary documents, first-hand interaction, and interviews with project stakeholders from ESCWA and ILO, focal points, participants in project activities from participating Member States, and experts and consultants who were engaged in the project. Stakeholder sampling ensured proper representation according to stakeholder roles in the project and in relation to the evaluation. Gender, human rights and the rights of people with disabilities were considered across all stages of the assessment.

### Main Findings

1. The project aligns with the overall objective of "leaving no one behind" and including all members of society in the development process under SDG Agenda 2030. It directly aligns with SDGs 8 on Full Productive Employment and Decent Work and 10 on equality of outcomes.
2. The plausibility of the project's intervention logic is stronger when viewed at its original design. However, as the project design was country-specific, changes in target countries and the level of engagement in each of the project components, as well as COVID-19 and political insecurity, deemed more robust account and management of underlying assumptions in the project intervention and management strategies (including risk management).
3. The project has made good progress towards its objective of increasing stakeholder capacities to develop evidence-based policies. Variance in country participation and levels of implementation of project activities resulted in mixed results at the component and country

levels and in the realisation of the project's indicators of achievements. Still, the interventions have created conditions and resources that policymakers in the region can use to better include people with disabilities in the labour market.

4. Project monitoring needed to be supported by a more robust mechanism and plan.
5. Despite making appropriate adjustments, such as shifting to online communication and prioritising research activities, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the project implementation and results. The resulting time gap between interventions limited the utilisation of interlinked project research outputs in target countries during the project's lifetime, partially realising the project's planned indicators. The outbreak also affected the project results qualitatively; it hindered benefits in terms of capacity building that relies on direct and interactive engagement, learning, as well as networking and joint coordination amongst stakeholders and relevant ministries.
6. Adaptations to delivery modalities increased project reach and benefits to more countries but also influenced project results in scope and depth.
7. The assessment of the project's sustainability was challenged by country stakeholders' weak awareness of the project's progress and the status of its outputs. To support their utilisation and promote ownership, project results and outputs will need to be consolidated and disseminated.
8. The project is built on understanding and responding to the work-related rights and needs of people with disabilities, both men and women, in the labour market of target countries. Overall, gender, human rights, and disability inclusion were sufficiently incorporated into the project design, planning, implementation, and monitoring, but room for improvement remains. The project helped increase participating countries' recognition of the programming approach that further considers supporting inclusive, rights-based policy development processes in future programming.

## **Main Conclusions**

1. The project is relevant, and its logic is broadly plausible. Changes in 2 of the 3 target countries and widened regional uptake of some of the project activities, as well as participating countries and stakeholders' recognition of its value, further demonstrate the relevance of project interventions.
2. The project has made significant strides towards its outcome in enhancing stakeholder capacities to develop evidence-based policies and procedures due to increased awareness about gaps in laws and regulations and rights of people with disabilities to employment and the availability of tools/ training material to be utilised by stakeholders in promoting disability inclusion in the workforce in line with CRPD 27. However, due to adjustments made in response to COVID-19 and variations in the implementation of project interventions across countries, the results varied at the country level. Jordan was the only country consistent with the original target countries and has participated in most project interventions. Its advancement higher up the project's result chain and project targets, respectively, attests to the project's plausibility despite COVID-19.
3. Overall, the project made efficient use of its resources, as it managed to benefit more countries within its budget and landed broad satisfaction with the quality of interventions, especially trainings. Adaptations to delivery modalities as a consequence of COVID-19, especially with shifting to online delivery and time gap between activities, have, however, negatively influenced project implementation and, respectively, the scope and depth of results. The project's management and implementation at the country level relied on focal points in countries that, in turn, faced some challenges in terms of responsiveness and coordination between national actors and focal points. A more conducive and empowering setup at the national level could have supported not only the implementation and management of risks

and challenges but also promoted stakeholder engagement across the project cycle, drove ownership and accountability over results (result-based orientation) and promoted sustainability in target countries.

4. The project produced outputs and results, created a more conducive environment, and should act as valuable resources that enable policymakers to better include people with disabilities in the labour market. Consolidation and dissemination of project results and outputs would be helpful in supporting joint ownership and continued utilisation at the country level. Project interventions are generally replicable, especially in stable settings, but some approaches would need to be revised. Since the project laid the foundation for a capacitated human resource network, ESCWA and target countries are better positioned to utilise it in future programming.

## **Main Recommendations**

1. Project results and outputs provide a strong foundation for ESCWA to continue supporting member States in reducing legislative and policy gaps and barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.
  - A. The project succeeded in identifying legislative gaps and barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Arab labour market. ESCWA is advised to complement this vital piece of work through the identification of gaps in policies and enforcement mechanisms and devise tailored capacity-building programming to help countries reduce these barriers based on a consolidated analysis of both. In doing so, it may also consider partnering with regional disability inclusion NGOs<sup>1</sup> and the network to develop and administer disability inclusion audits (like gender audits), especially in relevant ministries.
  - B. The legislative gap assessment can also comprise an essential baseline for monitoring countries' progress in closing these barriers (SDG 8.5 and aligning with the CRPD, especially Article 27). ESCWA can consider building monitoring tools through working with the established network.
  - C. ESCWA can consider prioritising countries' expressed needs pertaining to coherent and enforced policies on the employment of people with disabilities in the public and private sectors, such as adherence to quotas and accommodation requirements as well as procurement procedures, through the development of specific guidance and tools to accelerate progress in this aspect.
2. ESCWA is advised to engage with member States to increase awareness and promote joint ownership, use of outputs and demand for ESCWA's services.
3. ESCWA, including its Statistics division and ILO, is advised to continue cooperating in building NSOs' capacities to provide data needed for policymaking to promote inclusive participation in the labour market. In doing so, consider an institutional approach to capacity building and financial resource needs associated with the integration. This should include opportunities for synergetic programming with other stakeholders and actors in target countries.
4. A formal and institutionalised approach is recommended to continue engaging employers in the future. ESCWA and target countries should pursue capacity building for employers, especially the private sector, through a market system lens, i.e., by engaging and empowering sector representative bodies and unions and linking them with the ILO business disability network. Their participation can also be promoted in an inclusive project management setup at the country level (i.e. representation in national teams supporting FPs).

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<sup>1</sup> Disability inclusion NGOs have tools to assess inclusion in humanitarian programming but not in development, a gap that experts note to be valuable if filled in the region.

5. Capacity-building projects with policy influence objectives should approach engagement with relevant stakeholders—beyond governmental actors—in a manner that supports inclusive policymaking processes, advocacy, and conducive coordination among stakeholders.
6. In the future, programming should be backed by a robust monitoring framework and plan. ESCWA can encourage the involvement of member States in project management, including monitoring, to ensure successful implementation and efficient monitoring. This approach may also help promote country ownership and the sustainability of results.
7. The project management structure may comprise ESCWA and FPs. Still, the latter need to be empowered by mandate and decision-making authorities and equally imported, supported by national teams from various stakeholders that the project will engage in the country.
8. Future programming should strongly account for underlying assumptions and risks that could affect project implementation and realisation of results/intended change. It should also consider country-specific risks and challenges, including risks associated with data availability and countries' sharing of them, as well as those related to institutional and coordination frameworks.



## 1. Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA), in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), implemented a Development Account (DA) entitled 'Including People with Disabilities in the Arab Labour Market'. The project aimed to support "public officials and private sector employers in developing evidence-based policies to mainstream the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market". The project was implemented between January 2020 and December 2023. Upon project conclusion, ESCWA commissioned an external consultant to conduct an independent evaluation of the project to promote accountability for results and learning. The assessment was carried out between February and May 2024 and was facilitated by ESCWA's Strategic Planning, Accountability, Results and Knowledge (SPARK) team. The primary audiences for the evaluation are ESCWA and its partner, the ILO, and governments in the targeted member States.

The evaluation adhered to ESCWA's Evaluation Policy (2023), the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and the Development Account Evaluation Guidelines. It aimed to determine how the work undertaken in the project contributed to achieving the intended (and possibly unintended) results, the pathway to these results, and the elements that contributed most significantly to the achievement of these results. In addition, the evaluation assessed and employed development best practices regarding promoting gender equality and a human rights-based approach, including the rights of persons with disabilities.

## 2. Description of the Project

### 2.1 Background

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Better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, in line with Article 27 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is core to the achievement of social inclusion goals in the Arab World. However, persons with disabilities in the region experience high rates of unemployment and economic inactivity, often despite the existence of quota systems and other forms of enabling legislation. In addition, persons with disabilities in the Arab World are frequently denied educational opportunities, and those who have access to formal educational systems often do not receive instruction tailored to their individual learning needs. Specialised education or vocational training is often available only in specialised (and usually private) institutions rather than mainstreamed throughout the national education and vocational training systems. Resulting low literacy and skills place persons with disabilities at a distinct disadvantage when entering the workforce. In some countries, disability benefits in the framework of social assistance and insurance schemes are still contingent upon work inability and, therefore, risk disincentivising labour force participation. Measures intended to advance labour market inclusion are frequently rendered ineffective by inaccessible work environments and discriminatory employer attitudes, creating gaps between disability policy and practice.

### 2.2 Project Objectives and Expected Results

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The objective of the project was to "enhance the capacities of government officials, private sector employers and civil society organisations in the selected Arab member States to develop evidence-based policies and procedures that support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market". The project pursued two primary outcomes or results to achieve its objective:

Outcome (OC) 1: OC1: Increased capacity of Governments to develop evidence-based policies that facilitate better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour markets.

Outcome (OC) 2: Increased capacity of employers to address the main factors impeding employment of persons with disabilities.

## 2.3 Project Strategies and Activities

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The project focused on two main areas: **developing evidence-based policies** that facilitate better inclusion of persons with disabilities in labour markets and **addressing the main factors** impeding their employment.

### Outputs (OP) and activities for Developing evidence-based policies are:

- **OP1.1** Conduct **policy/legislation gap assessments** and suggest policy amendments for 3 countries and produce an overview synthesis report in light of international best practices.
- **OP1.2** Adjust and **translate the labour market add-on module** to be included in national labour force surveys (LFS) in the 3 countries and hold a regional consultation to finalise the module.
- **Op1.3** Train **enumerators** on the module and carry out the LFS in 3 countries.
- **Op1.4** Analyse the results of the LFS and provide relevant trainings to national statistics offices (NSOs) in 3 countries on how to use the data.
- **Op1.5** **Analyse programme databases** of Ministries of Labour and/or databases of disability card holders) in 3 countries with regard to employment characteristics of persons with disabilities.
- **Op1.6** Organise **multi-stakeholder workshops** in 3 countries to review the results of the policy gap assessment as well as the statistical/programme data analyses.
- **Op1.7** Develop **specialised training material** for government officials and employment services about the inclusion of persons with disabilities in labour markets and organise 3 national workshops to introduce the training materials.
- **Op1.8** Organise **one ToT per country** to roll out the labour market training, which was developed before this project by ILO in 2018, to create a pool of trainers/change agents.

### Activities for addressing the main factors impeding employment are:

- OP2.1** Develop a structured **establishment questionnaire/survey tool**, identify a representative sample of relevant businesses and other main stakeholders in each country, and conduct the survey in 3 countries to identify the factors that limit/prevent hiring persons with disabilities.
- OP2.2** Analyse the results of the survey and **organise a workshop/training** in 3 countries that brings together businesses, syndicates and OPDs to review the results of the surveys.
- Op2.3** Develop **training material for employers** on reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination and **organise trainings in 3 countries** for employers and syndicates on the training materials.
- Op2.4** Organise a **regional workshop of employers' networks** on the basis of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network.

## 2.4 Beneficiaries and Target Countries

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The project document identified Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt as the target countries for the project. However, as the project progressed, Tunisia replaced Egypt due to unforeseen obstacles that required further approvals from security services due to some internal regulations.<sup>2</sup> Lebanon also replaced Iraq due to instability that could hinder the implementation of the project activities<sup>3</sup>. As a result, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia were the final target countries.

While project activities were planned for the three countries, this was not always possible during the project implementation period. The LFS survey interventions were implemented in Tunisia only. Also, due to the political instability during this activity's implementation, the employer survey could not take

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<sup>2</sup> Final Progress Report.

<sup>3</sup> Final Progress Report

place in Tunisia; instead, it was implemented in Morocco. As discussed in the report, these changes influenced the comprehensiveness of the interventions and, in turn, the effectiveness of the project at the country level.

Nevertheless, some of the project activities were expanded to target all ESCWA member States. The production of national reports on the policy gap assessment and the labour market TOT training benefited 19 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

## **2.5 Key Partners and Other Key Stakeholders**

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The main partner in this project was the ILO, which was responsible for capacity building for the NSOs to support their adoption of the survey module. The module was developed by ILO and Washington Group (WG) to improve data availability on the employment situation of persons with disabilities.

Project activities targeted relevant stakeholders in the three target Arab countries such as the ministries of labour and social affairs, national statistical offices, national councils for disability affairs, non-governmental organisations including Disabled Persons' Organisations (OPDs), civil societies, private, academia as well as sector employers.

## **2.6 Resources**

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The project was implemented with DA funding of \$457,879. This budget was entirely used for implementation at a rate of 99.96 per cent, with no other source of financing.

## **2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of empowering people with disabilities. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 aims to promote inclusive growth and create decent work opportunities for everyone. Target 8.5 within SDG 8 stresses the need for policies that include individuals with disabilities in employment. The project supports target countries to take steps to improve/ revise national legislations and policies that protect persons with disabilities from discrimination in all matters of employment. SDG target 10.5 aims to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities in outcomes. To address inequality and promote meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities, information on their numbers and characteristics is essential. The project supports countries adopting the survey module that ILO and WG have developed to improve data availability on the employment situation of persons with disabilities. These measurements are essential for policymakers to make informed decisions and implement effective strategies that can create a more inclusive and equitable society.

# **3. Evaluation Objectives, Scope, and Questions**

## **3.1 Purpose and Objectives**

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**Purpose:** Through systematic and objective assessment of the performance of the project, the evaluation aims to realise three objectives:

- Provide a basis for evidence-informed decision-making, strategic planning, and risk management.
- Demonstrate accountability to the organisation's Executive and member States for performance relative to ESCWA's mandate and strategic objectives.
- Inform and facilitate the process of organisational learning by providing evidence-based findings, lessons, and recommendations.

The evaluation's primary audiences are the implementing entities ESCWA and ILO and the governments in the targeted member States.

### 3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria, and questions

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The evaluation covers the project's duration from January 2020 to December 2023. Geared as forward-looking and learning-oriented, it aims to determine how the work undertaken in the project contributed to achieving the intended and possible unintended results, the pathway to these results, and the elements that contributed most significantly to the achievement of these results. Understanding that this period includes the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation sought to accurately reflect the impact of this event on the project.

The evaluation assesses the project according to OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. In addition, it assesses development best practices regarding promoting gender equality and a human rights-based approach, including the rights of persons with disabilities. It is set to provide objective, evidence-based answers to the evaluation questions (EQ) under each criterion as laid out in the TOR (Annex 1) and elaborated in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 3).

## 4. Methodology

**Methodological approach:** A mixture of objective-oriented and participant-oriented approaches was followed in this evaluation. The evaluation design was comprised of utilisation-focused participatory and theory-based approaches.<sup>4</sup> and methodologies. In assessing project effectiveness, the review drew on *Reflexive Comparison* to evaluate whether and what results had happened through examining the difference between the baseline and the achieved targets by relying on the set indicators of the project outcomes that contain no systematic bias to avoid measurement problems.

Recognising that policy change is a long-term and complex process, the evaluation aimed to establish a plausible linkage between project interventions and the intended policy change that is reflected in the project log frame under (indicator 1.1) by constructing a Theory of Change (TOC). The approach helps explain the project's intervention logic, i.e. how a group of early and intermediate accomplishments set the stage for producing long-range results, i.e., the pathway of change that illustrates the relationship between project actions and outcomes and shows how outcomes are related to each other.

The methodological approach that was followed encompassed triangulated data for verification from different sources/ stakeholders. It included:

- Desk review and analysis of secondary documents: These include documents related to the project, including planning, reporting, training, and publications. A complete listing of documents consulted in designing the inception report is listed in Annex 5.
- Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) with participants: Interviews were conducted using Zoom and phone. A list of interview questions was developed, and interviews were tailored for each type of interview/ stakeholder group to ensure that a standardised interviewing process was being followed (as appropriate) and essential questions were covered. In these SSIs, a broad area of inquiry was investigated, and specific/follow-up questions were raised depending on the interview dynamics and data obtained. *The list of individuals* interviewed is included in Annex 4.

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<sup>4</sup> A theory-based evaluation is usually based on an explicit theory of change or logic model that explains the theory of a development intervention. The evaluation is designed to test the theory to see if it holds true. If it does, the task of the evaluator is to produce a plausible case, with evidence, that shows what has changed at each level of the theory and explores the linkages between those changes. Theory-based evaluation has at its core two vital components. The first is conceptual, and the second is empirical. Empirically, theory-based evaluations seek to test this theory and investigate whether, why, or how policies or programmes cause intended or observed outcomes. <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/theory-based-evaluation>

The stakeholder sampling parameters and criteria that were followed aimed to ensure proper representation according to stakeholder role in the project as well as in relation to the evaluation (whether as users of the evaluation findings, as key informants or actors). The review used Multistage Cluster Sampling: starting strata by selecting actors according to their role in the project: 1) project partners and staff from ESCWA, ILO 2) Representatives of beneficiary countries 3. expert/ consultant. Sequentially, according to Member countries' involvement in project outcomes and activities, prioritising those with heavier engagement. Geographical location was subsequently considered (Mashreq, Maghreb Guld or Least Developed Arab states). Subsequently, gender consideration (Male: Female) was also considered. Focal Points from target countries and other actors responsible for the project interventions and 'owning' project outputs and results from these countries were prioritised.

Data collection and analysis also include data disaggregated by sex, when applicable. Interviews were analysed using grounded theory methods. Triangulation was maintained through cross-verification from different sources/ stakeholders to arrive at findings and conclusions that answer all the questions and issues stipulated in the TOR and as elaborated in the evaluation matrix Annex 3. Only triangulated data substantiated through different methods is reflected in the findings of this Evaluation Report.

**Ethical Considerations:** the evaluation was undertaken in line with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy (2023), the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and the Development Account Evaluation Guidelines. The review systematically applied evaluation principles during the evaluation process and delivered products. The principles of independence, credibility, utility, and quality are interrelated and underpin the evaluation objectives of:

- Accountability; in that they provide the framework to ensure independent, credible, high-quality, and helpful evaluation of results, whether they are successes or shortfalls.
- Learning in so far that it requires independent, credible, high-quality, and helpful evaluation to generate essential lessons that will help improve performance and outcomes.

The evaluation assessed and employed development best practices regarding promoting gender equality and a human rights-based approach, including the rights of persons with disabilities. Gender, Human rights, and Rights of disability considerations were integrated into the evaluation design, including criteria and questions, evaluation scope of analysis, evaluation methods and tools, and data analysis techniques, as well as evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

**Limitations:** The evaluation methodology used a combination of data collection tools to mitigate limitations that could arise if one tool was used in isolation. The following table displays the limitations of each data collection tool and the mitigating measures that were taken.

Data Collection Tool	Limitations	Mitigating measure
<b>Desk review and analysis of secondary documents</b>	Documentation might not cover all the information needed to conduct a thorough analysis.	Missing information was sought through semi-structured interviews or by requesting further documentation.
<b>Semi-structured individual interviews.</b>	Semi-structured interviews do not allow to build up on the opinion of other interviewees.	Triangulation was maintained through cross-validation from multiple sources and instruments (documents and interviews of different stakeholders). The selection of various stakeholders supported the study of each project component.

The evaluation faced some notable challenges that should be maintained in reading this report;

1. Despite numerous attempts to interview sampled stakeholders, only 9 participants responded and were interviewed, which affected a comprehensive assessment of some interventions. The report makes references to areas that could not be fully triangulated.
2. Most evaluation participants from country stakeholders were unaware of the progress of the project since their participation and, respectively, the status of completion or eventual utilisation of the project outputs, which also challenges the assessment of the project's sustainability.

The evaluation applied an internal quality assurance mechanism to ensure the completeness of all elements requested in the TOR, as well as the report's logical presentation, objectivity, justification, and user-friendliness. Throughout the evaluation, the evaluator frequently engaged with, communicated with, and involved SPARK as the overall evaluation manager. SPARK was responsible for supporting the quality assurance of the assessment and coordinating the provision of feedback to the evaluator while maintaining neutrality, objectiveness, and focus on facts without compromising the independence of findings.

## 5. Findings

Based on the primary and secondary data collection, the evaluator has reached the following findings that were explored, triangulated, and validated. The evaluation findings were structured around the evaluation criteria and clustered around the evaluation questions. Unless noted, there has been no evidence of any differences in opinions and views among female and male respondents.

### 5.1 Relevance

**Evaluation Questions:** To what extent did the project align with and address the Sustainable Development Goals? How was the log frame translated to ensure that the activities carried out were relevant and contributed to achieving the intended result(s)? How were planned and implemented activities designed and sequenced to ensure a conscious consideration of the intended result?

#### Main Findings:

9. The project aligns with the overall objective of "leaving no one behind" and including all members of society in the development process under SDG Agenda 2030. It directly aligns with SDGs 8 on Full Productive Employment and Decent Work and 10 on equality of outcomes. The project also contributes to SDGs 1, 3, 4, and 5.
10. The plausibility of the project's intervention logic is stronger when viewed at its original design. However, as the project design was country-specific, changes in target countries and the level of engagement in each of the project components, as well as COVID-19 and political insecurity, deemed more robust account and management of underlying assumptions in the project intervention and management strategies (including risk management).

#### Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

The project contributes to the overall objective of "leaving no one behind" and including all members of society in the development process under the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Persons with disabilities face barriers and discrimination in the Arab labour market, resulting in higher unemployment and inactivity compared to persons without disabilities. Barriers and discrimination largely influence this in) underdeveloped, incoherent and unenforced legislations and policies, 2) insufficient integration of disability data to help inform evidence-based policies as well as 3) barriers (procedural, attitudinal and physical barriers) that hinder the employment of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

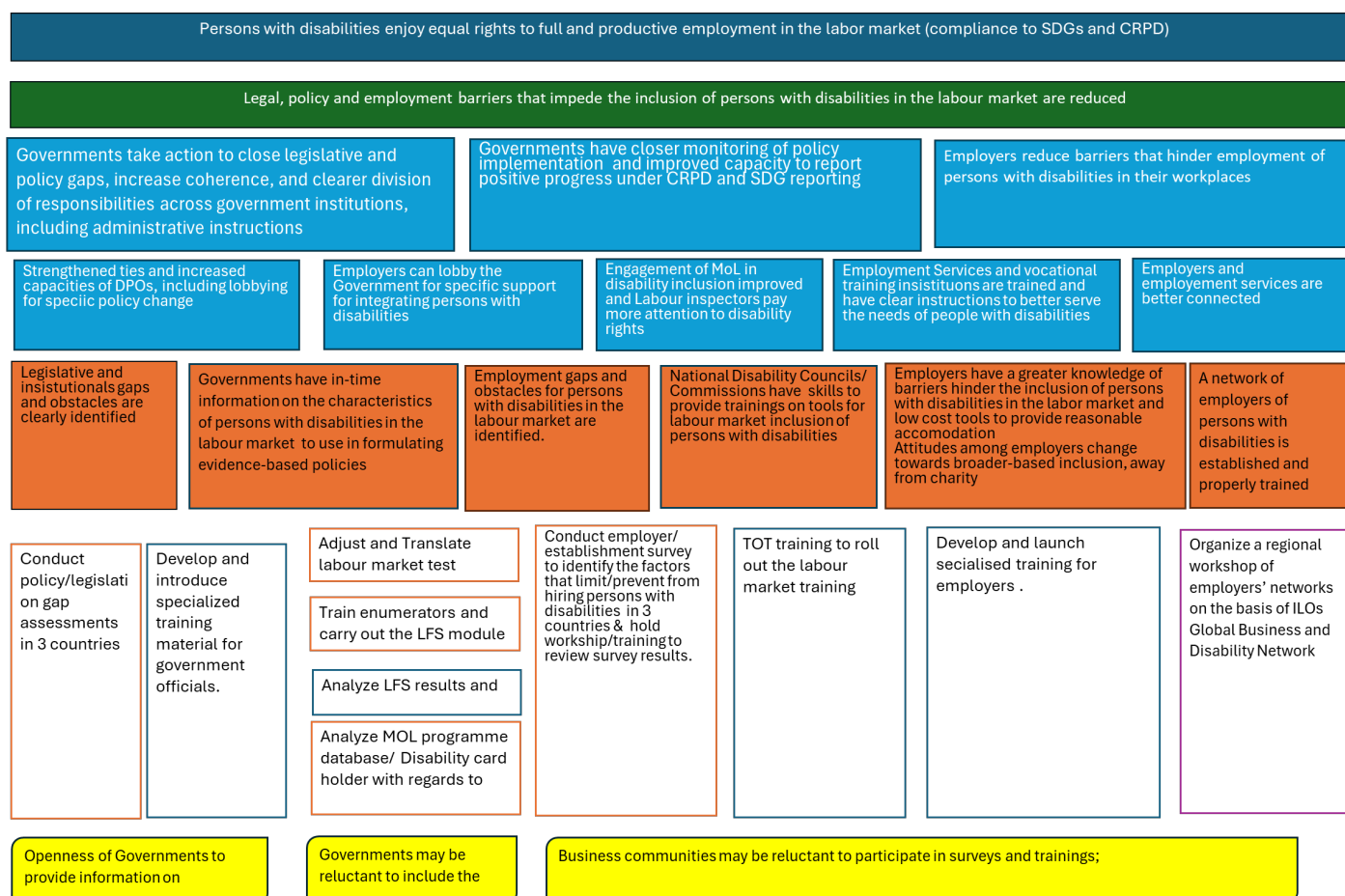
The realisation of the project objective through supporting stakeholders to address the constraints that promote inclusion of people with disability in the labour force in target countries should support their



efforts towards Goal 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth. It supports SDG target 8.5 (full and productive employment<sup>5</sup>) and (reduction of youth unemployment). The project's data component also supports SDG Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities and SDG Target 10.5 (ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome). Moreover, project attention to mainstream vocational education to include persons with disabilities through policy actions should also contribute to SDG Goal 4 on People with Disabilities' unimpeded and equal access to Quality Education. Project consideration of intersectionality (marginalisation, disability, gender) should help keep gender on the table of policymakers and employers and contribute to Goal 5 on Gender Equality. Ultimately, outcomes of inclusive, evidence-based policies and inclusion of People with Disabilities in the workforce should also support SDG 1 on Poverty Reduction and Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being of people with disabilities and their families.

### Plausibility of the Project Intervention Logic

The project's problem identification and analysis reflect a clear understanding of target country contexts, constraints, needs, and opportunities and are supported by stakeholder analysis. The evaluation developed a depiction of the project's logic and impact pathway. [Figure 1](#) below illustrates the project IL in target countries as understood from the project document.



<sup>5</sup> SDG target 8.5: By 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all and equal pay for work of equal value.

Consultations during the evaluation and review of outputs<sup>6</sup> generated by the project, namely, the legislative gap assessments and employer surveys, **validate the project's identified constraints and the relevance of project outputs**. Since these constraints are reflective of constraints across the region based on ESCWA's survey in 2017, they **continued to hold despite the change in target countries** during project implementation. Project relevance was evident in the widened reception of some of the project interventions amongst countries, albeit to various degrees.

Overall, the implemented **project interventions and outputs support the realisation of more immediate outcomes**, as highlighted in the **orange boxes** above. These focus on the identification of legislative, institutional and policy gaps, the generation of relevant data to feed the policy development process, the production of knowledge products/ tools and conducting workshops/training to enable state and non-state actors to develop/ revise policies based on evidence including those generated by the project (assessments, surveys, data analysis). The **project interventions were not entirely or consistently applied in all countries that took part in the project**, which affects project plausibility at the country level. Consultations echo some of the participant feedback in project workshops<sup>7</sup> whereby stakeholders emphasise countries' **variance** in terms of the scale of legislative gaps and, notably also, in policy enforcement and coordination, and respectively, the needed actions to address them.

Project logic is established by drawing plausible linkages between interventions and intended changes, accounting for other contributory factors, and capturing unintended effects. However, plausibility is hindered by **limited** elaboration of its **intervention strategy and assumptions**. Despite the project's logical framework containing some aspects of the intervention approach, the project document includes a minimal description of project activities and target audience and vague or "fluid" phrasing of project activities (training/ workshops), thereby challenging establishing their **rationale or purpose and respectively contribution to the intended change**. Moreover, unless assumed from the order of output listing or its phrasing, the **sequencing and interlinkage of project activities** and interventions/ components are not sufficiently clear and not necessarily followed due to the outbreak of the pandemic. For example, the results of the legislative and data components were planned to be discussed together in national validation workshops, but due to changes in country participation in the latter, the workshops only tackled the legislative assessments.

**Assumptions** are central to establishing project plausibility as they **link project intervention to its intended change** (i.e., in legislative, policy, and institutional framework (IA. 1.1) and also provide the basis for the project **intervention strategy**. Assumptions that can be *denoted* from the project document primarily relate to countries' needs and requests for project interventions based on a carefully studied stakeholder analysis and, presumably, the presence of a certain level of national ownership or setup that will utilise project results and realise the intended change. Respectively, the project's risk management approach concerns **stakeholders' cooperation and participation** in the project activities (Yellow Boxes- Figure 1) that would be mitigated through close engagement with the target stakeholders and lobbying with disability councils and advocates. These, however, were insufficient as they didn't take into account other important assumptions that needed to be reflected and managed to enable countries **to advance up the resulting chain**. These conditions, namely, pertain to countries' 1) institutional framework, 2) the policymaking and coordination landscape, 3) good governance and democratic space for civil society actors, 4) prevailing social and cultural norms regarding gender and disability, and 5) political stability. Accounting of these conditions in target countries and, particularly in the project intervention and engagement strategies, would have been valuable to enable these preconditions, such as through supporting OPDs/ CSOs advocacy capacities, inter-governmental coordination, actors' roles in combatting societal constraints, and others. The **outbreak of COVID-19** further complexed these assumptions and added another layer of conditions that the project couldn't have anticipated, like elsewhere in the world.

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<sup>6</sup> National workshops that were organized to discuss/ validate findings of the studies.

<sup>7</sup> Workshops that the project organised to discuss/ validate findings of the studies as well as the project closing event.



In light of changes to the project during implementation, the TOC below could be said to have been applied from reading the project document, outputs, and progress reports. The evaluation will refer to the TOC in assessing project performance and sustainability in the following sections.

### ***Project (implicit) Theory of Change***

**IF**, ESCWA/ project interventions:

- Provide country-specific evidence on gaps in **legislation, policy, and institutional frameworks** and **barriers facing the inclusion of people with disabilities in their workplaces**. (Activities: gap assessments, database analysis).
- Support beneficiary countries in periodically collecting and analysing **data** on the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market. (Activities: LFS module integration, database analysis)
- Build the capacity of duty bearers in removing legal and policy barriers that promote better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour markets (**policy guidelines, training**)
- Increase employers' awareness, knowledge, and positive attitudes to eliminate barriers and discrimination when hiring persons with disabilities. (Activities: Employer survey and Employer Training)
- Provide platforms for exchange, networking, experience sharing, and lesson learning among governmental, civil society, and private sector actors (national and regional workshops and trainings).

**THEN, governments, the private sector, and civil society** will have increased capacities to develop evidence-based policies and procedures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market will be enhanced in the target states.

**AND THEN**, decision-makers will **revise/ amend legislative and policy gaps**, and employers will **reduce attitudinal, procedural, and physical barriers** that hinder the employment of people with disabilities.

**And this will CONTRIBUTE** to persons with disabilities enjoying their full and equal rights to economic growth and employment in the labour market (SDGs 1, 8, 5, 10)

**BECAUSE** awareness raising and capacity building in inclusive employment, networking amongst stakeholders, and data/information availability will enable duty bearers and employers to identify gaps and devise suitable policies and procedures that align with article 27 of CRDP and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour force in their countries.

#### **Other Conditions / Contributory Factors**<sup>8</sup>

1. Empowered (in scope and mandate) and committed government institutions engaged in the project and capacitated in applying article 27 of CRPD) in legislation and policies.
2. The policymaking process is evidence-based, participatory and inclusive (Adopts Rights Based Approach)
3. Policy enforcement and monitoring are coordinated and inclusive (CSOs, governments, NSOs, OPDs, private sector).
4. Democratic space enables civic activism and advocacy for policy change.
5. Social and cultural norms are conducive to participation by people/ women with disabilities in the labour market.
6. Political stability.
7. No Pandemic Outbreaks.

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<sup>8</sup> As analysed from evaluation participants and implementation (gap assessment and project closing workshop reports).

## 5.2 Effectiveness

This section assesses the evidence supporting the achievement of results identified by stakeholders and the project team. It also seeks to determine the extent to which the project's success can be attributed to its intervention and to identify other factors that may have influenced the results.

**Evaluation Questions:** What evidence is available to support the achievement of the results identified by stakeholders and the project team? To what degree can the achievement of results be attributed to the intervention? Which other factors have impacted the achievement of the identified results? To what extent were any unintended results identified by the project team and stakeholders relevant to the project's aim?

**COVID-19:** What adjustments, if any, were made to the project as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, and to what extent did the adjustments allow the project to effectively respond to the new priorities of member States that emerged in relation to COVID-19?

### Main Findings:

1. The project has made good progress towards its objective of increasing stakeholder capacities to develop evidence-based policies. Variance in country participation and levels of implementation of project activities resulted in mixed results at component, country level, and realisation of the project's indicators of achievements. Still, the interventions have created conditions and resources that policymakers in the region can utilise to better include people with disabilities in the labour market.
2. Despite making appropriate adjustments, such as shifting to online communication and prioritising research activities, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the project implementation and results. The resulting time gap between interventions limited the utilisation of interlinked project research outputs in target countries during the project's lifetime, partially realising the project's planned indicators. The outbreak also affected the project results qualitatively; it hindered benefits in terms of capacity building that relies on direct and interactive engagement, learning, as well as networking and joint coordination amongst stakeholders and relevant ministries.
3. Project monitoring needed to be supported by a more robust mechanism and plan.

### OC1: Governments' increased capacity to develop evidence-based policies that facilitate better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour markets.

1. **Legislative and Policy Gap Assessments:** Gap assessment<sup>9</sup> interventions were the project's entry point in the three target countries according to the project logic. Amidst the outbreak of COVID-19 at the time of project inception, it remained suitable, provided its desk-based modality. The project expanded the production of country profiles to 16 more countries, **exceeding the planned target for this output** (OP1.1). Report validation workshops for the target 3 countries were organised online due to the Pandemic (OP1.6), whereas the remaining <sup>10</sup> were validated in coordination with national focal points.<sup>11</sup>

Gap assessment workshop reports<sup>12</sup> and interviewed evaluation participants show the significance of the assessments in helping target countries identify **gaps and inconsistencies** that require revision or development in their respective countries to align with Article 27 of CRPD. Some governmental

<sup>9</sup> Project progress reports, workshop reports and gap assessments on ESCWA website evidence the completion of legislative and policy gap assessments for the three target countries: Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia.

<sup>10</sup> The validation workshops planned to review results of data component which was launched later in the project due to COVID-19 when movement was finally possible.

<sup>11</sup> [Country profiles: Employment policies for persons with disabilities - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia \(unescwa.org\)](#). Reports of Kuwait and Yemen were still in the design process as of May 21, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> According to national validation workshop reports from Jordan and Lebanon. No report was prepared for the meeting in Tunisia as it was organized with a small and focused group according to project staff.

stakeholders also appreciate the reports' value as a stocktaking document that should **help them monitor progress** over time. Most consulted stakeholders also value the gap assessment's scope in terms of highlighting sectoral linkages (between education, TVET, health, transportation laws, and regulations, amongst others) as they relate to barriers facing people with disabilities' engagement in the workforce.

The project closing event reveals participants' increased **recognition of the importance of revising laws** such as laws for people with disability, labour, public service, and others. There is also an evident recognition of increased mainstreaming of disability and disability-inclusive terms in national laws and policies. Some evaluation participants, however, echo feedback gathered during some project workshops.<sup>13</sup> on the extent to which gap assessments covered gaps in policies and enforcement. Weak enforcement mechanisms appear paramount and are something stakeholders remain keen to address.

Findings and recommendations from the national reports also helped inform the project's development of a toolkit for policymakers on designing an inclusive employment policy in line with Article 27 of the CRPD. There was a time gap between the production of the target countries' report and the toolkit, which was developed late in the project's lifetime (Sept 2023) and introduced during the project's closing event (OP1.7).<sup>14</sup> The time-lapse and alteration of the delivery method (from 3 designated national workshops to 1 closing event) affected the scale of reach and depth of the project's capacity-building efforts and use of the toolkit during the project's lifetime.

2. **Data component:** The Add-On LFS module was translated into Arabic by ESCWA and introduced to all three original target countries by the project partners (OP1.2). However, only Tunisia took up the module integration<sup>15</sup>. Project progress reports and interviews with project stakeholders evidence **challenges** in integrating the module in target countries' LFS due to variance in frequency of their administration and lack of necessary financial resources to incorporate such integration. Participants explain that integration of the module in Jordan, Lebanon, could not be pursued during the project period due to methodological and sampling difficulties that would otherwise be **too costly** to administer. However, this risk was **anticipated in the project** and was planned to be mitigated by providing support and funding to facilitate a positive response from NSO. The evaluation could not verify how this mitigation measure could have been accommodated within the project's available resources or whether other resources would be sought.

Tunisia conducted the training for enumerators on the module, but the analysis support output was partially completed, as verified by ILO. Despite challenges in language and translation, the training was well received and highly assessed by the participants, indicating its relevance and their increased capacity to administrate the survey as intended. Though Tunisia incorporated disability identification and barriers questions in its 2023 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter labour force survey<sup>16</sup>, **the fate of the disability-related results in the survey remains unknown**<sup>17</sup>. Reasons could not be verified with relevant stakeholders during the evaluation, which mirrors the reported challenges in the NSO's responsiveness and adherence to the agreed-upon deadline during project implementation. Tunisia pursued the integration without effective coordination with the ILO, which led to challenges in analysing the results and the ILO's

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<sup>13</sup> Source: The gap assessment validation and project closing workshop reports.

<sup>14</sup> The project had planned to organise 3 national workshops to introduce the training, but the toolkit was introduced to countries during the project's final closing event.

<sup>15</sup> ILO explains that the project expanded its outreach to other countries.

<sup>16</sup> According to interviews with ILO and project progress reports.

<sup>17</sup> According to ILO, results concerning people with disabilities were not published at the time of evaluation. Tunisia's NSO could not proceed with the analysis of the questions due to the adoption of their version of questions (un-verified integration of the module). This would require data analysis support. ILO provided the Syntex and a list of indicators they could generate from the administered survey. Still, it is insufficient as the barriers section did not have a programme for processing it.

implementation of outputs that supported the analysis of the survey<sup>18</sup>. ILO reports to remain open to supporting Tunisia in the analysis, nevertheless.

The project had also planned to analyse **programme databases** (of Ministries of Labour and/or databases of disability card holders) in target countries concerning employment characteristics of persons with disabilities. This activity was partially implemented due to the **unavailability of a reliable database** of disability card holders in Lebanon and Tunisia. While these were not in the original target countries, this need is sustained in several Arab countries, as noted in the project closing workshop, which also signifies the importance of considering the availability of and sharing of data in risk management. **Jordan benefited from assistance in analysing its disability database and linking it to the ESCWA Skills Monitor Portal**. According to the project progress report and interviews during the evaluation, the assistance helps identify gaps in the skill sets of people with disabilities and the current skills required in the Jordanian labour market, which Jordan is building upon through another project with ESCWA's support. <sup>19</sup>This should enable decision-makers to develop necessary skills for people with disabilities and plan appropriate vocational training programs.

### **Outcome (OC) 2: Increased capacity of employers to address the main factors impeding employment of persons with disabilities.**

This outcome was pursued by conducting an **employer survey to identify barriers** to including people with disabilities in their workplace and support building their capacities through **training by TOT trainers**.

The project completed activities related to survey administration through third-party consultants/centres, which was challenged by the **weak cooperation of the employers**. The project reports the holding of online meetings in Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco with a small, focused group. Though no reports were prepared for these meetings, reviewed survey reports reveal the different attitudinal and environmental barriers to employers hiring people with disabilities (attitudes on risks, productivity, cost of accommodation measures, etc). The reports also include policy recommendations that stakeholders echoed during the project workshops and in the evaluation.

The project mainly tackled employers' knowledge and attitudinal barriers through TOT training. The TOT training was held on a subregional level (4 TOTs), targeting governmental actors mainly from ministries of labour or ministries of social development (depending on the country) who are mandated to engage in employer awareness and capacity building, as well as some non-governmental actors. <sup>20</sup>Reviewed training reports reveal **high satisfaction with the training** and increased knowledge or correction of misconceptions among participants. Trainees were requested to **cascade the training to employers in the countries** and as the **practical element of the TOT**. The project did not have a clear mechanism for monitoring reach and effect. As such, the evaluation **could not verify the scale of reach of this component**, i.e., the number and profile of trainees who cascaded the training (governmental bodies, others), the number of employers reached, or their profile and countries. Feedback from the evaluation participants reveals the **positive effects** of awareness-raising activities in tackling some of these knowledge and attitudinal barriers.

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<sup>18</sup> Despite extensive coordination with the NSO for conducting the training, the ILO faced significant challenges. They received the questionnaire on short notice prior to the training, and their suggested improvements to the questionnaire were not accommodated. The ILO provided a list of indicators that could be generated from the questionnaire that Tunisia administered, but this was insufficient and would require a programme to process it.

<sup>19</sup> According to interviews with stakeholders from Jordan.

<sup>20</sup> Trainings aimed to 1) Raise awareness on the concepts of diversity and inclusion, 2) Manage the inclusion of persons with disability in the workplace, 3) Apply modifications and accommodations that can enhance the participation of persons with disability in the workplace) Address stigma and prejudice surrounding disability among employers.

Feedback gathered during the evaluation and project monitoring indicates that employers' training is of good quality and well received by employers of different backgrounds and sizes, including MSMEs and large employers. They further emphasised the need for **coherent and enforced policies** on the employment of people with disabilities in the public and private sectors, such as adherence to quotas and accommodation requirements, to accelerate progress in this aspect.

*"My position entails awareness raising of employers on labour laws and inclusion. The training is an important resource that I integrate with the guides I use". Trainee*

*"Many projects work on empowering PWD but not the employers. This training is important to sensitise employers to improve their attitude and practices to include people with disability." ToT trainee*

According to evaluation participants, the cascading of the training was not sponsored by a formal party or ministry, which they believe is vital as an official reference to scale it and facilitate logistical arrangements. **A more formal approach to the training would be valuable for approaching employers in the future.**

### **Realisation of intended change (indicators or achievement)**

The progress report shows the project's partial realisation of its planned targets under Outcome 1. IA.1.1 can be said to have been realised, whereas IA 1.2 was partially realised. (Refer to Annex 2).

- **IA. 1.1** While the evaluation could not establish the project's direct effect on the revision of Jordan's constitution with Jordan's stakeholders, it was able to track some changes in procedures addressing some of the gaps that were identified by the project outputs, namely the gap assessments. According to interviews with stakeholders from Jordan, the country has been working on removing the following regulatory/ procedural barriers:
  - Jordan's Prime Ministry issued an order removing MOH's authority to include an assessment of a person's fitness to work as part of its health report indicating a person's type and degree of disability, thereby removing this procedural access barrier. MOH internally publicised these changes amongst its directorates.
  - Jordan's Ministry of Labour has also reactivated the platform for employment of people with disabilities (data on job lookers, etc.)—national employment system for PWD, No 35 2021.
  - Jordan also amended the laws on night work protecting people with disabilities, their caregivers, and other vulnerable groups.
- **IA. 1.2** One target country (Target: 2 countries), Tunisia, incorporated disability-related questions in 2023 Q3 LFS. However, the disability results have not yet been published.
- **IA. 2.1** Results concerning change at the employer level could not be verified due to limited monitoring, as mentioned above. Consulted trainers gave examples of some success they had, such as an employer hiring a person with a disability after the training and another removing physical barriers to workplace entry. The project progress report documents a success story in Irbid Jordan as well. However, these are only **anecdotal and inconclusive accounts**. A deeper assessment of change at the employer level would require a separate and more comprehensive undertaking.
- **IA. 2.2** A network of experts on inclusive employment amongst government officials, the private sector, and organisations of persons with disabilities was agreed upon during the project's closing workshop. ESCWA plans to support the network in its operations in the future, and it should continue to support the regional network's linkage with ILO Global Business and Disability Network as initially planned by the project.

- **Progress against the project impact pathway (TOC)**

As discussed, the project's main components had mixed results due to varying levels of country engagement, COVID-19-related challenges, and implementation approach and modality. Amongst target countries, Jordan showed better results due to more consistent engagement in the project. Importantly, progress has also been due to relatively more enabled conditions/assumptions for change (political stability, empowered mandated organisation at the Higher Council) and ESCWA's complimentary assistance through other projects. While capacity-building objectives progressed to varying degrees amongst the three target countries, upper-level changes across the project's impact pathway, especially in relation to more inclusive policymaking processes and advocacy by OPDs/ CSOs and private sector representatives, remain minimal and were influenced by the project's implementation approach and engagement strategy. The project outputs, namely the legislative gap assessments, employer surveys, guidelines and tools, as well as equipping of trainers to work with employers, comprise significant, if not necessary, foundations that enable the future support of inclusive and rights-based approaches in countries' policymaking processes. Future programming can continue to build on these achievements, including through the established network.

### 5.3 Efficiency

**Evaluation Questions:** Were the planned activities considered and delivered with the end results in mind? How did this shape the process? What, if any, adjustments were made during the project to optimise the actual achievement of results? What considerations were made regarding the most efficient way of delivering activities (choice of modality, available expertise, etc.)?

#### **Main Findings:**

1. The project management and delivery approach supported the implementation of the project activities and revealed lessons for a more empowering and coordinated setup in target countries for future programming.
2. Adaptations to delivery modalities increased project reach and benefits to more countries but also influenced project results in scope and depth.
3. The project engaged with various stakeholders in the three central targeted countries to varying degrees.

**Project management and implementation:** This project's approach involved a small project management team from ESCWA coordinating with FPs nominated by participating countries. The FPs appointed varied depending on the country's **planned interventions** and **institutional framework**, ranging from MOSD or MOL to both or higher councils or commissions. The FPs' role was to facilitate project implementation by providing access to necessary documents and stakeholders, coordinating workshops, selecting participants, and performing other similar tasks. As some project interventions, such as legislative assessments and TOT training, were widened, the **project management and coordination workload increased**, stretching ESCWA's resources thin as ESCWA's management team engaged with 16 extra countries to coordinate their participation in the TOT training and conduct the extra legislative gap assessments.

Project implementation was, however, challenged by **varying responsiveness from countries and FPs** mirroring complex institutional setup and coordination challenges, especially between relevant stakeholders and ministries in countries. Some project counterparts, or FPs, could speak about the interventions they had accompanied or closely followed but had limited input on the progress or results achieved at the entirety of the project or country level. Project experience in this aspect indicates that a **more empowering setup at the national level**, potentially through the designation of a national, multisectoral team, would have been valuable in supporting the project and, respectively, FP's effective



implementation and managing risks and challenges in target countries. It would promote country responsiveness to the project, drive ownership and accountability over results (result-based orientation and realising project change targets) and promote sustainability. Some FPs and evaluation participants also view the network as an essential platform that can be utilised to support a more enabling setup and resources that can be tapped into in future programming.

**Delivery Modality:** As a project aimed at building capacity, most of its outputs and activities concentrate on conducting surveys and studies, developing tools and training guides, and organising workshops and training, mainly at a national level. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the project had to adjust its delivery mode by moving to online communications and workshops. Project staff and participants found the online setting not ideal for a capacity-building project as it limited **opportunities for interactive discussions**, exchange, and networking among the group.<sup>21</sup> The evaluation argues that this potentially also formed a *missed opportunity* to capture the momentum for collective pursuance of follow-up actions created amongst the diverse participants during the gap assessment validation workshops at the beginning of the project. This lesson was also captured in the project closing event report.

On a more positive note, however, the savings from project adjustments **increased the project benefits to more countries**, namely from the legislative gap assessments and TOT, respectively, reaching more employers. ILO also finds that the delivery approach with Tunisia's NSO could have maximised resources and institutionalised benefits **by adopting a TOT approach from the beginning, similar to the TOT approach adopted in labour training**.

The evaluation gathered **broad satisfaction with the quality of the project resources and outputs**. Participants and activity report high satisfaction with the quality of resources, especially experts and trainers who were engaged in the training conducted by the project. However, the assessment of legislative and policy gaps saw some *differences in expectations* regarding the methodology and scope, revealing an **opportunity** for ESCWA to support countries' policy assessment and monitoring needs in future programming.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** In addition to the main FPs, the project **engaged with various** national stakeholders from target countries. The nature and level of engagement varied depending on the interventions and countries. The first component engaged CSOs, OPDs, and private sector actors in validating the gap assessment, whereas the data component was pursued by the NSO only. Civil society organisations benefited from the TOT training and, respectively, in training employees. Participation in workshops varied, with Jordan and Lebanon engaging with more participants and diverse stakeholders from different ministries, CSOs and OPDs, and private sector representative bodies than Tunisia.

The stakeholder engagement approach was not fully expressed in the project document, which made it difficult to determine the extent to which factors, such as differing FPs from MOL and MOSDs or the time gap due to COVID-19, influenced the project implementation. However, the evaluation and feedback from participants during the project closing event revealed that stakeholders, including line ministries, CSOs, and others, aspired to strengthen **engagement across the project cycle**.

Project engagement with other stakeholders at the regional level was mainly done by disseminating project work during the closing event and on the IEGD platform. However, there is a lack of evidence regarding engagement with different sections and divisions within ESCWA.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Evaluations participants were not all aware of the outcome of the reports and if any further actions were pursued by their countries since their participation in the workshops.

<sup>22</sup> Based on interviews and review of project outputs and activity participation lists.

## 5.4 Sustainability

**Evaluation Questions:** Which activities that contributed to the project's identified results provided ongoing benefits for stakeholders? What evidence is available to indicate that stakeholders can maintain the project's results? Given a similar context, could the project's identified results be replicated?

### Main Findings:

1. The assessment of the project's sustainability was challenged by country stakeholders' weak awareness of the project's progress and the status of its outputs. While the project outputs and results should support stakeholders' continued efforts to better include people with disabilities in the labour force through legislative and policy action, consolidation and dissemination of project results and outputs will be necessary to support their utilisation and promote ownership.
2. The foundation for establishing a capacitated human resource network was laid during the project for countries' and ESCWA's continued programming.
3. Project interventions are generally replicable, especially in stable settings, but some approaches would need to be revised.

Ultimately, **project sustainability lies in its ultimate target, i.e. countries' supportive and enforcement actions that reduce barriers and better include people with disabilities in the labour market.** Thus far, the project has supported it by highlighting gaps and obstacles through the legislative review, surveying businesses and LFS data, and doing some capacity-building work. The studies' utilisation was not yet evident during the project implementation period. As gathered from interviews with evaluation stakeholders, this has been primarily influenced by the time gap in their completion and the variance in stakeholders' collective awareness regarding their status and the project's progress. The introduction of guidelines and resources for inclusive employment policymaking was launched late in the project, with some evaluation stakeholders noting the need for further capacity-building support in operationalising a coherent policy revision and enforcement process. Despite this, the **availability of these resources should support evidence-based policy development in target countries beyond the project period.** The project publicised these outputs during the closing event and on ESCWA's website for an expanded pool of stakeholders. **Effective dissemination** of these outputs and main results should increase concerned stakeholders' awareness, reference, **and eventual utilisation.** Consolidating the results of these outputs and follow-up actions, including supporting capacity development needs in the process, will also be vital.

The project also contributed to **increased human resource capacities** in inclusive employment, as was primarily evident in building trainees' capacities to outreach and engage with businesses. Within a clear vision of the way forward by target countries, these human capacities, as well as supportive material/ guidelines that were developed, should act as essential resources that can continue to be utilised in engaging with employers in the future.

*"I proposed to cascade the inclusive employment training to the national technical committee for people with disabilities, but my proposal wasn't taken seriously. An institutional reference is important for employers to take it up."*

The project did not materially influence the potential for continued engagement of civil society and private sector representative bodies in the policy-development scene. Supporting their, especially OPDs', capacity to engage in employment-related policy-shaping efforts is a vital sustainability element that helps promote inclusive and participatory policymaking processes. Moreover, in the project design,



the project's sustainability was foreseen through establishing networks of national, regional, and international trainers and experts who will also play an essential role in creating policymakers' awareness and providing information to the private sector. The network was established during the project closing event and interviewed stakeholders anticipate ESCWA's continued support in defining its scope and operationalising it.

Adopting the ILO/WG Module in countries' LFS should enable sustainable gathering of disability-related data to continue informing disability-inclusion policy development processes. According to project reporting, Jordan has expressed interest in adopting the module in 2024. Lessons from the project's experience, especially regarding financial requirements and the adoption of a more sustainable institutionalised approach (ToT), should help shape future programming regarding NSOs' capacities to sustain periodic data collection and analysis. As discussed in the report, it will be essential to focus on the design and analysis and ensure future data alignment and use by policymakers.

### **Replication:**

Replication and scaling were initiated during project implementation by expanding some activities, namely the legislative gap analysis and the TOT on labour market training, to all member states. As gathered in this evaluation, the project experience evidences the complexities associated with the internalisation of project results and building on the project's outcomes in a coordinated manner. That said, project interventions are generally replicable, especially in stable settings. However, a revision in implementation and engagement approaches will be needed, building on lessons learned identified by this evaluation and those identified by ESCWA and project stakeholders during project implementation. At any rate, as gathered from the project team, project outputs and resources should also help ESCWA's future replication and development of capacity-building programming.

## **5.5 Gender, Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, and Environmental Issues**

**Evaluation Question:** To what extent did the project respond to and affect the rights, needs and interests of different stakeholders, including women, men, youth, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups? To what extent were issues of gender, human rights, disability inclusion, and the environment incorporated into the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation practices of the project, as well as the results achieved?

### **Main Findings:**

1. The project design and implementation approach is built on understanding and responding to the work-related rights and needs of people with disabilities, both men and women, in the labour market of target countries.
2. Overall, gender, human rights, and disability inclusion were sufficiently incorporated into the project design, planning, implementation, and monitoring, but room for improvement remains.
3. The project helped increase recognition of the programming approach that further considers supporting inclusive, rights-based policy development processes in future programming.

The project enables ESCWA to promote member states' adoption of a rights-based approach to equitable, inclusive, and participatory social development and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It specifically supports the realisation of the rights of all individuals, including women and youth with disabilities, in the labour market through assisting duty bearers in aligning laws and legislation with the (CRPD), notably Article 27. This commitment is clearly expressed in the project's design (objectives, outcomes, and indicators of achievement) and interventions. The project's evidence-based approach is built on understanding and responding to the work-related rights and needs of people with disabilities, both men and women, in the labour market of target countries.

Consideration of gender, human rights and disability inclusion are also reflected in the **project interventions and outputs**, namely in training materials on integrating persons with disability in labour markets in policies as well as in the workplace. The training guide for policymakers, for example, underscores the significance of developing a targeted policy on the equal employment of persons with disabilities along with efforts to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of labour law as well as in other policy areas, particularly education and social protection. The training guide for employers also highlights the discrimination that persons with disabilities face in obtaining employment and the barriers that hinder their access to employment opportunities on an equal basis with others.

The project also **considers intersectionality** in terms of marginalisation, disability, and gender, particularly in the data components (evidence base) that provide sex-disaggregated statistical analysis that should help inform gender equality and sensitivity in policy development. Consideration of gender in the legislative/policy gap assessment varied, with some participants pointing to a need for a more in-depth gendered analysis to help recognise and address the differing needs of men and women, as well as the possible pathways involved in meeting their rights to inclusion in the labour force.

The project's **implementation approach** pays consideration of gender, disability, and rights issues. It has achieved a commendably balanced representation of women and men participants, including those with disabilities, in its activities. The participation of CSOs and OPDs has embodied the project's rights-based approach in several activities. These activities have provided a platform for voicing the needs and interests of people with disabilities to the project, as well as to policymakers and employers. As noted earlier, this could be interpreted as an area that the project helped influence (aspiring for inclusive engagement) and can continue to build on through a targeted engagement approach that promotes the capacities of representative groups to engage with policymakers, as earlier noted. It would enhance the project's rights-based approach and foster a more inclusive policy development process in target countries.

**Project monitoring and evaluation** also incorporated issues of gender, human rights, and disability, albeit to varying degrees. Disability inclusion is chiefly reflected at the highest level in the project's primary outcome indicator (IA1.1- legislative revision). Changes in knowledge and understanding of human rights, disability, and gender are also broadly monitored in some of the project activities (training). However, more disaggregation in monitoring data (according to gender and stakeholder type/ role in the project TOC) could help generate a richer analysis. This evaluation also reflects the project's incorporation of these issues by incorporating them in the planning, consultation, and analysis. Stakeholder participation in evaluating project activities and public dissemination of the evaluation results on ESCWA's website is also a strong reflection of accountability to affected groups.

The project's incorporation of **environmental issues** is limited by the scope of the project and its activities. Environmental considerations include the project's use of an online delivery mode. Discussions amongst stakeholders show barriers facing effective integration of people with disabilities in education, TVET, and employment, especially green and digital economies and jobs. This should enable a more deliberate consideration of opportunities identified from incorporating environmental issues in future programming.

## 6. Conclusions

5. The project is relevant, and its logic is broadly plausible. The project considers systemic constraints impeding the inclusion of people with disabilities and the realisation of their rights in the labour market that are common to the region. Changes in 2 of the 3 target countries and widened regional uptake of some of the project activities, as well as participating countries and stakeholders' recognition of its value, further demonstrate the relevance of project interventions.

6. The project has made significant strides towards its outcome in enhancing stakeholder capacities to develop evidence-based policies and procedures due to increased awareness about gaps in laws and regulations and rights of people with disabilities to employment and the availability of tools/ training material to be utilised by stakeholders in promoting disability inclusion in the workforce in line with CRPD 27. However, due to adjustments made in response to COVID-19 and variations in the implementation of project interventions across countries, the results varied at the country level. Jordan was the only country consistent with the original target countries and has participated in most project interventions. Its advancement higher up the project's result chain and project targets, respectively, attests to the project's plausibility despite COVID-19.
7. Overall, the project made efficient use of its resources, as it managed to benefit more countries within its budget and landed broad satisfaction with the quality of interventions, especially trainings. Adaptations to delivery modalities as a consequence of COVID-19, especially with shifting to online delivery and time gap between activities, have, however, negatively influenced project implementation and, respectively, the scope and depth of results. The project's management and implementation at the country level relied on focal points in countries that, in turn, faced some challenges in terms of responsiveness and coordination between national actors and focal points. A more conducive and empowering setup at the national level could have supported not only the implementation and management of risks and challenges but also promoted stakeholder engagement across the project cycle, drove ownership and accountability over results (result-based orientation) and promoted sustainability in target countries.
8. The project produced outputs and results, created a more conducive environment, and should act as valuable resources that enable policymakers to better include people with disabilities in the labour market. Consolidation and dissemination of project results and outputs would be helpful in supporting joint ownership and continued utilisation at the country level. Project interventions are generally replicable, especially in stable settings, but some approaches would need to be revised. Since the project laid the foundation for a capacitated human resource network, ESCWA and target countries are in a better position to utilise it in future programming.
9. The project is built on understanding and responding to the work-related rights and needs of people with disabilities, both men and women, in the labour market of target countries. Overall, gender, human rights, and disability inclusion were sufficiently incorporated into the project design, planning, implementation, and monitoring, but room for improvement remains. The project helped increase participating countries' recognition of the programming approach that further considers supporting inclusive, rights-based policy development processes in future programming.

## **7. Lessons Learned and Good Practices**

1. Despite commonalities in regional needs, the variation in project results underscores the complex contexts and challenges associated with implementing a project designed for specific countries in countries that it was not designed for. Consideration of assumptions or conditions in project design and strategies is essential to enable countries to progress up the project impact pathway and solidify the project's contribution.
2. A conducive and empowering setup at the country level is essential to support project planning and implementation and promote stakeholder engagement across the project life cycle. It will also serve to anchor the sustainability of benefits and results.
3. A project intervention and engagement strategy is essential to enable ecosystem actors to contribute to the intended change, i.e., towards inclusive, evidence-based policymaking. A targeted

engagement that supports CSOs/OPDs' capacities to engage with policymakers as advocates enable an assertive human rights-based approach and is an essential element of sustainability.

## 8. Recommendations

1. Project results and outputs provide a strong foundation for ESCWA to continue supporting member states in reducing legislative and policy gaps and barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.
  - A. The project succeeded in identifying legislative gaps and barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Arab labour market. ESCWA is advised to complement this vital piece of work through the identification of gaps in policies and enforcement mechanisms and devise tailored capacity-building programming to help countries reduce these barriers based on a consolidated analysis of both. In doing so, it may also consider partnering with regional disability inclusion NGOs<sup>23</sup> and the network to develop and administer disability inclusion audits (like gender audits), especially in relevant ministries.
  - B. The legislative gap assessment can also comprise an essential baseline for monitoring countries' progress in closing these barriers (SDG 8.5 and aligning with the CRPD, especially Article 27). ESCWA can consider building monitoring tools through working with the established network.
  - C. ESCWA can consider prioritising countries' expressed needs pertaining to coherent and enforced policies on the employment of people with disabilities in the public and private sectors, such as adherence to quotas and accommodation requirements as well as procurement procedures, through the development of specific guidance and tools to accelerate progress in this aspect.
2. ESCWA is advised to engage with member States to increase awareness, promote joint ownership, use of outputs and demand for ESCWA's supporting services.
3. ESCWA, including its Statistics division and ILO, is advised to continue cooperating in building NSOs' capacities to provide data needed for policymaking to promote inclusive participation in the labour market. In doing so, consider an institutional approach to capacity building and financial resource needs associated with the integration. This should include opportunities for synergetic programming with other stakeholders and actors in target countries.
4. A formal and institutionalised approach is recommended to continue engaging employers in the future. ESCWA and target countries should pursue capacity building for employers, especially the private sector, through a market system lens, i.e., by engaging and empowering sector representative bodies and unions and linking them with the ILO business disability network. Their participation can also be promoted in an inclusive project management setup at the country level (i.e. representation in national teams supporting FPs).
5. Capacity-building projects with policy influence objectives should approach engagement with relevant stakeholders—beyond governmental actors—in a manner that supports inclusive policymaking processes, advocacy, and conducive coordination among stakeholders.

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<sup>23</sup> Disability inclusion NGOs have tools to assess inclusion in humanitarian programming but not in development, a gap that experts note to be valuable if filled in the region.

6. In the future, programming should be backed by a robust monitoring framework and plan. ESCWA can encourage the involvement of member States in project management, including monitoring, to ensure successful implementation and efficient monitoring. This approach may also help promote country ownership and the sustainability of results.
7. The project management structure may comprise ESCWA and FPs. Still, the latter need to be empowered by mandate and decision-making authorities and equally supported by national teams from various stakeholders that the project will engage in the country.
8. Future programming should strongly account for underlying assumptions and risks that could affect project implementation and realisation of results/intended change. It should also consider country-specific risks and challenges, including risks associated with data availability and countries' sharing of them, as well as those related to institutional and coordination frameworks.

## 9. Annexes

Annex 1	Evaluation TOR
Annex 2	Project results framework
Annex 3	Evaluation matrix
Annex 4	List of individuals interviewed
Annex 5	List of documents reviewed

