ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

CONCEPT NOTE & TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Investing in Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities

Social Development Division
Wednesday, 9 December (09:00-16:30 UCT+7)
United Nations Conference Center, Conference Room 3
Bangkok, Thailand and Online

Background

Persons with disabilities across Asia and the Pacific continue to face systemic barriers to full and equal participation in economic life, including employment, entrepreneurship, and market access. While there has been growing recognition of disability inclusion within policy discussions, business practice and development cooperation, progress remains uneven across the region. In many countries, opportunities remain limited in formal employment pathways, entrepreneurship, procurement and the broader value chains.

Building on the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032, this Regional Forum is being convened as part of ESCAP's broader initiative on the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. Since 2024, the regional technical cooperation initiative has supported tailored in-country technical support in China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam. These interventions have focused primarily on strengthening policy ecosystems and building capacities of key stakeholders for disability-inclusive employment and entrepreneurship, while also generating lessons on how Governments, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), the private sector and development partners can work together more effectively. In parallel, ESCAP has been implementing digital inclusion projects in countries, including China, India and Viet Nam which also contributed to the economic empowerment of the disability community.

Altogether, these efforts on the ground have contributed to an increasing maturing conceptual framework of disability-inclusive employment and business while generating technical resources that could be used to inform action in a broader range of countries in our region.

Various regional dialogues ESCAP has convened in recent years have underscored the need to adopt a more inclusive understanding of disability-inclusive economic empowerment. It encompasses not only access to formal employment, but also informal work, community-level entrepreneurship, accessible products and services, inclusive innovation, value chains, and investment frameworks. Action in some Asia-Pacific countries have also emerged to foster collective and scalable investment in economic empowerment of persons with disabilities: embedding disability inclusion within stock exchanges' investor empowerment frameworks and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), promoting inclusive procurement, co-designing policies and standards with OPDs, and improving disability-inclusive data and monitoring systems in the economic sector.

This Regional Forum will provide a platform to consolidate good practices appropriate to different labour market and economic contexts, take stock of lessons learned, exchange experiences in multi-stakeholder collaboration, and identify practical and strategic pathways to advance economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. The Forum will bring together key stakeholders – policy makers, OPDs, private-sector leaders - leading policy development, private sector action, and financing for disability inclusion, with a view to strengthening action-oriented collaboration and broadening the partnership landscape. **Ultimately, the Forum will aim to foster a shared understanding of "what" and "how" about investing in economic empowerment of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific**.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the Regional Forum are to:

- Share good practices, lessons learned, innovations and opportunities in advancing economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, through policy ecosystem building, capacity development, and regional cooperation.
- Explore partnership models for economic empowerment of persons with disabilities in diverse social and economic contexts.
- Facilitate dialogue around fostering strategic and sustainable financing for disability inclusion.

Modality

The Regional Forum will be held in a hybrid format on **Wednesday, 9 December 2026, from 09:00 to 16:30 (Bangkok-time, UCT+7)** in **Conference Room 3** at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, and online via the **Zoom** platform.

All participants are kindly advised to register well in advance. For **in-person participants**, please register via https://indico.un.org/event/1026237/registrations/28577/ in order to allow security screening and entry into the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok. For **online participants**, kindly register via the following link: https://zoom.us/meeting/register/5UcMiPkJRlaaL_zBVtP_XQ

in order to receive the Zoom meeting link. **Kindly note that only pre-vetted registrants will be accepted**.

Accessibility support will be provided to participants with disabilities, including through the provision of real-time captioning, International Sign Language interpretation, and other accessibility-related services. Accessible facilities, including accessible toilets and lifts are available in the United Nations Conference Center.

Tentative Programme

Time	Agenda
8:30-09:00	**Registration**
09:00-09:15	**Opening and Introduction** **Welcome Remarks**: ○ Ms. Lin Yang, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP (tbc) ○ Mr. Ye Xuenong, Permanent Representative of China to ESCAP (tbc)
09:15- 09:35	**Session 1: The model framework of disability-inclusive employment and business** **Keynote presentation**: ESCAP's conceptual framework for economic empowerment of persons with disabilities ○ Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP
09:35- 09:50	Group photo
09:50-10:50	**Session 2 – Countries in Action** *This session will explore what ecosystem leads to meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce and the economy. We will hear from speakers from five Asia-Pacific countries with deliberate action plans, each with a unique focus pertaining to their contexts (Part 1). This will be followed by four other speakers offering insights on and experiences in mobilizing multi-stakeholder partnerships and bridging critical implementation capacity gaps (Part 2).* **Moderator:** Susan Scotts-Parker, Founder & CEO, Business Disability International **Part 1: Trailblazer presentations** (10min each): • Ms. Xu Ling, Director-General, International Affairs Department, China Disabled Persons' Federation

	• Ms. Dwi Rahayuningsih, Junior Expert Planner, Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas), Indonesia • Ms. Saranchuluun Otgon, Member of the Parliament, Mongolia • Ms. Nantanoot Suwannawut, Director, International Cooperation Section, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEP), Thailand • Ms. Lê Hà, Director, FTU Innovation and Incubation Space (FIIS), Viet Nam
10:50-11:05	Coffee break
11:05-11:45	**Session 2 (continued)** **Part 2: Building the whole-of-village support** *Short presentations followed by interactive panel discussion* **Pathfinder 1**: Mr. Neeraj Krishnan, Purple Economy Movement Head, Enable India **Pathfinder 2**: Mr. Jurgen Menze, Coordinator, ILO Global Business and Disability Network **Pathfinder 3:** Mr. Max Simpson, Steps/Thailand Business and Disability Network **Pathfinder 4**: TBC representative, Agency for Private Enterprise and Cooperative Development (APED), Ministry of Finance, Viet Nam **Pathfinder 5**: TBC private sector representative
11:45- 12:00	**Q&A**
12:00– 13:30	**Lunch Break**
13:30– 14:15	**Session 3: Financing Disability Inclusion: Crossing the Impact Frontier** *This session aims to explore what innovative financing schemes make good sense for healthier and sustainable financing in disability inclusion. What strategic focus areas have emerged for social impact and/or commercial viability? What motivates or concerns different types of investors? The session will contain three parts as follows.* **Part 1: Opening the space for promises** *In this part, we will hear from 3 keynote speakers representing business-disability advocates, OPD leader, and What opportunities arise for financing in the scope of disability inclusion?*

	Moderator: Ms. Tingting Chen, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, ESCAP **Keynote 1: The business and ethical case is settled — The financing isn't** Speaker: Ms. Susan Scott-Parker, Founder & CEO, Business Disability International **Keynote 2**: **Ground truth — What the demand side has built** Speaker: Mr. Walter Tsui, Founder & CEO, CareER Association (OPD), Hong Kong, China **Keynote 3**: **Making disability inclusion actionable for investors and the capital market** (tentative title) Speaker: Ms. Mazliana Mohamad, Acting Director Group Sustainability, Bursa Malaysia
14:15- 14:55	**Part 2: Panel Discussion on Building the Blended Finance Architecture for Disability Inclusion** *Focus: Designing the ecosystem to use catalytic public/sovereign capital and development frameworks to de-risk disability-inclusive projects, create standardized asset classes, and build macro infrastructure that shifts inclusion from a "charity case" to an "investable case". Panelists will contribute from the angles of blended finance engineering and market development.* **Moderator:** TBC Panelists: • **Catalytic Donor:** Ms. Anna Mallard, Program Manager, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Government (tbc) • **Multilateral De-risker**: Mr. Benjamin M. Graham, Director, Fragility and Engagement Division, Asian Development Bank (tbc) • **Capital Market Accelerator**: Ms. Mazliana Mohamad, Acting Director Group Sustainability, Bursa Malaysia
14:55- 15:10	**Coffee break**
15:10- 15:50	**Part 3: Panel Discussion on Mobilizing Active Impact Capital to the Disability Inclusion Frontier** *Focus: Deploy the capital – how to source, structure, and invest active private capital, venture philanthropy, and thematic bonds directly into small- to medium enterprises (SMEs) and initiatives that employ, serve, and empower persons with disabilities.*

	Moderator: TBC Panelists: • **Institutional Private Investor**: Ms. Hang Vu, Operations Officer – Gender and Economic Inclusion Group, International Finance Corporation (IFC) • **Innovative Instrument Designer**: Mr. Jonathan Abeywickrema, Director for Investment Banking and Impact Partners, Impact Investment Exchange (IIX) • **Venture Philanthropist**: Ms. Lillian Li, Executive Director, Social Impact Partners, Hong Kong, China
15:50- 16:15	**Plenary intervention**
16:15– 16:30	**Closing remarks**

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