

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE THEME
“PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS”
12 NOVEMBER 2009 - ILO, GENEVA**

**REMARKS BY
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Ladies and Gentlemen.

As we have heard today from our panellists, the economic crisis affects the livelihoods of almost everyone in an increasingly connected world--and especially people with disabilities.

Some things may seem a bit disheartening. Others have been inspiring. You've heard from government, worker, employer and civil society representatives. You've heard from a private citizen. All have asked what can be done to help address the problem of exclusion of people with disabilities from solutions and actions to tackle the crisis.

So, what does the ILO see as the main issues to be tackled in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities? I'd like to draw attention to a few main issues:

- Labour force participation
 - while many disabled persons have overcome significant barriers to finding work, their overall workforce participation and employment rates are significantly lower than those of non-disabled persons
 - Disabled women face greater barriers in this, than men with disabilities and non-disabled women
- Wages
 - When people with disabilities work, they are more likely to earn lower wages or receive smaller incomes than non-disabled persons. This is especially the case for women with disabilities
- Education and vocational training
 - Education is crucial to future participation in training, employment and self-employment. Yet around one in ten disabled children attend school in developing countries
 - Fewer disabled young men and women get the opportunity to attend vocational training in skills that lead to decent jobs
- Poverty
 - There is a significant link between poverty and disability, with disabled people and their families more likely to live in poverty than non-disabled people

Underlying these issues are factors that contribute to exclusion, sometimes written in laws and policies, sometimes embedded in practices in schools, training centres and other services, and sometimes due to inaccessible buildings and information. Very often, the issues can be traced back to mistaken assumptions about the

capacity of disabled persons to contribute and take part in the labour force and in society.

What steps are we taking to address these issues?

The simplest way to answer this question is to say that we have a twin track approach:

The first allows for disability specific programmes or initiatives at the country level aimed at overcoming particular disadvantages or obstacles experienced by some people with disabilities.

The second track seeks to ensure that disabled persons are included in mainstream services and programmes on vocational training, employment, entrepreneurship development and micro-finance.

Until full inclusion and equal opportunity and treatment become a reality, the twin-track approach is necessary. In both approaches, we work through research, building knowledge on good practices, advocacy, capacity building, and technical cooperation services. Our work also involves outreach to media, more specifically, sharing the results of our experiences gained from research and lessons learned.

So, what can we take from today's discussion?

The main point of today's gathering is that no one can do this alone. Broadly speaking, we all have a part to play....

- To adopt and implement policies that ensure the rights and entitlements of disabled citizens.
- To provide resources that allow and ensure that mainstream services such as health and education, skills development and training are accessible to disabled people.
- To help promote the employment of women and men with disabilities, and
- To raise awareness of disability issues, lobby and advocate for their rights and hold accountable those responsible.

I think we have a long way to go, but together we can make a difference.

We have set aside this next part of the discussion for all of us to think about ideas on how to move forward from here. More specially, how can we all make a difference in our respective communities, places of work and daily lives to ensure that people with disabilities are included... and to meet the challenge of exclusion head on.

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