

► Workers with Disabilities in Jordan's Garment Sector

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Phenix Center for Economics & Informatics Studies is a non-governmental organization dedicated to independent policy research and measuring public opinions on impactful current and emerging issues in areas of economics, society, and its legislative environment in Jordan. The Center was founded in Amman, Jordan in 2003 under the registration number 142203. Phenix Center works to promote a sustainable developmental paradigm in Jordan, rooted in human rights and the principles of democratic governance by focusing on reforming labor policies, lifting restrictions on freedom of association, and strengthening social protection policies. The Center specializes in promoting inclusivity in development processes by compiling databases of relevant actors and stakeholders, developing research, studies, papers, and reports, conducting conferences and advocacy campaigns and empowering several actors to take part in steering development through capacity-building.

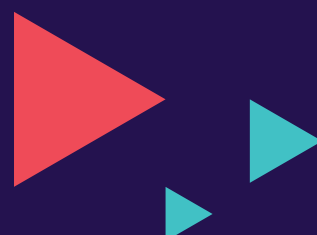
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► Abbreviations

BWJ	Better Work Jordan
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DOL	Department of Labor (US Government)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GOJ	Government of Jordan
JTGCU	The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing
HCD	Higher Council for the Rights of People with Disabilities
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labor Organization
JGATE	Jordanian Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporters' Association
KII	Key Informant Interview
LTC	Labor Tripartite Committee
MOL	Jordanian Ministry of Labor
MOH	Jordanian Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PWD	Person / People with Disability
QIZ	Qualifying Industrial Zone



► Foreword

The following study was prepared on behalf of Better Work Jordan (BWJ)—a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—in the context of the BWJ's efforts to improve working conditions and promote labor rights and decent work in Jordan, as well as boost the competitiveness of the country's garment sector. At the time of writing, approximately 63,000 workers in Jordan are covered by BWJ.

This document details the outcomes of research conducted by the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies into labor market access and working conditions among people with disability (PWD) in the Jordanian garment sector. Research for this study was based on both existing literature and secondary data, on the one hand, and primary qualitative data, on the other hand—the latter collected during site visits to each factory, focus group discussions with factory workers with disability, and interviews with employers, experts, and other stakeholders.

The authors of this study wish to extend their deepest thanks to the staff of Better Work Jordan for all the support provided, especially throughout the data collection process, for granting access to a wealth of data from their databases, and for facilitating communications between the research team and factory managers. The team is also grateful to the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing (JTGCU), for assisting in the organization of the focus group discussions, and to all factory managers and administrative staff who granted the researchers access to their factories' premises, enabling the collection of field data. Lastly, a special word of gratitude is owed to all respondents who participated in this study, notably the workers with disability who shared their views and experiences in the focus group discussions or otherwise contributed to this research, all communication facilitators—namely, sign language interpreters—and all other respondents who enriched this study by contributing their time and insight.

Without the support of all parties, this study would not have been possible.



► Executive Summary

Everywhere in the world, persons with disabilities (PWD) live conditioned, not only by their own impairments, but by the perceptions and prejudices of those around them regarding their conditions, their abilities, their worth and, ultimately, their place in society. Such gaps, biases, and obstacles are particularly evident in the labor market.

The present study is an assessment of the realities faced by workers with disability in Jordan's garment factories, from a sample of nine main factories and three satellite factories in the country's garment sector (12 factories total) within three industrial zones located in Ad-Dulayl, Sahab, and Irbid. The research combines data extracted from secondary sources over the course of a preliminary desk review of available figures and literature with the first-hand accounts of workers, employers, experts, and other stakeholders, gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with workers with disability in the sampled factories. In addition, site visits were carried out at each factory, employing a purpose-made checklist to determine the extent to which the rights of workers with disability are guaranteed, and their needs met, at each of the factories under study, according to both national laws and internationally recognized best practices.

The ensuing study outlines the evolution and current state of the legal framework for PWD in Jordan, as well as its interplay with some of the more socially prevalent views on disability. Over the past years, Jordan seems to have signaled its intention to better promote, advance, and protect human rights within its borders—including the rights of workers and persons with disabilities, which constitute the main objects of the present study. It has done so through successive legal changes and the ratification of watershed international conventions—which have, in principle, introduced crucial guarantees for PWD into the country's body of laws.

Jordan's Labor Law, the Jordanian Constitution, and the Collective Bargaining Agreement all contain important provisions concerning the integration of PWD into the labor market in general and the garment sector in particular, including PWD recruitment quotas tied to the size of each factory's total workforce, as well as other legal requirements and obligations—concerning, e.g., the accessibility and adaptability of the workplace, its environment, and its facilities. However, while most of the factories sampled were found compliant with the set PWD employment quotas (see below), the pervasiveness of infrastructural inadequacies dampens much of the confidence that this may translate into tangible improved access to decent work for PWD, in line with their specific rights and needs, as several factories failed to meet some of even the most basic workplace standards and requirements for PWD. Indeed, one of the key take-aways from this study is that legislation is no panacea and must not be regarded as such, for it is likely to remain ineffective in the absence of complementary measures and approaches—some of which are detailed at the end of this document. It is equally pertinent to underline the importance of clear communication of information to workers with disability, and of their inclusion in decision-making processes in the factories and the union, to improve the conditions of PWD in the sector. Finally, the feelings of underappreciation shared by large numbers of PWD working in the garment sector point to the persistence of harmful biases and preconceptions which must be tackled if the situation of workers with disabilities in Jordan is ever to improve in a meaningful way.

Accommodating infrastructure is often a decisive factor for people with disability seeking employment and the garment sector is no exception. Each factory was subject to a site visit, with the aim of determining the characteristics of their premises and facilities and assessing the adequacy of the latter in light of national laws and international standards regarding workplace conditions for PWD—ranging from the location and accessibility of the sites to the availability of transportation, the ergonomic qualities of the work stations, tools, and machines, and numerous other factors (see attached research tools for the comprehensive checklist). When analyzing the outcomes of the site visits, researchers remarked upon several transversal issues hindering both the employability and workplace wellbeing of PWD in the sector. Accessible transportation to the factories was one of the key amenities whose importance was underlined by PWD, especially workers with motor and sensory impairments; indeed, several of the PWD working in the factories where such transportation was provided stated that they would not be able to reach their workplace otherwise.

A general lack of adequate accessibility and facilitated mobility in the factories' outdoor and indoor spaces was another of the main issues raised by workers with disabilities in the course of the FGDs. In addition, the workers' responses pointed to an absence of adequate systems and resources for conveying key information to workers with sensory impairments—concerning contracts, services, complaints mechanisms, labor rights, access to the trade union and relevant CSOs, and the like—which has hindered the integration of PWD in the sector. As was often emphasized by respondents, a lack of adequate communication and support systems geared toward facilitating the work and everyday lives of PWD is often a powerful enough push factor to discourage certain PWD from working altogether. Perhaps the most damaging consequence of the lack of autonomy enjoyed by PWD in the workplace is that it contributes to perpetuating sociocultural perceptions of such persons primarily as objects of charity, or at times social burdens; in some anecdotal examples, PWD were hired and paid but are not expected to do any work—that is, out of charity or obligation (e.g., to meet quotas), as opposed to trust in the capabilities of the recruited workers.

The presence of some good practices in certain factories, together with a general overachievement of PWD quotas, were among the more promising outcomes of the study. Such successes are partly owed to the broad and frequent dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders—from factory managers to the sector's employer's association and trade union, civil society, the ILO, the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (HDC), and several ministries. The existence of such consensuses, partnerships and synergies, rooted in aligned missions and principles, inspires some optimism for the future improvement of conditions of PWD in the garment sector, representing a wealth of opportunity for the systematic improvement of working conditions and environments, made sustainable through adequate evaluation and oversight mechanisms.

In light of these and other outcomes of the research carried out for the purpose of the following study, a list of recommendations was developed for the further improvement of working conditions and labor market environment for PWD in Jordan's garment sector:

- ***J-GATE in cooperation with HCD and ILO / Better Work: Develop guidelines for employing people with disabilities in the garment sector.*** There are many initiatives to employ people with disabilities in the sector; streamlining among programs and access to information on available applicants

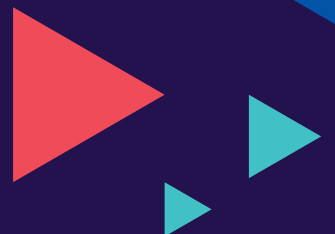
would facilitate the pooling of resources and the recruitment of PWD in the sector. In addition, the HCD is advised to invest in training employers on best practices on accessible and adaptive infrastructure for PWD.

- ***MOL as part of the national employment program, in cooperation with J-GATE and VTC:*** Develop and implement vocational programs with the goal of promoting the employment of PWD in the garment sector. Respondents in both the FGDs and KIIs mentioned a lack of education and training as a hurdle to permanent employment and career development for PWD. Programs targeting the acquisition and development, by PWD, of both soft and technical skills shown to enhance employability in the sector would both contribute to promoting employment among PWD and provide garment factories with ever more qualified staff.
- ***MOL, J-GATE, JTGCU, and ILO / Better Work:*** Provide workshops on the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers at the factory level to workers with disability, employers, and trade union members. By making the same information on the applicable laws, rights and standards available to all participants, employing inclusive and adapted methods and formats, such workshops would help, not only to clarify any issues regarding labor relations, but also to stem the exclusion of PWD and promote awareness of their rights.
- ***MOL and ILO / Better Work:*** Increase the training capacity of the MOL to better detect workers' rights violations involving at the factory level. The improved screening and monitoring of such incidents would provide insight into any correlations between disability and labor rights violations. At the broader level, it would provide additional data and contribute to identifying opportunities for intervention concerning the rights of workers in general, and PWD in particular, in Jordan's garment sector.
- ***JTGCU, HCD, ILO / Better Work:*** Continue to promote the employment of PWD in the garment sector. While this is key for securing employment in the formal economy for PWD, further issues must be addressed, such as wage discrimination, inflexible work schedules, and a lack of awareness of disability issues within the factories, the labor market, and in society at large.
- ***Garment sector employers, in cooperation with ILO / Better Work:*** Adapt or (re)design work environments in ways that facilitate the work, movement, and integration of PWD. With the goal of ultimately achieving compliance with international standards, the factory's facilities and infrastructure should continue to be adapted, piecemeal, to accommodate the needs of workers with disability—in this respect, one element of key importance is the paving of factory floors, which should facilitate mobility and special orientation, and by extension enhance workplace safety and accessibility.

- ***ILO / Better Work, JTGCU, concerned CSOs, J-GATE, and employers:*** Plan and implement broad awareness-raising and educational campaigns aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes and misguided attitudes toward PWD. Social stigma, prejudices and misconceptions remain among the main factors hindering the employment of PWD, not only in the sector, but in the labor market as a whole. It is necessary to continue implementing and supporting awareness-raising initiatives aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes concerning disability.
- ***Garment sector employers, JTGCU, and J-GATE:*** Promote the involvement of workers with disability in the development and discussion of factory policies, as well as in union affairs. The participation of PWD in these processes and institutions is considered a key step for promoting their integration, not only at the workplace or in the labor market, but as members of broader society.
- ***All stakeholders*** should encourage and participate in the exchange of information, methodologies and best practices, cooperating and engaging in regular dialogue with the goal of continuously improving the situation of workers with disability in Jordan's garment sector.



1. Introduction and Methodology



► 1. Introduction and Methodology

► 1.1. Background and Purpose

The lives and livelihoods of people with disability (PWD) are often impacted by perceptions and prejudices regarding their conditions, their abilities, their worth and, ultimately, their place in society. Such views are not typically favorable, instead compromising the social, economic and political integration of PWD, as well as the full enjoyment of their rights, economic participation and access to assistance and protection systems.

In Jordan, an abundance of programs, initiatives, and legal guarantees aimed at economically empowering and enhancing the societal inclusion of PWD, such as hiring quotas, have been introduced over the past two decades; however, such measures have yet to translate into tangible progress in all dimensions. PWD in Jordan are still broadly regarded as unfit to work and, at times, even as social burdens. Such attitudes ultimately have a profound impact on the psychological wellbeing and self-perception of people with disability, leaving them socioeconomically disempowered in a self-perpetuating cycle of alienation and dependence. The reality in the labor market is, in turn, both a reflection and a consequence of the phenomena of exclusion evident in the education system itself, as limited access to education among PWD (compared to their non-disabled peers) further adds to the competitive disadvantage workers with disability face in the Jordanian labor market.

Over the last twenty years, Jordan has established itself as an apparel exporting country. Textile, garment and clothing is now one of the Kingdom's leading export sectors, and one of the foremost job creators in manufacturing. Better Work Jordan (BWJ) aims to improve working conditions, enhance respect for labor rights, and boost competitiveness in the sector. In line with its mission to improve conditions for all workers, BWJ is committed to protecting the labor rights of PWD, including guarantees of non-discriminatory labor market access and the provision of adequate protections and accommodations, in line with international standards. Among other guarantees under the program and Jordanian labor law, hiring quotas for PWD have been introduced, tied to the size of each factory's workforce—e.g., 4% of the total workforce for factories employing 50 or more workers.

The following study details the outcomes of research conducted by Phenix Center into labor market access and working conditions among PWD in factories in the Jordanian garment sector. The objectives of this study are threefold and aim to identify:

- Barriers and obstacles workers with disability face when searching for and accessing work within the garment sector.
- Barriers facing workers with disabilities when working in garment factories, across physical, cultural, and social dimensions.
- What interventions are needed to eliminate barriers, and which stakeholders have the capacity to implement these interventions.

This study is structured as follows. The following section will outline the research methodology, while Section 2 will outline the key findings of the desk review regarding the legal framework and the situation of people with disability working in the Jordanian garment sector, which also forms the basis of the analytical framework. Section 3 will present a more in-depth analysis of the findings regarding barriers faced by PWD both in accessing and finding work in the sector and while working in the sector. Finally, Sections 4 and 5 will offer recommendations aiming at improving the situation of workers with disabilities in the garment sector.

► 1.2. Methodology

This research relies on a mixed study methodology, consisting of both a desk review of available literature and existing data and the collection and analysis of qualitative primary data.

For the purpose of data collection, three specific methods were implemented: observational data collection through site visits to each of the 12 factories, 12 focus group discussions held with PWD working at the garment factories under study, and 12 key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, such as ministry representatives, civil society actors, the trade unionists, factory managers, factory buyers, and other concerned parties. The target factories were sampled from three industrial zones in Ad-Dulayl, Sahab, and Irbid. Workers with disability working in these factories who participated in the FGDs were selected and contacted with support from the JTGCU and factory managers. The respondents were selected with the goal of approaching proportional representation based on gender and type of disability. The discussions were held in an accessible meeting room within factory premises and were conducted by researchers and facilitators, with the support of sign language interpreters whenever one or more hearing-impaired persons were present.

The following table illustrates the use and aim of each tool, supplementing the desk review.

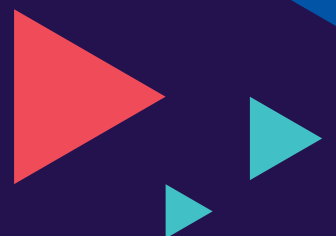
Topic	Indicator		Research Tool
1. Job-seeking process and accessibility of work within the garment sector for people with disability	1.1.	Willingness of factories to hire PWD / hiring discrimination	FGDs / KIIs
	1.2.	Presence of accessible recruitment tools	FGDs / KIIs
	1.3.	Presence of suitable jobs	FGDs
	1.4.	Representation of people with disabilities within the workforce	Observational data collection / FGDs
2. Barriers facing workers with disability in the garment sector	2.1.	Infrastructural adequacy of the factories regarding accessibility and mobility / provision of specific assistance to PWD	Observational data collection / FGDs
	2.2.	Social inclusion in the factory environments, including level of involvement of PWD in spaces of social dialogue and workers' committees	FGDs
	2.3.	Presence of inclusive HR practices, including grievance mechanisms	FGDs / KIIs
	2.4.	Social and cultural perceptions of disability and of the types of jobs PWD are suited to perform	FGDs / KIIs
3. Stakeholder interventions	3.1.	Interventions required to rectify and solve existing barriers for PWD in the garment sector	FGDs / KIIs
	3.2.	Stakeholders with the capacity to carry out the necessary interventions	KIIs

Lastly, some limitations of this study must be made clear:

1. Not all disabilities are visible, diagnosed, or registered with public authorities or employers. This impacted the sampling of respondents for the FGDs, in that only workers with formally diagnosed impairments were considered.
2. The research team obtained little information concerning workers with mental impairments, who were underrepresented in the study, likely not because they are underrepresented at the factories, but because also such conditions are more likely to go undiagnosed and/or unreported at factory level, due to a multitude of factors deserving of dedicated research.
3. Although all workers who participated in the FGDs for this study were Jordanian, migrant workers are heavily represented in the garment sector, where they make up 74% of the workforce.¹ Naturally, this impacts the scope of the study, as there are certainly migrant workers with disability in the sector facing their own sets of challenges. However, such workers are subject to specific legislation, and face circumstances too nuanced to be addressed as a second-order issue in a study of this size. Rather, the situations of such workers must be (and have been) the object of targeted studies. As such, no observations were made regarding any intersectionality between nationality and disability status among workers.

¹ Better Work Annual Report 2022

▶ 2. Legal Framework and Inclusion Standards



► 2. Legal Framework and Inclusion Standards

► 2.1. Legal Definition, Rights, and Protections

According to Jordanian law, a person with disability is defined as:

*"... a person who has long-term physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, psychological or neurological impairment, which, as a result of interaction with other physical and behavioral barriers, may hinder performance by such person of one of the major life activities or hinder the exercise by such person of any right or basic freedom independently".*²

It is precisely the lack of independence and autonomy outlined in this article—the limited enjoyment of basic rights and liberties—that the rights of PWD aim to address. The article carries a recognition of the challenges of disability and an appreciation for the breadth of their impact and significance, which underline the importance of proactively developing and putting into place systems and regulations designed to mitigate such challenges and empower PWD to overcome them.

The Jordanian constitution offers legal protections against discrimination on several grounds, including disability. As a general provision, Article 6(1) states that "Jordanians are equal before the law, with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion." Paragraph 5 of the same article states that "the law protects motherhood, childhood and old age, takes care of young people and people with disabilities, and protects them from abuse and exploitation."³ In addition, the constitution provides for basic labor rights standards to be read in conjunction with the anti-discrimination provisions. Article 23(2) states that "the state protects work and establishes legislation for it based on the following principles: first, giving the worker a wage proportional to the quantity and quality of his work; second, determining the weekly working hours and granting workers weekly and annual rest days with the wage; third, a special compensation report for dependent workers in cases of dismissal, sickness, disability and work-related emergencies."

Beyond constitutionally guaranteed rights, Jordan first adopted Law No. 31 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007, the same year the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2007-2015 was introduced. In 2008, Jordan reaffirmed its commitment to this framework with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its publication in the Official Gazette. In 2017,⁴ Law No. 20/2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted, which updated and expanded on the existing legal provisions concerning PWD in Jordan, most notably through the introduction of recruitment quotas, detailed below. Law No. 20/2017 saw the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, created in 2007, restyled the Higher Council on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The HCD is tasked with defining national standards on all matters concerning the inclusion and empowerment of PWD, including the accreditation system for programs and institutions benefiting

² Law No.20/2017, Art. 4(a), emphasis added.

³ The Jordanian Constitution, 1952

⁴ HCD, "First Annual Report to Monitor the Status and Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018", 2019

PWD, introduced in 2009. Under its previous name, the organization assisted in the development of the country's first National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, mentioned above.

Jordanian Labor Law both reinforces and supplements the outlined provisions and policies. The amended Article 13/1996 of the Jordanian Labor Law states: "The employer shall [hire] the percentage of workers with disabilities specified in the effective Law of Persons with Disabilities and in accordance with the conditions set forth therein, and shall send to the Ministry a statement specifying the jobs occupied by persons with disabilities and the wages of each of them [sic]." While the article itself does not mention the precise quota, it specifically refers to the quotas for the employment of PWD introduced by the abovementioned 2017 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In accordance with the latter, any business employing between 25 and 50 employees must recruit at least one PWD, while businesses with 50 or more employees must ensure that PWD make up a minimum of 4% of their total workforce.

More recently, the Ministry of Labor issued Bylaw No. 35/2021 on Employment of Persons with Disability, which further refined the national strategy for the employment of PWD and the promotion of accessible and adapted work environments. Notably, it also established the MOL's supervisory role in ensuring compliance with PWD employment quotas. As per the bylaw, employers are required to disclose data on workers with disability (as part of their total workforce), by issuing reports to the MOL on the first month of each year, and are subject to periodic worksite inspections.

Finally, the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) for the garment sector has been instrumental in bolstering and expanding on the existing provisions and regulations as enshrined in Jordanian law. The CBA has promoted the employment of PWD in Jordan's garment sector by establishing the following requirements:⁵

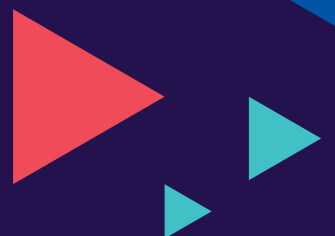
- Advertisements for job opportunities and forms relating to job applications and employment in garment factories must not explicitly exclude PWD from recruitment processes—e.g., indicating "workers with disability need not apply" or similar.
- Garment factories must recruit and employ workers with disability in accordance with the quotas stipulated in Law No. 20/2017.
- Garment factories must not, in any way, exclude any person from work or training on grounds of impairment or disability, through termination, suspension, or otherwise, in accordance with the provisions of Article 21 of the Jordanian Labor Law.
- Garment factories must strive to provide accessible, adaptive, and inclusive workspaces and environments, enabling PWD to exercise their rights and liberties to the fullest extent at the workplace.

The sections below present an assessment of the sample factories' compliance with the Jordan's legal framework and the CBA, as outlined above.

⁵ Collective Bargaining Agreement for the Textiles, Garment and Clothing Sector, Article (8), Paragraph (F).



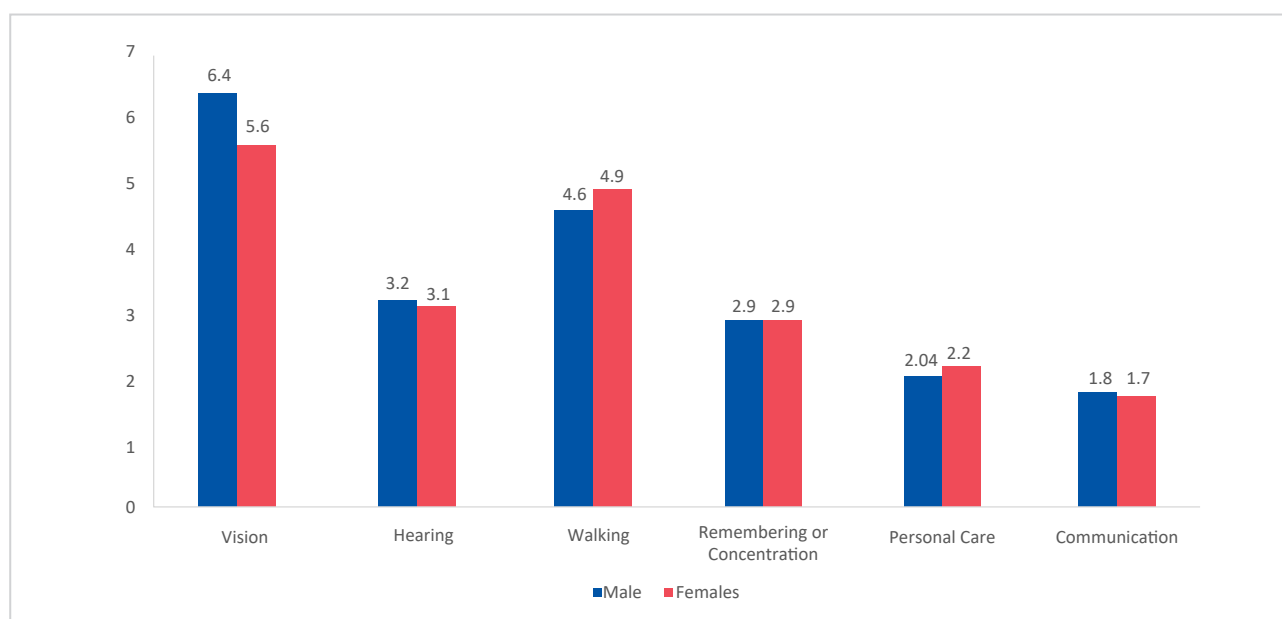
3. Mapping the Situation of Workers with Disabilities in the Jordanian Garment Sector



► 3. Mapping the Situation of Workers with Disabilities in the Jordanian Garment Sector

The most recent government figures on PWD in Jordan date back to a 2015 census, according to which more than one in ten people over the age of 5 in Jordan at the time (11.1%) lived with some form with disability—with a marginally higher prevalence among males than females (11.5% and 10.6%, respectively). Among the census population, the most common types of disability were visual (6% of the population), motor (4.8%) and hearing impairments (3.1%). Approximately 4% of the population lived with two or more different types of disability, of which 29.1% were visually impaired, 23% suffered from motor impairments, and 15% were hearing impaired. More strikingly still was that an even higher percentage of the sample population was shown to live with three or more different types of disability (21%).

► **Figure 1. Prevalence of types of disability among Jordanians in % of population. Source: Department of Statistics**



In its analysis, the Jordanian Department of Statistics also found that 22.3% of PWD in Jordan had never received any form of formal education and 21.4% were illiterate, with striking contrasts in PWD illiteracy rates between urban areas and the kingdom's rural and peripheric regions—for example, such rates were at their lowest and highest in the Amman (17.3%) and Ma'an (34.5%) governorates, respectively. In turn, such low levels of education have further impacted the opportunities available to PWD in the formal labor market, while the same census found that an estimated 82.2% of PWD of working age in Jordan were economically inactive.⁷ While unemployment rates in Jordan are already particularly high (reaching 22.6% in mid-2022)⁸, PWD are disproportionately represented both among Jordan's unemployed and NEET populations—as of 2015, approximately 72.2% of PWD in Jordan were not employed (66% not

6 DOS, "The Reality of Disability (Functional Difficulties) in Jordan", based on the data of General Population and Housing Census 2015. Available at: http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/population/census2015/Disability%202021.pdf

7 Ibid.

8 Q2 2022, DOS at http://dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/archive/Unemp/2022/Emp_Q2_2022.pdf

actively seeking employment, to 6.2% looking for and applying to jobs). A 2019 report by the Phenix Center remarked upon a lack of elevators and adequate public transport available to PWD in Jordan, stressing that it effectively prevented PWD from working in hard-to-access areas, e.g., the above-ground floors of buildings. The same report also noted a general lack of access to social protection systems—namely, social security and health insurance—owed primarily to an overrepresentation of PWD in the informal economy, coupled with un- and underemployment and economic inactivity / NEET status. It is also worth noting that the challenges faced by PWD in the Jordanian labor market and their impact are reportedly exacerbated and more prevalent among female workers (Phenix Center 2019).

It remains of the essence, therefore, that new, more, and better strategies be implemented to integrate PWD into Jordan's labor market. The CBA in the garment sector and the corresponding legislation have represented important steps toward improving the legal framework for people with disability in the labor market. According to data from BWJ's annual reports for 2021 and 2022, most garment factories employ at least one PWD, and out of the 60,445 workers in the 77 factories under study in 2021, 849 were PWD (59% of whom were women). While there are some contrasts in quota compliance between factories, with some exceeding the quotas and others falling short of compliance—out of 77 factories, 10 did not comply with the 4% quota (i.e., fewer than 4% of their total number of employees, if 50 or more, were PWD)—the fact that only one factory was found to employ one worker with disability who used wheelchairs.

As will be demonstrated below, however, the realities on the ground are evidence that expanding and perfecting the legal framework can only be one of several steps necessary in cultivating a PWD-inclusive labor market environment. In addition to establishing and regularly updating the legal framework, it is necessary to consider infrastructure, social perceptions, misconceptions and stereotypes, and numerous other factors which directly or indirectly condition the lives of PWD, both in general and at work—one of many reasons why it is important to consider information flows between all stakeholders. Moreover, while essential, it is not sufficient that workers with disability be made aware of their rights and the services and support systems at their disposal in labor affairs; such efforts must always be accompanied by the continuous adaptation and improvement of workspaces and environments with the goal of promoting the labor market integration and socioeconomic empowerment of PWD. In short, addressing the issues and challenges discussed in this study demands the adoption of a bird's eye view of disability as a multifaceted phenomenon, requiring a concerted, comprehensive approach.

► 3.1. The situation of workers with disabilities in accessing and finding work in the sector

3.1.1. Recruitment processes and awareness of labor rights among workers with disabilities

Some of the most common constraints faced by people with disability either employed or seeking employment in the Jordanian garment sector include: a lack of access to information, inadequate or discriminatory recruitment processes and practices, limited access to training, and low wages. As one expert stated ⁹: "People with disability, and women in particular, struggle to secure employment."

⁹ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

The accounts of participants in the focus group discussions illustrate the hardships faced by PWD seeking employment. One deaf respondent underlined general recruitment challenges, describing recruitment processes as very difficult for PWD, who were only hired for simple jobs—even through official channels and platforms, such as the Civil Service Bureau. The same participant stated that PWD were not chosen for administrative positions as often as their non-disabled peers, despite applying through the same channels.¹⁰



"I happened to read the name of the company on the bus, so I came here a few times until they hired me."

FGD Participant



This worker's account was corroborated by a representative¹¹ from the HCD, who stated: "The Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities faces problems in promoting [PWD] employment, in the public sector first and foremost." Regarding access to employment-related information, results show that, for most PWD, friends and family members are their main

source of such information, while others claim to have secured work in the factories by sheer luck or coincidence.¹²

Civil society organizations and the JTGCU were described by respondents as playing an important role in expanding access to decent employment opportunities for PWD, citing several examples and describing how such organizations facilitate contact with recruiters in garment factories and provide information on suitable vacancies.¹³

Of all workers present in the FDGs, nearly a quarter underlined the importance of the MOL's National Employment Strategy in helping them secure employment in garment factories, both by actively connecting potential workers with the factories' human resources departments and by providing training workshops to PWD with the goal of promoting their employment in the garment sector.¹⁴ One representative of the MOL described the institution's role in promoting the employment of people with disability: "We first interview the workers in person and then put them in contact with employment centers. We also hold job fairs involving multiple sectors, and the ministry has launched a special department for employment promotion."¹⁵

The HCD also plays an important role in providing PWD with the necessary assistance and support to secure employment. However, workers in FGD expressed a desire to see the HCD play a more active role in the sharing of information between job-seeking PWD and recruiters. A concerned CSO member also advocated for a better streamlining of efforts between the HCD, factory managers, and other CSOs.¹⁶ In the same vein, a representative of the HCD also underlined the importance of working with all stakeholders.¹⁷

¹⁰ Respondents; FGD #3.

¹¹ In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

¹² Respondents; FGD #12. Respondents; FGD #8. Respondent, FGD #4.

¹³ Respondent, FGD #4. Respondent, FGD #2.

¹⁴ Respondent, FGD #2., Respondent, FGD #8., Respondent, FGD #2.

¹⁵ In-depth interview with representative of the MOL.

¹⁶ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

¹⁷ In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

For their part, factory managers claimed there was no discrimination of PWD in recruitment processes and that they are happy to comply with legal requirements concerning the recruitment of workers with PWD. As noted in interviews with factory managers, as well as in the validation meeting held on 6 September 2022 with multiple stakeholders, employers assert that their access to job applicants with disability remains limited, despite recruiters' efforts to actively reach out to potential workers. In contrast, one factory manager recalled holding a one-day job fair for people with disability in collaboration with the local Chamber of Industry, which led to hiring between 45 and 50 workers in a single day.¹⁸

However, workers also recounted challenges and violations of their rights upon the signing of their contracts. In particular, a high number of respondents with sensory impairments claimed they were not adequately aware of their rights or the contents of their employment contracts. Notably, several visually impaired workers remarked that their contracts had neither been provided in Braille nor read out to them in full.¹⁹ In the course of the FGDs, respondents also mentioned struggling to accessing information



The first and most difficult part is finding people with disability to work. A year ago, we organized a one-day job fair for people with disability, in cooperation with the [local] Chamber of Industry, and hired 45-50 workers with disability.

Representative of Factory Management



regarding their rights as workers, especially concerning issues such as annual leaves. In accordance with Jordanian Labor Law, workers are entitled to 14 days of paid leave per year of service, or 21 days per year for workers who remain with the same employer for five or more consecutive years (amended Law No. 14/2019, Art. 61); yet, many of the workers who participated in the FGDs were not aware of this,²⁰ with one worker noting they had never heard about the 14 days of annual leave before the FGD.²¹

The workers' admitted lack of knowledge regarding their own rights underlines the importance of raising awareness of such issues among PWD themselves, but also of improving HR practices in certain factories to ensure that all workers may enjoy their rights equally. Participants in the FGDs also mentioned a desire to receive more information about the union, its activities, and how to become involved,²² as well as to see the role of the HCD further expanded, to ensure that their needs are met.²³

The workers' lack of access to legal aid and training was illustrated by their recounting of several labor rights violations, namely regarding late wage payments and the granting of leave days. Particularly, approximately one-third of FGD respondents in the larger factories (those employing 500 or more workers) reported issues with wage payments, such as a lack of clarity regarding payment policies and the recurrent withholding of wages.²⁴ While such problems may not be specific to workers with disability, such practices are in violation of Jordanian law and warrant an in-depth inquiry.

¹⁸ In-depth interview with a factory representative.

¹⁹ Respondent, FGD #4.

²⁰ Respondent, FGD #4.

²¹ Respondent, FGD #1.

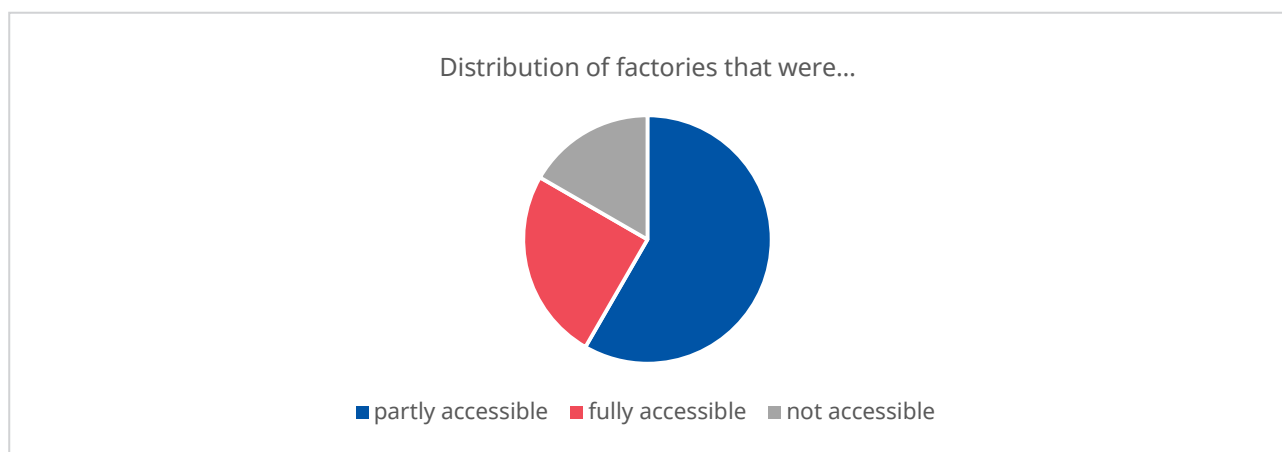
²² Respondent, FGD #8.

²³ Respondent, FGD #4.

²⁴ Respondent, FGD #4.

3.1.2. Accessible infrastructure as a pull factor for workers with disabilities in the garment sector

► **Figure 2. Distribution of factories by ease of access**



The existence of accessible infrastructure to ease the commute to and from work proved to be two major factors in enabling PWD to secure employment in garment factories. Site inspections revealed seven factories were only partly accessible to PWD, while three were deemed both suitably located and accessible, and the remaining two did not ensure suitable accessibility conditions for PWD.

The findings of the site visits concerning the factories' infrastructural adequacy were corroborated by workers who participated in the FGDs. Several PWD mentioned their commutes to and from work as one of their main challenges. As one worker recounted, "there is no transportation to the factory, so for me, being blind, it's difficult to get there."²⁵ Conversely, testimonies from other workers with disability revealed how ease of access and the availability of transportations can be powerful incentives for PWD.²⁶



"There is secure transportation for everyone and this was one of the incentives that encouraged us to work in the factory."

FGD participant

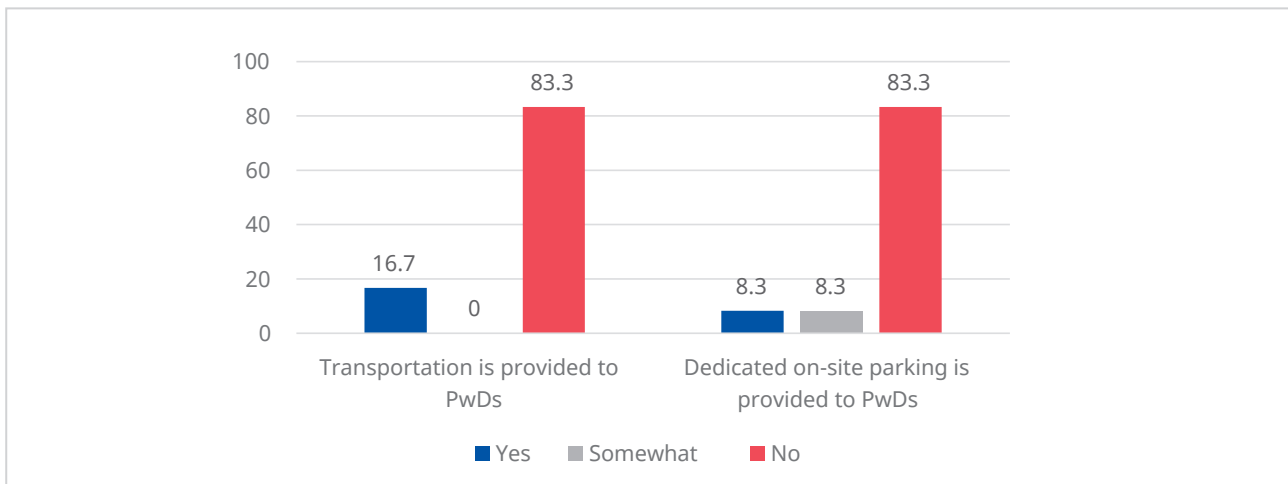


One of the more concerning findings was that an overwhelming majority of factories did not provide transportation to workers, including those with disabilities. This is thought to be a strong push factor keeping PWD out of the labor market, as many do not have access to adequate means of transportation.

²⁵ Respondent, FGD #4.

²⁶ Respondent, FGD #6.

► **Figure 3. Provision of safe transportation to PWD**



In terms of accessibility to the buildings themselves, it was found that in four of factories the main entrances were fully wheelchair accessible, while the main entrances of an additional four were only partly accessible to persons with motor disabilities. Researchers also remarked upon a lack of ramps along the sidewalks and at the entrances of three factories, limiting the access of PWD to these worksites. In addition, it is worth underlining that the presence of elevators and ramps is not synonymous with adequate accessibility PWD with limited mobility—indeed, workers reported using the elevators and ramps present in the factories’ loading docks, due to the main entrances being inaccessible, while 41.7% of ramps and paved paths were reserved for the transit of goods and vehicles. Ramps specifically designed with the needs of PWD in mind, which can be identified by the presence of special handrails, were only present in two of the factories visited, leaving workers with motor disabilities and the visually impaired unassisted and more vulnerable to accidents.

Researchers also noted that the slip resistance of paths and the height of door thresholds could be improved. Rough, slip resistant surfaces are of special importance wherever the ground is tilted or uneven, such as in the case of access ramps—of these, 58.3% had a coarse enough surface to prevent slipping, thereby facilitating mobility for PWD, while 25% had slippery surfaces, resulting in frequent accidents. Even in the absence of protective barriers or handrails, slip resistant ramps may serve as passable alternative forms of access for PWD, provided they are located near the main entrance and the passage of PWD is unimpeded by activities such as the loading and unloading of cargo.

Concerning the lighting in the entrance areas, whether natural or artificial, it was found that half of the factories’ entrances were adequately lit, while lighting in the remaining half was only partly adequate. In some factories, numerous quilts and parasols had been propped up to shield the entrance from direct sunlight, impacting the visibility of workers with mild to moderate visual impairments. During night hours, most factories’ outside areas are inadequately lit, often illuminated solely by the streetlights of adjacent roads, limiting the visibility of workers, particularly when arriving before dawn and leaving after sunset.

A particularly striking finding was the inexistence, in any of the twelve sampled factories, of any form of textured path or guiding system for visually impaired workers, further increasing their dependence on

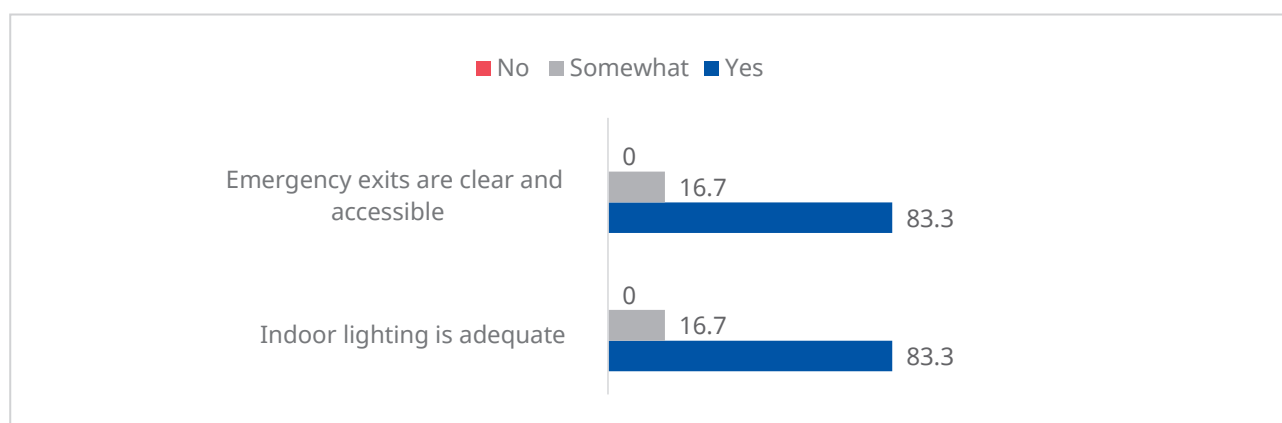
others. In general, it was found that, while some infrastructure was adapted to accommodate workers with motor disabilities, comparable arrangements for workers with other types of disability were altogether absent from the factories.

► 3.2. The situation of workers with disabilities while working in the sector

3.2.1. Factory Floors: Accessibility and Health and Safety

As one civil society representative pointed out, there is a pressing need to adapt the building interiors to the needs of people with disability, notably to ensure PWD are able to easily evacuate the buildings in case of an emergency.²⁷ Furthermore, while emergency exits were present and clearly marked in most factories, as well as accessible to people with motor impairments, the needs of visually and hearing impaired workers were not always contemplated in the worksites' emergency plans—e.g., lacking visual warning cues to complement auditory alarms and textured paths to help guide visually impaired workers toward the nearest emergency exit.

► Figure 4. Checklist results on factory floors.



The safety of the workers is interlinked with the setup of the factory floors. Half of factories did not provide adequate signage and instructions for people with disability, including emergency numbers, while four factories provided only somewhat adequate signage and emergency information, apart from marking emergency exits. Most factories (10 out of 12) provided good quality lighting in their interiors—neither so dim nor so bright that it may significantly hinder PWD—while, in the remaining two factories interior, lighting was found to be inadequate, increasing the likelihood workplace accidents to which PWD are more susceptible. However, some compliant factories switch off the power during work breaks, to conserve energy, which affects visibility in indoor areas during those times.

Poor ventilation was described as a source of distress for PWD.²⁸ Poor air quality and high noise levels were two concerns raised by workers in every FGD, underlining the need for the Ministry of Health (MOH) to carry out more frequent inspections, seeing as it is of the responsibly of the MOH to “determine the

²⁷ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

²⁸ Respondent, FGD #12. Respondent, FGD #9. Recurring remarks throughout all FGDs.

presence of workplace hazards and health risks and follow up on them periodically,” as described by one ministry representative.²⁹ One trade union leader queried on the topic assured researchers the JTGCU has been making efforts to improve working conditions and environments for all workers in garment factories.³⁰

Most multi-story factories proved a challenge for workers with motor and visual impairments in particular, due to the pervasiveness of stairs and steps and a lack of systems in place to assist PWD in traversing the facilities—such as ramps, handrails, or textured surfaces to help guide the visually impaired. In this regard, it was found that in 75% of cases where stairs were present, no alternate means of access were provided for people in wheelchairs, with access ramps present in only 8.3% of cases. While the workstations in all factories were on the ground level, bathrooms, prayer rooms and cafeterias—to mention only a few examples—were often located in places only reachable by stairs, thereby hindering the access of PWD.



“One of [the bathrooms] is in the basement, and the prayer room is on the upper floor. It’s difficult for me here.”

FGD participant



Workers with motor impairments reported challenges accessing cafeterias, especially in the larger factories. Most factory cafeterias were located on the upper floors, which, in the absence of elevators, often pushed workers with reduced mobility to order food from outside businesses at their own expense,³¹ while others were not allowed to bring their food from home and/or refrigerate or reheat their food at an accessible location.³² In some cases, circumstances have led workers to opt not to take breaks or refrain from eating during their breaks.³³

Of all factories under study, only four had elevators on site, and three-fourths of elevators were for loading and unloading cargo, with several including variations of the warning: “Elevator for cargo only. Not fit for human use.” Nevertheless, as some workers reported in the FGDs, some managers and floor supervisors allow PWD to use them to access the factories.³⁴ As for adaptivity, it was found that the elevators present in the factories were not designed taking into consideration the needs of persons with sensory disabilities across most key criteria.

²⁹ In-depth interview with a representative of the MOH.

³⁰ In-depth interview with a union representative.

³¹ Respondent, FGD #5.

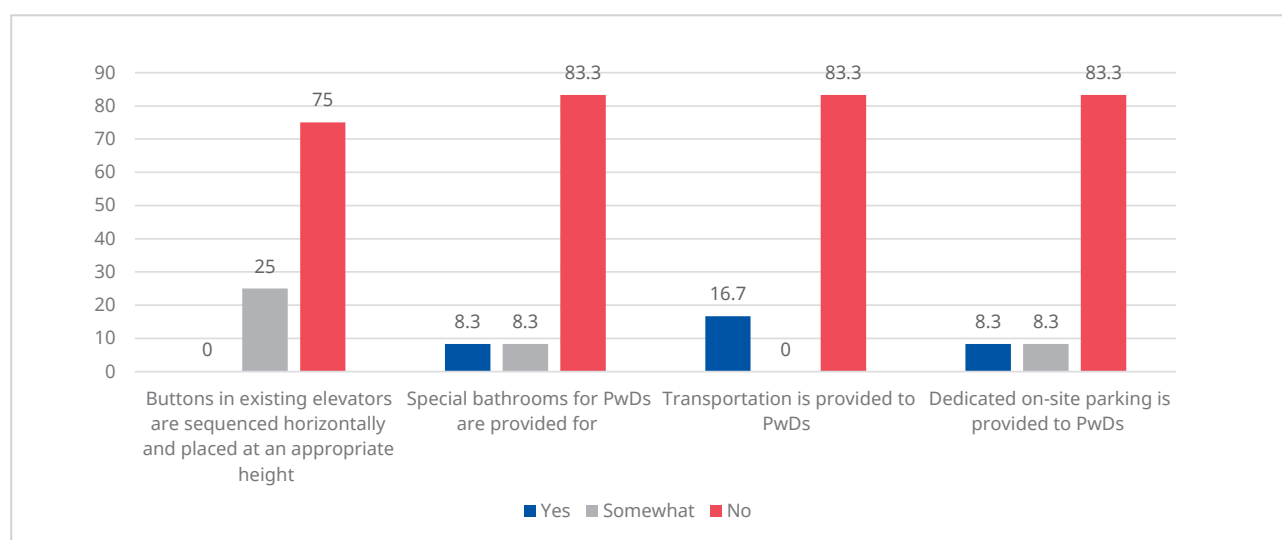
³² Respondent, FGD #11.

³³ Respondent, FGD #12.

³⁴ Respondent, FGD #10.

The provision of accessible bathrooms was another important issue identified during site visits. Most factories did not provide a dedicated bathroom for people with disabilities, accessible to all PWD regardless of impairment. In one factory, however, one bathroom was reserved for people with disability. In several cases, the dimensions and positioning of bathroom doors hindered the passage of PWD. As one of the factories' HR managers admitted: "Currently, the people who need a special bathroom are those with motor impairments, so I picked toilets which are easier to use. In terms of pathways [for the visually impaired], however, we are unfortunately not prepared."³⁵

► **Figure 5. Accessible bathrooms at garment factories**



Access to break areas and prayer rooms was another key issue raised by PWD. Factory workers noted in the FGDs that such spaces were often not accessible to PWD due to being located somewhere other than the ground floor, especially in factories without elevators—i.e., most of those sampled. Taking into account the needs and rights of PWD, four factories were found to provide adequate break rooms or areas, while in six of the factories break areas were only partly adequate. In the remaining two of the 12 sampled factories, the break areas provided were not adequate; cafeterias and prayer rooms doubled as break areas, making them susceptible to overcrowding—as a result, at least one worker with disability claimed to avoid those places, and instead taking their breaks sitting on steps or under tables.³⁶



"There are machines [in the way] and it's dangerous. We need to wait for a staff member [to guide us]; I'm afraid of bumping into a female worker—I feel this is a highly sensitive issue."

Visually impaired FGD participant



Upon inspection of the factory warehouses, five were found to adequately allow for the free movement and maneuvering of wheelchairs, while in five other cases their movement was limited by the transit of people and machines, particularly when loading and unloading shipments. Finally, in the two remaining

³⁵ Respondent, FGD

³⁶ Respondent, FGD #10.

factories, conditions in the factory warehouses effectively prevented PWD from working or even passing through those sections. One visually impaired worker complained that the layout of the factory floor prevented them from going to the restroom unassisted,³⁷ while others also felt uncomfortable moving around by themselves.³⁸

Data gathered for the purpose of this study corroborates previous research pointing to the need to improve factory floor planning, to better accommodate people with disability. One factory management representative acknowledged that this is a widespread problem in the garment sector,³⁹ while one of the factories' international clients offered a solution in the course of a KII:

"We would like to see more foresight, in the sense that factories, when built, should actually be built with infrastructure to accommodate people with disabilities, rather than adapting the existing infrastructure post-hoc, at the cost of greater time and resources."

3.2.2. Tools, Equipment, and Communication

Empowering PWD to be economically active involves providing the necessary material conditions for their success. This includes the provision of adequate tools and equipment in line with workplace safety and health regulations, and specialized equipment and specific practices meant to increase, as much as possible, the freedom of people with disability to move, act, communicate, and otherwise interact with their surroundings and their peers, comfortably and on their own terms. Study results revealed significant disparities between factories, in this regard—while, in some factories, respondents were widely satisfied with the adequacy of safety measures and equipment for PWD, in others, workers indicated several problems, and multiple areas with much room for improvement.⁴⁰

In one of the KIIs, a MOL official underlined that "one factory [□] has been highly responsive to the Ministry's efforts, taking steps to facilitate the work of people with disability."⁴¹ This example both suggests that will to adapt and adopt best practices is not entirely absent from the sector, but should be encouraged and cultivated in a greater number of factories.

Other issues identified during site visits were inadequate chair heights, non-adjustable workstations, and an absence of signs and warnings adequately legible and/or adapted to workers with sensory disabilities in five of the factories, while the remaining seven did include clear signage, with nitid symbols and colors to facilitate their understanding. However, the placement and lighting of such signs could be improved in nearly all factories.

In general, access to information and in-house training for people with sensory disabilities proved difficult, as the programs and workshops provided did not include sign language interpreters⁴² or Braille translations of important documents or training material.⁴³ Only two of the factories had sign

37 Respondent, FGD #4.

38 Respondent, FGD #4

39 In-depth interview with a factory representative.

40 Respondents, FGDs #2, #4, #5, and #6.

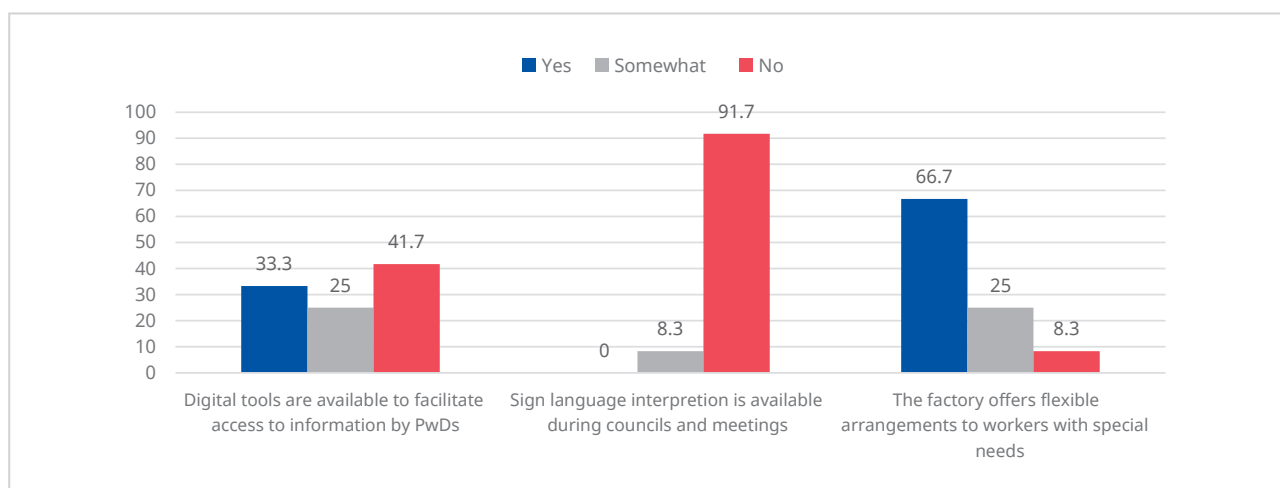
41 In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

42 Respondent, FGD #8.

43 Respondent, FGD #5.

language interpreters present at meetings and conferences, while another factory had a sign language interpreter on site—however, this person was not a qualified interpreter, but rather a worker who had learned sign language to communicate with a hearing impaired relative.

► **Figure 6. Accommodations for Workers with Disabilities in targeted factories**



A similar lack of accommodative measures was found regarding persons with other types of disabilities and impairments, including autism. One such worker who participated in the FGDs reported not being granted additional time to complete their emergency evacuation training, to ensure they fully understood every procedure, in spite of their autism diagnosis.

3.2.3. Inclusion efforts vs. discriminatory practices

Regarding the involvement of workers with disability in the development of factory policies impacting work environments, results were mixed. In four of the twelve factories, workers had a say in all matters concerning their work environment, while in five other factories they were able to influence some such decisions, but not all. In four of the factories, workers with disability were powerless to effect meaningful changes on their work environments, notably because they were virtually altogether absent from decision-making bodies and administrative positions, with only one PWD reportedly working in a supervisory role.⁴⁴

Another avenue through which workers with disability may promote their rights and voice their needs at the workplace is through membership to the internal committees and the sector trade union, the JTGCU. However, results showed that workers with disability, especially women, were entirely uninvolved—and broadly unaware—of these institutions and their activities.⁴⁵ The situation was confirmed by one trade union representative, who stated that PWD were underrepresented in the union.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Respondent, FGD #2.

⁴⁵ Respondent, FGD #7.

⁴⁶ In-depth interview with a union representative.

Trade unionists acknowledged that more actions needed to be taken to promote greater inclusion and to contemplate PWD in more of the union's activities. In the same vein, while the representatives of five factories claimed to provide adequate special training and workshops focusing on disability issues, and four factory managers claimed to provide at least some such programs, these claims were contradicted by the testimonies of participants in the FGDs—the only program any workers report taking part in had been organized by the union.⁴⁷



I have a sensory disability and cannot communicate with anyone. Every day [the supervisors] give me too much work for me to finish, and I'm unable to discuss it with them.

FGD participant



In addition to a lack of representation, individual workers reported being subject to some degree of discrimination, notably in regard to break times and workloads⁴⁸ and, in exceptional cases, verbal abuse.⁴⁹ Some workers also reported having been subject to wage discrimination throughout their careers, comparing their salary and career progression to that of their non-disabled peers.⁵⁰ Alas, a detailed assessment of the wages of all workers was not contemplated in this research and, therefore, no data was collected from non-disabled workers on this issue, to allow for cross-examination. The possible prevalence of wage discrimination warrants an assessment on its own in future research.

As one civil society representative emphasized, the particular needs of each worker are not commonly accommodated by employers, due to a lack of awareness of the needs of people with different types of disability. As the KII respondent stated: “For some workers with disability it is difficult to remain standing for long periods of time, and people with certain types of disability may need to take more frequent breaks, [but] some employers do not take such specificities into account.”⁵¹

Factory administrators noted in several KIIs that there are mechanism in place to identify and address the needs of PWD.⁵² However, the capacity of the factories' HR departments on disability issues could—and should—be improved. When asked to share their thoughts on workers with disability in general, one factory manager mused, recalling one employee: “[They are] very respectful and do everything I or their colleagues ask them to without complaining; when we're late, they finish our work without a word.”⁵³ While it is important to recognize the commitment and productivity of all workers, not least of whom those with disability, the phrasing employed in their praise in this and a few other instances seems to suggest the presence of a work culture that values silent obedience over dialogue, and a workers' productivity over their wellbeing.

⁴⁷ Respondent, FGD #6.

⁴⁸ Respondent, FGD #7., Respondent, FGD #8., Respondent, FGD #5.

⁴⁹ Respondent, FGD #9.

⁵⁰ Several Focus Group Discussions

⁵¹ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁵² In-depth interviews with a factory representatives.

⁵³ Respondent in FGD #4.

3.2.4. Access to training and education

In assessing the quality and adequateness of the training and education programs available in and outside the factories, two distinct types were contemplated. Emphasis was, by nature of the scope of the research, placed on education and training provided to workers with disability; however, it was also analysed to what extent, if at all, any programs, documents, and workshops were made available to the general workforce concerning people with disability and their rights, aimed at tackling prejudice and a lack of awareness among the peers and colleagues of PWD.

In most factories, technical and vocational training was limited to the specific tasks required for the job—i.e., basic onboarding. Only two respondents reported receiving further technical and vocational training.⁵⁴

In addition, the technical training provided to workers with disability was deemed stereotypical in nature, contributing to the concentration of PWD in a small number of occupations. As stated by a representative of the HCD: “Vocational training and employment are stereotyped; for example, hearing impaired workers receive training in carpentry and metalsmithing, but not in programming or IT, where there are also no programs for the visually impaired. To prevent this stereotyping, we have signed a memorandum requiring that vocational programs be accessible to all.”⁵⁵ In the factories, only few courses were offered, and awareness among workers with disability of the professional development programs offered was generally low. This was underlined by a civil society representative, who stated: “Unfortunately, there are [currently] no courses, but we’re working with the [HCD] to organize courses for workers with disability, which we expect to launch [at a major industrial complex].”⁵⁶ This seems to indicate that factories are prepared and willing to cooperate with stakeholders in preparing and implementing valuable initiatives on disability issues in the garment sector.

Together with enhanced efforts by the JTGCU, there are ample opportunities for cooperation between stakeholders on disability issues. From awareness raising to the provision of training and capacity-building programs for PWD, to promote their employability, one of the trade union representatives interview underlined the broad potential for further concerted action on these matters.⁵⁷



“Unfortunately, [our] factories do not have any strategies, trainings, or workshops regarding workers with disability, nor are there any currently under development. It would be possible to articulate with [rights] organizations to raise our awareness of disability issues and develop specific employment policies. That had not occurred to me before, but it has come to my attention now.”

Factory management representative



⁵⁴ Respondents; FGD #4.

⁵⁵ In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

⁵⁶ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁵⁷ In-depth interview with a representative of the JTGCU.

3.2.5. Social and cultural barriers

Several findings in this study also shed light on the impact of social and cultural factors on the situations of people with disability in the garment sector. The pervasiveness of unwelcoming, inadequate, and outright oppressive social and cultural environments often impacts the self-perception of workers with disability (and PWD at large) in ways that can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. Some workers, for example, shared that they needed more time to use the bathroom and faced a lack of understanding by their supervisors, who expressed frustration with their “extended breaks”⁵⁸. Greater sensitization among supervisory staff concerning the needs of PWD could go a long way in improving this situation. However, some interviews also revealed instances of discrimination at the managerial level. For instance, two of the factory managers refused to hire visually impaired workers, as they could not think of a position such workers would be suited for.⁵⁹ Similarly, regardless of qualifications, workers reported little hierarchical mobility within the factories, claiming they were only considered suited to a limited number of simple tasks.⁶⁰

Despite often being deemed unsuitable for more complex work by their superiors, workers with disability expressed a desire—and, in some cases, a determination—to be employed in positions that better matched their ambitions and qualifications, and where they would not so be so hampered by their impairments. While some stated they were capable of and/or had work experience in other roles, other FGD respondents echoed some of the broader societal preconception mentioned above—namely, the preconception that non-disabled workers are better suited for management and leadership positions.⁶¹



“We have the experience, we’re able to perform the jobs, and we’ve worked at the factory for a long time, but they won’t let us do any other type of work.”

FGD Participant



Unfortunately, such preconceptions were also allegedly shared by labor inspectors. According to one of the participants in the FGDs, upon seeing PWD working at the factory, a labor inspector sought to have them removed “out of concern for them,”⁶² although they were working normally, like everyone else.

Some of the hearing-impaired workers who participated in the study did not know Jordanian Sign Language (LIU). It was reported by one of the interpreters in the FGDs that some only knew forms of home sign—informal gestural communication systems often invented by hearing impaired children of hearing parents with no access to formal education for the hard of hearing. In addition, two of the hearing impaired workers who did not know LIU were also illiterate, which further hampered both their access to information and their ability to communicate.

According to respondents, neither managers nor coworkers make any efforts to communicate with hearing impaired workers. As one worker stated: “Employers find it hard to communicate with us, even

⁵⁸ Respondents, FGDs #1 and #3.

⁵⁹ In-depth interview with a factory management representative.

⁶⁰ Respondent, FGD #3.

⁶¹ Respondents, FGDs #3, #4, and #10.

⁶² Respondent, FGD #4.

though we can read lips and understand them, learn and perform new tasks; even though we're able to communicate with them in writing, officials and decisionmakers don't trust us and won't listen to us." ⁶³

Workers with disability also reported being subject to ridicule, silencing and, at times, forms of harassment such as shouting and name calling. Representatives of CSOs in the field confirmed that workers with disability were particularly vulnerable to psychological pressure, and that the psychological toll of such work environments often contributed to mental deterioration and other work-related illnesses.⁶⁴ On this subject, the HCD also confirmed to have received complaints regarding instances of HR and middle management staff referring to and calling workers by their disability [e.g., "blind one", "deaf one"] instead of their names.

Some FGD participants reported being given unreasonable workloads, especially when compared with their non-disabled peers. This was a common theme within some of the factories—workers with disability were commonly expected to be, not only as productive as their coworkers, but more productive still, typically in the absence of any form of facilitations or incentives. Such results suggest that vulnerabilities of workers with disability detailed thus far are not seriously acknowledged by a non-negligible number of staff in managerial positions, some of whom have reportedly respond to concerns raised by PWD with dismissive comments, such as *"if you don't like the job, then quit,"*⁶⁵ as recounted by one of the participants in the FGDs.

3.2.6. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

The situation described regarding the workers with disability requires a detailed assessment of available monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Few workers reported ever witnessing a labor inspector's visit. Only workers from three of the twelve factories had seen labor inspectors at their workplace. This is can be at least partly explained by the fact that, as the respondents recounted, such visits were rare, largely limited to a guided walk around the site, and never involved asking any workers with disability about their needs, concerns, and experiences at the factories.⁶⁶

Regarding complaint and report mechanisms, there were striking discrepancies between the accounts of factory managers and those of workers with disability. According to employers, all twelve factories under study provided adequate mechanisms for reporting instances of workplace violence or harassment, while five factories further claimed to provide a free dedicated hotline for people with disability to report such cases. Workers' testimonies contradicted these statements, illustrating the need for more information on these mechanisms among workers. These mechanisms are provided by the Ministry of Labour,⁶⁷ the JTGCU⁶⁸, the HCD, civil society organizations⁶⁹, as well as (to some extent) J-GATE ⁷⁰ and, in certain cases, some of the factories' international buyers.⁷¹

⁶³ Respondent, FGD #3., Respondents; FGD #2.

⁶⁴ In-depth interview with a civil society representative.

⁶⁵ Respondent, FGD #4.

⁶⁶ Respondents, FGDs #6 and #4.

⁶⁷ In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

⁶⁸ In-depth interview with a union representative.

⁶⁹ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁷⁰ In-depth interview with J-GATE representative

⁷¹ In-depth interview with a factory client.

Most of the abovementioned stakeholders stated that complaints involving workplace violence and harassment were rare. However, it is important to underline what was mentioned by a representative of the HCD in this respect: “In cases involving violence or harassment, no official action has been taken, nor have the cases been transferred to the judiciary, due to workers’ fear of losing their jobs. It’s not easy.”⁷²

Participants in the discussions mentioned two other means of filing complaints: reporting directly to a hierarchical superior, or using a complaints box,⁷³ when one was available. The workers were not aware of any hotlines for filing complaints and stressed the absence of standardized forms for reporting workplace violence: “For general complaints, we refer to our manager; if the issue is with the manager, we contact the administration. There is no phone line, but there is a complaints box.” For their part, the HCD emphasized the importance of anonymity in reporting, to prevent workers from being penalized or otherwise suffering repercussions for reporting instances of harassment and abuse.⁷⁴

Despite attempts to put adequate monitoring and reporting mechanisms into place, the broad majority of workers with disability was unaware of most avenues through which to submit anonymous and consequential reports or complaints, with adequate follow-through from the competent authorities. These findings suggest a need for increased efforts to raise awareness among workers and improve the effectiveness of the existing reporting mechanisms.

3.2.7. Female Workers with Disability

Some of the findings presented thus far partly illustrate how women were found to be at a greater risk of various forms of workplace discrimination, harassment, and abuse, in comparison with their male counterparts.

Women with disability were shown to face greater challenges and constraints securing employment than males. This phenomenon was described by experts as being, to a large extent, a reflection of broader sociocultural views and attitudes toward gender, which compounded with negative perceptions on PWD, exacerbating the alienation of women with disability from the labor market. One MOL representative and an expert on disability rights commented the following:

“[Female] workers with disability face twice as many problems, going by the cases we receive at the Ministry of Labor. They are subject to violence and discrimination even within their families, and are prevented from applying for jobs, especially in factories, for fear of harassment. [In light of this,] we provided training courses for the parents of women with disability, stressing factors such as the existence of security cameras in the factories. We were able to employ a good number of them after that.”⁷⁵

⁷² In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

⁷³ Respondent, FGD #6.

⁷⁴ In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

⁷⁵ In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

Discrimination between male and female workers with disability was also reported in regard to wages and promotions;⁷⁶ however, it was not possible to satisfactorily confirm such claims in the context of this study.

Several women reported being subject to or witnessing instances of sexual harassment and violence. The most common forms of sexual harassment were either verbal or involved some form of non-verbal insinuation or crude gesture; however, there were also several reported instances of physical violence.⁷⁷

One worker's testimony shed light on how the particular needs and challenges faced by women with disability as women are wont to leave them more vulnerable still. Per her account, it had become necessary to install security cameras in the cargo lifts due to the sheer number of sexual harassment complaints.⁷⁸ This is especially relevant considering the established dependency of several workers with disability on the few available elevators and, at times, on their coworkers, to move around the factories.

Two fundamental vulnerabilities were identified which contribute to the incidence of sexual harassment among female workers with disability. The first has to do with the nature of disability itself, in particular certain types of impairments, namely sensory, which prevent people from being fully aware of their surroundings, making it difficult for certain PWD to recount events the way they happened. Secondly, women with disability recounted stigma and taboos around both the act of harassment itself and the intersectionality with their role as women, which often left them feeling ashamed, alienated, or deprived of support.

3.2.8. Psychological Toll

The impact of these environments and phenomena on the mental health of people with disability is an important factor and should constitute the object of future research. Respondents reported dissatisfaction with their work, feeling undervalued or—what is worse—valueless and less capable than their non-disabled peers; their self-perception was warped by social attitudes to such an extent that it began to reflect them. One hearing impaired worker shared: “I would like to work in an administrative position, but we’re not good for that, we’re only good for sewing.”⁷⁹ In a similar vein, another added: “It is difficult to hire me for a leadership position because I suffer from hearing loss, so I will never be a production line supervisor, for instance.”⁸⁰

The psychological effects of such conditions on workers with disability also impact their development of social skills; as a result, it is commonly harder for them to engage and connect with others. Indeed, the supposed inclusion of workers with disability in the workforces' social circles was, in 83.3% of cases, limited to being in the same instant messaging group (on WhatsApp).⁸¹

⁷⁶ Respondent, FGD #5.

⁷⁷ Respondents, FGDs #4 and #5.

⁷⁸ Respondent, FGD #5.

⁷⁹ Respondent, FGD #1.

⁸⁰ Respondent, FGD #9.

⁸¹ Respondents, FGDs #4 and #11.

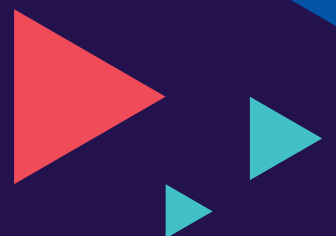
One of the experts interviewed underlined how the general lack of social skills among some people with disability further impacts their ability to benefit from capacity-building initiatives. Namely, one of the experts interviewed on disability issues described how a poor self-image limited the extent to which they were able to benefit from training programs: “People with disability [are more] introverted, and some of them are [both] unskilled [and] difficult to train. We face problems educating people with disability because of their own preconceptions regarding themselves.”⁸²

Several workers who participated in the study described symptoms of burnout, such as apathy, stress, depression, and low motivation. Yet, as attested by a representative of the MOH, the challenges and needs of PWD in factories have remained largely absent from the ministry’s agenda, with no psychological or physical health monitoring or promotion initiatives under planning at the time of research. In the words of the ministry representative: “The information I have concerning the challenges of people with disability in the factories is very scarce, because we’re not in contact with them; not even the factories’ clinics contact us. [□] In the workshops concerning people with disability, this topic was not addressed; it was mostly about rights, awareness, mental health, and the like.”⁸³

⁸² In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁸³ In-depth interview with a representative of the MOH.

▶ 4. Possible Interventions



► 4. Possible Interventions

This research has shown that the situation of people with disability working in Jordan's garment sector is complex and demands the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. An effective legal framework and compliance with quotas and anti-discrimination laws is key; however, so too are the infrastructural issues and sociocultural perceptions of workers with disabilities outlined in this document. Initiatives and mechanisms by different stakeholders can be amended and expanded to be more effective, and cooperation between stakeholders may yet be strengthened. One representative of the MOL mentioned that ensuring compliance with quotas was key and that, while there remained gaps in compliance, the ministry's incentives to the employment of PWD were reportedly bearing fruit. The representative went on to state that many garment factories were cooperating with the MOL despite not meeting the specified employment quotas, out of a desire for assistance in meeting them. In fact, this type of proactivity by employers prompted the MOL to launch the so-called 'golden list' of garment sector factories, which benefit from tax reductions for as long as they remain compliant with certain standards, including the employment quotas for workers with disability.⁸⁴

Research also pointed to the key role of civil society organizations in improving labor market conditions for PWD, notably through the provision of training. Civil society representatives stressed the importance of training and qualifying PWD even prior to their entry into the labor market, enabling them, not only to learn and hone marketable skills, but also essential aspects of workplace safety, social dynamics, and labor legislation.⁸⁵

Concerning accessibility and the adaptation of the factories' work environments to better accommodate the needs of workers with disability, experts emphasized the need to rehabilitate and adapt existing structures and means of transport, as well as some of the factories' internal systems and procedures. It is a particularly broad issue, which extends from building specifications to the methods through which information is transmitted to workers by management—which, as seen above, often excludes workers with certain types of disability.

Similarly, a representative of the JTGCU pointed out that institutions must take people with disability into account when planning construction and provide them with the necessary amenities to help them work.⁸⁶ A similar sentiment was shared by an international buyer, who recounted some best practices from other countries and factories they purchased from, such as the provision of transportation to workers with disability, the wide availability of adapted bathrooms, and the presence of elevators for PWD in the main stairwells.

For the Ministry of Health, appropriate workplace equipment was key.⁸⁷ Most stakeholders agreed that public and private, national and international organizations must cooperate with civil society for the

⁸⁴ In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

⁸⁵ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁸⁶ In-depth interview with a union representative.

⁸⁷ In-depth interview with a MOH representative.

advancement of the rights of PWD in Jordan. As one of the factories' buyers pointed out, "it is important to involve civil society organizations [□] and people with disability in all improvements, as non-disabled people may not understand the needs of people with disability in the work environment. This is where the role of civil society stands out."⁸⁸

Similarly, most of the experts interviewed opined that addressing the challenges facing people with disability in the Jordanian garment sector and labor market at large would require strengthening cooperation between stakeholders at all levels. The following statements illustrate the interviewees' attitudes on this matter:

- One CSO representative emphasized: "We should focus on partnerships between the International Labour Organization and [other] human rights organizations with a focus on labor rights or workers with disability, in addition to the Ministry of Labor, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Industry, factory [administrations], the Ministry of Health, and the Civil Defense Directorate. The nature of work and the workplace depends on them."⁸⁹
- For their part, a representative of the MOL similarly pointed out that disability issues should be considered within the context of a comprehensive human rights system: "This is a responsibility of the communities which people with disability are an integral part of. It begins with the media, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor—all ministries."⁹⁰
- Another CSO leader provided an example of institutional cooperation on issues pertaining to the rights of workers with disability in Jordan: "There is cooperation with the National Democratic Institute, [□] which has provided courses to people with disability, empowering them politically through education concerning their rights. There is also cooperation with the Amman-based [CSO for the Rights of People with Disability] on the provision of training programs for people with disability. We also [□] developed an awareness training package which has been successful in Jordan and will be presented before 150 foreign countries in Sweden."⁹¹
- The MOL also raised the question of the flexibilization of work for PWD as one of the next major steps in the advancement of their rights. According to a ministry representative, the recently approved flexible work system would yield "excellent results" if fully activated—a sentiment shared by several FGD respondents, as shown in section 4.1.4. The representative of the ministry also underlined the need to assist PWD in acquiring essential skills for employment promotion: "Workers with disability must acquire many skills, some related to work, others to interpersonal communication, and some [as simple as] what to wear for a job interview."⁹²
- The HCD echoed the calls for training and professional guidance, describing how a general lack of skills among people with disability negatively impacted the success of otherwise promising initiatives.⁹³

⁸⁸ In-depth interview with a factory client.

⁸⁹ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁹⁰ In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

⁹¹ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁹² In-depth interview with a MOL representative.

⁹³ In-depth interview with a representative of the HCD.

As suggested by the responses obtained during both the key informant interviews and focus group discussions, people with disability must be enabled and empowered to develop skills critical to the promotion of their success and integration into the labor market. While the needs and opportunities for training approaches are equally vast, the skill gaps of Jordanian PWD broadly fall into two categories: psychosocial, and practical-technical. Both are discussed below, in turn.

Many of the issues raised by workers and other respondents in this study concerned the mental and social wellbeing and skills of people with disability. These related to the workers' mental resilience, their perception of themselves and their own capabilities, the degree to which they were integrated into the factories' social environments, and related topics.

Regarding laws, standards, and regulations, one of the issues most commonly raised was that of ensuring compliance. Experts generally agreed on the overall adequacy of most current legislation affecting workers with disability but lamented the demonstrated lack of will among employers to meet quotas and comply with similar provisions. To address this issue, one CSO representative mentioned the need to amend legal loopholes affecting the employment of PWD and adding guarantees in the legal framework or the CBA: "The amendments we suggest are published on social media and in Braille. We were the first organization to print them in Braille. Examples of these amendments include regulations concerning the provision of [□] an appropriate work environment for workers with disability."⁹⁴ In the same vein, eliminating pay discrimination in all its forms—which, as was shown, may extend beyond wages, affecting overtime and holiday pay—is necessary to counteract the prevalent notion that the time and efforts of PWD are somehow worth less than those of others.⁹⁵

When considering the conditions and challenges faced by particular demographics in the labor market—and the best strategies to overcome them—trade unions are often the principal sources of information, guidance, and support. However, several stakeholders would like to see the JTGCU's role in promoting and advancing the rights of workers with disability in Jordan expanded.⁹⁶ A union representative reportedly recognized this gap, stating the union intended to bolster its efforts on disability issues: "We do not have any programs specialized in persons with disability. You have drawn our attention to the issue of improving conditions for workers with disability, which will be taken into account in the union's future programs."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁹⁵ In-depth interview with a CSO representative.

⁹⁶ In-depth interview with a factory representative.

⁹⁷ In-depth interview with a union representative.

► Good Practices

One noteworthy factory in one of the industrial complexes has begun to proactively adapt their facilities to better meet the needs of PWD. The process reportedly began with the installation of several bathrooms adapted to facilitate access and use by people with disability.

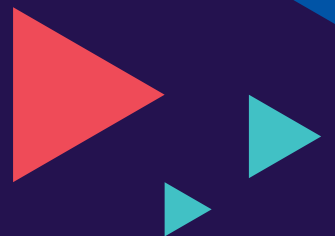
As one worker noted: “There is a total of forty-two bathrooms, three of which are adapted to people with disability.” In addition, information is displayed on a large screen at the factory in sign language, and sign language interpreters are occasionally available, though not always.

Workers with disability expressed satisfaction with the factory’s flexible work policies for PWD: “Everyone here is helpful; if a certain type of work is particularly taxing or difficult for us to perform [as PWD], we’re quickly transferred to a more appropriate station.” Another worker added: “The [□] manager who works with me is great; I take many breaks, because I tire easily and there is no one to help me, so [they] make it easier on me.”

The impact of these steps has been overwhelmingly positive and has greatly contributed to the inclusion of people with disability in this factory. It has also led to a high degree of worker satisfaction and retention. Most of the workers with disability who participated in the FGD held this factory reported having worked there for several years—some for over a decade. Part of the reason for the levels of retention and satisfaction at this factory was that workers with disability are able progress in their careers and given tasks that suit their abilities, needs, and aspirations. Most of the workers reported feeling “comfortable” in their job, while being productive. However, certain areas for improvement were also identified at this factory, notably regarding the representation of PWD at the administration level and with regard to improving communication with sensory impaired workers.

This example highlights the importance of a knowledge exchange between factories in order to improve the situation of workers with disabilities in the sector. It also shows the benefits for employers of providing accommodations for people with disability and facilitating their inclusion in the workplace, given the demonstrated benefits to worker satisfaction and productivity.

▶ 5. Recommendations



► 5. Recommendations

In light of the above, and of the outcomes of the research carried out for the purpose of this study, a list of recommendations was developed for the garment sector, for the further advancement of situation of PWD working in the garment sector:

- ***J-GATE in cooperation with HCD and ILO / Better Work:*** Develop guidelines for employing people with disabilities in the garment sector. There are many initiatives to employ people with disabilities in the sector; streamlining among programs and access to information on available applicants would facilitate the pooling of resources and the recruitment of PWD in the sector. In addition, the HCD is advised to invest in training employers on best practices on accessible and adaptive infrastructure for PWD.
- ***Garment sector employers, in cooperation with ILO / Better Work:*** Adapt or (re)design work environments in ways that facilitate the work, movement, and integration of PWD. With the goal of ultimately achieving compliance with international standards, the factory's facilities and infrastructure should continue to be adapted, piecemeal, to accommodate the needs of workers with disability—in this respect, one element of key importance is the paving of factory floors, which should facilitate mobility and special orientation, and by extension enhance workplace safety and accessibility.
- ***JTGCU, HCD, ILO / Better Work:*** Continue to promote the employment of PWD in the garment sector. While this is key for securing employment in the formal economy for PWD, further issues must be addressed, such as wage discrimination, inflexible work schedules, and a lack of awareness of disability issues within the factories, the labor market, and in society at large. One possible first step toward addressing this issue would be to collect and analyze up-to-date wage data, sorted by gender, disability, nationality, and other such factors.
- ***MOL as part of the national employment program, in cooperation with J-GATE and VTC:*** Develop and implement vocational programs with the goal of promoting the employment of PWD in the garment sector. Respondents in both the FGDs and KIIs mentioned a lack of education and training as a hurdle to permanent employment and career development for PWD. Programs targeting the acquisition and development, by PWD, of both soft and technical skills shown to enhance employability in the sector would both contribute to promoting employment among PWD and provide garment factories with ever more qualified staff.
- ***MOL, J-GATE, JTGCU, and ILO / Better Work:*** Provide workshops on the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers at the factory level to workers with disability, employers, and trade union members. By making the same information on the applicable laws, rights and standards available to all participants, employing inclusive and adapted methods and formats, such workshops would help, not only to clarify any issues regarding labor relations, but also to stem the exclusion of PWD and promote awareness of their rights.

- ***MOL and ILO / Better Work:*** Increase the training capacity of the MOL to better detect workers' rights violations involving at the factory level. The improved screening and monitoring of such incidents would provide insight into any correlations between disability and labor rights violations. At the broader level, it would provide additional data and contribute to identifying opportunities for intervention concerning the rights of workers in general, and PWD in particular, in Jordan's garment sector.
- ***ILO / BWJ, JTGCU, concerned CSOs, J-GATE, and garment sector employers:*** Plan and implement broad awareness-raising and educational campaigns aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes and misguided attitudes toward PWD. Social stigma, prejudices and misconceptions remain among the main factors hindering the employment of PWD, not only in the sector, but in the labor market as a whole. It is necessary to continue implementing and supporting awareness-raising initiatives aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes concerning disability.
- ***Garment sector employers, JTGCU, and J-GATE:*** Promote the involvement of workers with disability in the development and discussion of factory policies, as well as in union affairs. The participation of PWD in these processes and institutions is considered a key step for promoting their integration, not only at the workplace or in the labor market, but as members of broader society.

All stakeholders should encourage and participate in the exchange of information, methodologies and best practices, cooperating and engaging in regular dialogue with the goal of continuously improving the situation of workers with disability in Jordan's garment sector. Furthermore, concerted efforts are necessary to guarantee that reporting and complaint mechanisms are available to all workers, including PWD.

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