

**Yuval Wagner, Access Israel**

Before I begin, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak at such an important event, it is truly an honor to be here with you.

The Convention recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others.

The Convention recognizes the right to work in an environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

States parties are called upon to “promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures.

The 2030 Agenda constitutes a global development agenda for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

In the 2030 Agenda, Member States pledged to leave no one behind.

In Israel the legislation for employing people with disabilities requires every private company with more than 100 employees to employ at least 3% employees with disabilities in an accessible and inclusive working environment. In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of people with disabilities that are employed. Today, the employment rate for people with disabilities is 60% and the employment rate for people with severe disabilities is 47%.

This is a significant improvement, as employment rates among this group stood at just 32% in 2011.

However, there is still a considerable gap in employment between people with disabilities and people without disabilities – as the employment rate among people without a disability stands at 79%.

There are key barriers and challenges on the journey to full equality and employment of people with disabilities and their true inclusion in the labor market, such as:

- The awareness of the potential of employing people with disabilities,
- The accessibility of the built environment,
- Accessible transportation,
- Accessible workplaces,
- Accessible ICT to information and communications technology.
- Training for the HR recruitment staff
- Awareness and accessibility training for all employees
- Awareness by people with disabilities of possible job openings
- And more

Dealing with all these barriers is very important to improve the employment of people with disabilities. But I believe that in order to reach the true goal of full accessible and inclusive employment, we have to make sure that the decision makers of an organization truly understand and believe that employment of people with disabilities

is a very important investment for their company and the right business decision to make.

In order to achieve this, our methods of implementation should be through awareness, research, best practices, trainings, round tables and providing management, support staff, and fellow co-workers with tools and understanding on how to create an accessible environment

A manager that believes in this mission will make it happen.

We at Access Israel, are true believers of awareness, but a special kind of awareness. We believe the awareness should be made by people with disabilities themselves. We believe that the managers, decision makers and all employees of an organization must experience themselves what it means to feel and to be with a disability - with all kinds of disabilities. We created experiential activities that simulate the challenges that people with disabilities face. We learned that when people understand what it feels like to have a disability, they understand the importance of creating an accessible and inclusive environment.

To achieve full inclusive employment, it is important that accessibility is provided at all stages; from the recruitment to employment. This means, that the available jobs should be published in an accessible form, that HR knows how to go through a CV of a potential employee with disability and that the organization offers an accessible and inclusive physical and social environment.

To give you one quick example: A bank employed a person with hearing disability and was very proud of it, but very quickly problems came up and the manager complained that this employee with disability often didn't do the tasks correctly. We intervened and to help out and learned that the problem was that the manager was chewing gum often which made it difficult for the employee to read his lips and understand the instruction. This is just a quick example that shows the importance of accessibility in all steps of employment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, because of the lockdowns, for the first time everyone in the country and in the world feels what people with disabilities feel all the time - wanting to go somewhere or do something but you simply cannot.

During the pandemic we learned the potential of technologies that enable us to work remotely but we also learned how important it is to make sure that those technologies are fully accessible.

On the one hand, technologies can enable an employee to work remotely from home and this can be great for people with disabilities that don't have accessible transportation to work.

But on the other hand, it can be that there is no Internet at the employees' home, or he or she doesn't have an accessible working environment at home and this is an issue that has to be taken care of to enable accessible inclusive remote employment.

This pandemic has shown us the amazing potential of technologies to enable the employment of people with disabilities, but it also raised some new barriers and challenges, such as:

- Internet availability
- Computer and software availability
- Accessible working environment
- Digital orientation
- Accessibility of virtual meetings and the technologies used
- Accessibility of software used internally by the organization
- Accessibility in local language

So, we call the managers of private businesses to truly learn and understand the business potential of employing people disabilities and then take action, and make it happen

**Final Remark:**

Access Israel became a Special Advisor to the CRPD and we are proud to be part of this amazing global accessibility community. We are here to share our experience in the last 20 years, learn from you and share with each other best practices to make sure to leave no one behind.