

► A powerful partnership to drive disability inclusion in business: ILO GBDN and the Zero Project

1. The Zero Project

[The Zero Project](#), an initiative by the Austrian non-profit [Essl Foundation](#), has the mission of advancing the implementation of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) by finding and sharing solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of all persons with disabilities. Across all activities, the Zero Project works closely with a [global and cross-sectoral network of more than 10,000 experts](#). Every year, it leads a community-guided research process to identify good practices and policies that demonstrate innovation, impact, and scalability. These solutions receive [“Zero Project Awards”](#) and are supported through a range of events and activities, from the annual global [Zero Project Conference](#) to regionalised events, as well as the [Zero Project Technology Forum](#), initiatives, and publications.

The Zero Project’s [annual research cycle](#) is closely aligned with the CRPD: Accessibility, Education, Employment, Independent Living and Political Participation are each addressed in a four-year cycle. In addition, Assistive Technology (AT) is included as a research topic every year, due to its significance for disability inclusion and rapid developments in the sector. [Inclusive Arts](#) are addressed as a cross-cutting topic.

Every year in May, the Zero Project activates its global network to identify innovative solutions through a Call for Nominations (#ZeroCall) for the Zero Project Awards. In the 2025/2026 cycle, 586 nominations from 93 countries were submitted. The Call for Nominations is followed by several months of evaluation through an [extensive multi-step selection process](#), which involves hundreds of experts with and without disabilities in peer-review sessions, along with screening and comprehensive factchecking. This process results in a cohort of approximately 75 innovations that are recognised through the “Zero Project Awards”.

The global Zero Project Conference (#ZeroCon) is held at the [United Nations Office at Vienna](#), bringing together more than 1,000 participants from around 100 countries every year. It focuses on cross-sector collaboration to support disability innovation. Therefore, the conference agenda is centred around the “Zero Project Awardees”.



Participants at the Zero Project Conference 2026

With the objective of overcoming language, cultural or geographical barriers, and connecting its global network with regional innovation ecosystems, the Zero Project pursues strategic partnerships in [Ibero-America](#) (Fundación Descúbreme), [India](#) (Youth4Jobs), and the [Asia Pacific](#) (SG Enable).

The [Zero Project Technology Forum](#) provides a platform where highly innovative technology-based solutions - AT innovations - that drive accessibility and disability inclusion are connected to potential Support Partners. The Zero Project partners with organisations such as UnExcluded in Singapore to bring this event format to regional tech hubs.

Through other strategic partnerships, the Zero Project supports the replication of highly scalable innovations ([Zero Project Scaling Solutions](#)) and champions disability-inclusive AI ([Equitable AI Alliance](#)) by placing speakers at leading conferences worldwide.

2. ILO Global Business and Disability Network

Established in 2010, the [ILO Global Business and Disability Network](#) (GBDN) is a unique employers-led worldwide network of more than [45 multinational enterprises, more than 45 National Business and Disability Networks](#) (NBDN)¹, including in developing countries, as well as a few non-business associate members.

The development, identification and dissemination of globally applicable good corporate disability inclusion practices lie at the heart of the ILO GBDN's work – with the overall goal of increasing employment rates of persons with disabilities.

In 2015, the ILO GBDN introduced its [Charter](#) which commits its company signatories to support ten disability inclusion principles.

3. ILO GBDN in the Zero Project Conference



ILO GBDN-led session at at the Zero Project Conference 2026

In recent years, the annual Zero Project Conference has been a mutually beneficial point of collaboration, especially in the areas of Education, Employment, and Accessibility. For instance, the ILO GBDN partners with the Zero Project to encourage companies to nominate their good practices, particularly in the area of disability-inclusive employment.

The ILO GBDN further helps to promote the Zero Project to the general public through the ILO GBDN newsletters, social media, and website.

Before the call for submissions on good practices on employment for the 2025 Zero Project Conference, the ILO GBDN and the Zero Project held the webinar "[Disability-](#)

[inclusive Employment: Corporate Nominations for #ZeroCall25](#)".

The Zero Project Conferences – at global as well as regional levels – provide opportunities for the ILO GBDN to present latest trends and practices related to disability inclusion in business.

Global Zero Project Conferences

- **2026:** ILO GBDN-led session "[Accessibility powering employment: leadership by business](#)", featuring ILO GBDN members Bayer, Novartis, AXA, Adecco and Pluxee.
- **2025:**
 - i) ILO-GBDN-led session "[Putting the I in ESG: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Sustainability Practices](#)", featuring ILO GBDN members Capgemini and Siemens Energy.
 - ii) "[ESG, Circular Economy, and Disability-Inclusion](#)" session, in which the ILO GBDN presented its 2024 report on disability-inclusive sustainability practices by companies and investors.
- **2023:** Fireside chat on the "[ILO GBDN's Self-Assessment Tool for companies](#)".
- **2022:** ILO GBDN-led session "[Reaping the business benefits of accessibility](#)", featuring ILO GBDN members Accenture, Atos, GSK, Repsol and Standard Chartered Bank.
- **2021:** ILO-led session "[An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities](#)".
- **2018:** ILO-led session "[Forum on reasonable adjustments in the workplace](#)".

Regional Zero Project Conferences

- **2025 (India):** "Will AI Leave Persons with Disabilities Behind?" session, in which the ILO GBDN presented its work on the nexus of employment, disability inclusion, and AI.

¹ NBDN provide country-level platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises, nationally or regionally operating companies as well as local branches of multinational enterprises for peer-to-peer exchange and support on disability inclusion issues, in collaboration with relevant non-business actors like local and international Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.

- **2025 (Asia Pacific):** "[Collaboration across borders](#)" session, in which the ILO GBDN presented its Asia-Pacific regional work.
- **2025 (Ibero-America):** ILO GBDN-co-led session "[Global collaboration for inclusion: The potential of working as network](#)" (*Colaboración global por la inclusión: El potencial del trabajo en red*).
- **2024 (Ibero-America):** ILO GBDN-led session "[Collaborative networks: An opportunity for business growth](#)" (*Redes colaborativas: Una oportunidad para el crecimiento de las empresas*).
- **2023 (India):** "How can global collaboration on innovative solutions and technology support inclusive employment in India?" session, featuring the ILO GBDN's work.



Speakers at the "Will AI Leave Persons with Disabilities Behind?" session of the Zero Project India Conference 2025

4. ILO GBDN members as Zero Project Awardees

The collaboration has also been beneficial to ILO GBDN members across the globe. The Zero Project Awards recognise innovative, scalable, and impactful solutions that improve the lives of persons with disabilities. Over the years, several ILO GBDN members have been Zero Project Awardees:

- **2026:**
 - Bayer**, for its integrated enterprise accessibility framework.
 - Unilever**, for its packaging standard featuring accessible QR codes.
- **2025:**
 - Capgemini**, for its NeuroInclusion programme aiming at an inclusive workplace for individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities.
 - Inditex**, for its Inclusion Programme to provide equal opportunities and access to work, thus providing possibilities for people with all types of disabilities to learn and grow.
 - Salesforce**, for its Workforce Navigators training programme to provide professionals with disabilities with technical skills and certifications.
- **2022:**
 - Atos**, for its Global Accessibility and Digital Inclusion Policy, Governance & Programme.
- **2021:**
 - Microsoft**, for its Seeing AI app, for people who are blind or visually impaired - using AI and augmented reality.
 - Bangladesh Business and Disability Network**, for its promotion of innovative practices in disability-inclusive employment.



Innovative Practice in Employment from the Business Sector



2021 Zero Project Award for the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network

5. Opportunities to strengthen collaboration and engagement

Mutual promotion of each other's work, especially in the areas of interest to the ILO GBDN - Education, Employment, Accessibility - has been an ongoing collaborative effort. The ILO GBDN focuses on promoting disability-inclusive employment and sharing good corporate practices in this area, both of which are also priorities for Zero Project Conferences and related awards. A mutual collaboration to promote both the ILO GBDN global conferences and the Zero Project annual conferences ensures a wider reach, specifically to the members of both initiatives.

The ILO GBDN also regularly hosts regional conferences. Frequently, additional efforts by the ILO GBDN are put on a particular geographic region and one way to strengthen the mutual collaboration is by

creating synergies between ILO GBDN regional conferences with the Zero Project’s regional conferences, including by working with National Business and Disability Networks in the countries of the particular region.

For instance, in 2025, the Zero Project’s Asia Pacific Symposium took place a day after the ILO GBDN’s 2nd Asia-Pacific regional conference “[Catalyst for Change: Disability-Inclusive Business in Asia-Pacific](#)” - also featuring participation by representatives of Zero Project and the Equitable AI Alliance in the session “[Ecosystem: joint efforts for the employment of persons with disabilities](#)”. In total, 19 ILO GBDN delegates from 12 countries joined the international delegation to the Zero Project Asia Pacific Symposium in 2025.

Moreover, the ILO GBDN and the Zero Project have coordinated speaker placements at other events, such as the [WSIS+20 High-Level Event in Geneva](#) to promote the development and use of disability-inclusive AI.

Mutual collaboration also extends beyond events. Through experts of the Equitable AI Alliance, the Zero Project was invited to provide technical input to the ILO GBDN’s policy brief “[AI and the Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Opportunities, Risks and Recommendations](#)”. The ILO GBDN also contributes to the [Equitable AI Knowledge Hub](#), a public and carefully curated database of resources relating to disability-inclusive AI innovation.

Contact details

International Labour Organization

Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

ILO Global Business and Disability Network

+41 22 799 7273
businessanddisability@ilo.org
www.businessanddisability.org