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NETWORK

► Driving disability inclusion in companies at country level



2023 survey among National Business and Disability Networks worldwide

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► Executive summary

National Business and Disability Networks (NBDNs) can provide non-judgmental and encouraging employers-led platforms at country level. They aim to improve the confidence and capability of companies of any size to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly in the area of employment. NBDNs provide support and guidance to companies on topics related to disability inclusion and allow for peer-to-peer learning among their corporate members dedicated to making their work culture and environments inclusive.¹

To better understand the work, success stories, challenges and support needs of NBDNs – with focus on the year 2023 – a bilingual (English and Spanish) survey by the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN) was sent to the coordinating entities of the 40 NBDNs that were members of the ILO GBDN at the end of December 2023. This analysis is based on the responses by 32 NBDNs that were received until mid-March 2024.

Corporate membership base

NBDNs are primarily comprised of companies, which can include both private and public sector companies. Based on the responses received to this survey, six NBDNs had less than 10 company members, two NBDNs had over 450 company members, while the rest range from 15 to some 100 corporate members. Based on the responses from the survey, it is worth noting that some multinational enterprises are part of several NBDNs. Accenture, Unilever, Nestlé, Sodexo and IBM all are members in more than five NBDNs.

Strategic partnerships

National employers' associations are one of the entities that can host NBDNs, and these along with Local Networks of the United Nations Global Compact can be valuable partners for NBDNs. These entities can provide business expertise and support to NBDNs, ultimately helping with their sustainability. More than half of the NBDNs said they collaborate regularly with the national employers' association in their respective country. About a third of NBDNs partner with the Local Network of the UN Global Compact.

Key achievements and challenges

Although NBDNs exist in all geographical regions and vary a lot in size, they share many similar achievements, challenges and goals. Commonly shared achievements in 2023 include:

- *Growing their membership base and expanding their network.* This was in relation to getting more members to join their network, but also internally, by hiring more employees and increase NBDNs' human resources.
- *Conducting more trainings and providing knowledge sharing opportunities* for corporate members – to better support and include persons with disabilities in their respective company – and for persons with disabilities – to gain the skills and knowledge to enter and stay in the workforce.
- *Hosting an increased number of events on disability inclusion.* This included informative webinars allowing for the sharing of best practices, but also conferences and celebratory events in which NBDNs share the work they have done on disability inclusion.

¹ [ILO \(2023\) The 'Why' and 'How' of National Business and Disability Networks](#)

NBDNs also face similar challenges when it comes to sustaining their network and implementing all their anticipated work. Some of the challenges NBDNs expressed they faced in 2023 were:

- *A lack of resources, both financial and human resources.* This particular challenge was expressed most commonly by NBDNs. Many stated that a lack of resources negatively impacted their ability to achieve the goals they had for their network. There is a growing demand of work on disability inclusion in global and national business communities and NBDNs are facing challenges when it comes to being able to meet these demands.
- *Volatile economic climate in their respective country.* Some NBDNs said that the economic climate and political uncertainty created challenges for them to effectively engage with relevant stakeholders. Further economic and political uncertainties affected their membership base because fewer companies reached out to their network.
- *Struggling to increase their membership base.* Although some NBDNs expressed that they were able to grow their network in 2023, several networks stated that gaining new corporate members was still a major challenge.

Plans for 2024

The key issues many NBDNs want to focus on in 2024 can be grouped into three areas of work:

- *To improve the governance structure of their network.* This meant bringing greater clarity to the roles and responsibilities within the NBDN context, which can ultimately allow for more efficiency and impact.
- *To better communicate with their members and connect them better with each other.* This also included promoting and sharing useful information and resources among their network members to increase the visibility of the NBDNs' work and added value to companies.
- *To grow the membership base further.* As membership is at the core of a NBDN, many prioritise to increase their membership base and get more companies interested and involved.

Key recommendations to NBDNs

- Identify multinational enterprise members in other NBDNs that are not yet members in one's own NBDN and encourage these companies' membership, e.g. by collaborating with other NBDNs and the ILO GBDN.
- Initiate or strengthen strategic partnerships with relevant actors at both national, regional and global level, e.g. by reaching out to Local Networks of the United Nations Global Compact (if they exist in the country in question), sector-specific business associations, as well as international bilateral and multilateral development partners.
- Diversify NBDN's funding streams, including funding from domestic and international partners, charging fees for NBDN's activities and membership, and linking the NBDN's work to development programmes in which NBDNs can play the role of implementing partners.
- Promote the use of the free ILO GBDN Self-Assessment Tool for companies among NBDNs' corporate members and encourage them to share their most pressing needs to allow NBDNs to better plan and prioritise their actions and services vis-à-vis their members.

► Introduction

Companies are increasingly recognising the benefits and importance of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Their work on disability inclusion is a continuous learning journey and can be supported by collaborating and exchanging with other companies. NBDNs are key in this regard.

NBDNs can help facilitate peer-to-peer learning and the exchange of good practices as well as technically guide companies on disability inclusion, including through publications, tools and events. NBDNs can also establish and promote corporate partnerships on disability inclusion with relevant actors in the labour market, including Employer and Business Membership Organizations (EBMOs), workers' organisations, public authorities like Ministries of Labour as well as Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

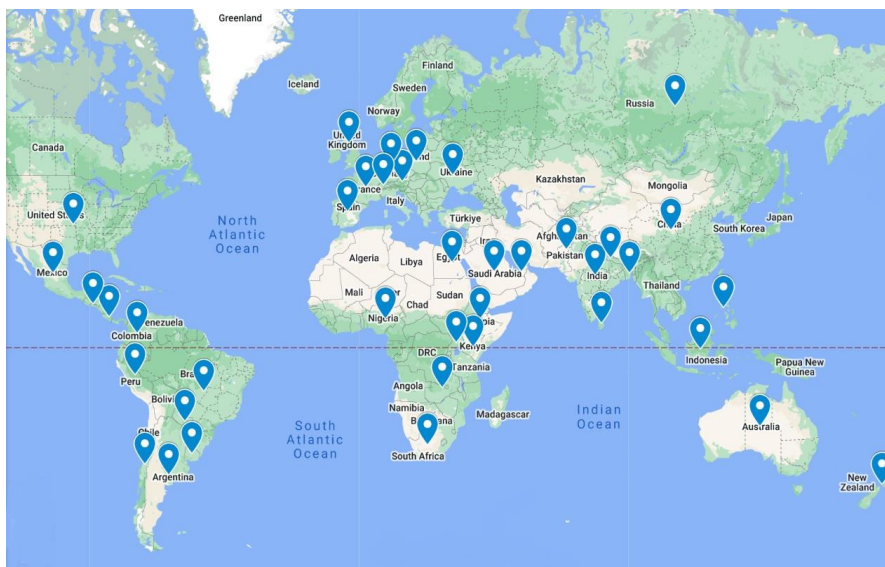


Figure I: World map indicating countries with National Business and Disability Networks

As of early 2024, 40 NBDNs were members of the ILO GBDN. To the coordinating entities of all of them, the ILO GBDN sent a bilingual survey in English and Spanish in late December 2023 to better understand the work, success stories, challenges and support needs of NBDNs – with focus on the year 2023. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, and respondents were made aware that their responses would be published. NBDNs had time until mid-March 2024 to respond.

The ILO GBDN survey had four specific aims:

1. To learn how many companies are members in each respective NBDN, with focus on multinational enterprises.
2. To map NBDNs' partnerships with the national employers' organisations, with the Local Networks of the United Nations Global Compact in their respective country, if they exist, as well as with the ILO GBDN.
3. To identify key achievements and challenges of NBDNs in 2023.
4. To understand the key areas of work by NBDNs in 2024.

The survey contained eleven questions, some open-ended and others with multiple choice options.

The ILO GBDN expresses its gratitude to the NBDNs that took the time to complete the survey. Special thanks go to Aria Tung, Junior Project Officer on Disability Inclusion, who led the results analysis and report writing.

► Results

The survey was sent to the 40 NBDNs that were members of the ILO GBDN at the end of December 2023. Out of the 40 NBDNs, 32 networks responded. Ten NBDNs from Asia and the Pacific, 8 from Europe, 8 from Latin America, 5 from Africa, and 1 from the Arab States responded.

Corporate membership base

The number of companies that are members of each NBDN ranged considerably. From zero (newly established NBDN in Nepal) to over 500 in the United Kingdom. Six NBDNs had less than 10 company members, two NBDNs had over 450 company members, while the rest range from 15 to some 100 corporate members.

Some ILO GBDN multinational enterprise members are members of several NBDNs:

- Accenture (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, France, Mexico, Philippines, Spain, United Kingdom)
- Unilever (Australia, Brazil, Chile, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Spain, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom)
- Nestlé (Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Spain, United Kingdom)
- Sodexo (Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, India, Spain, United Kingdom)
- IBM (Australia, Chile, China, India, Philippines, Spain)
- Standard Chartered Bank (China, India, Kenya, Uganda)
- Microsoft (Australia, Brazil, France, United Kingdom)
- Deloitte (Australia, Chile, Spain, United Kingdom)

Among the multinational enterprises that are not (yet) members of the ILO GBDN, the following are noteworthy in terms of membership in several NBDNs:

- KPMG (Australia, Mexico, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Spain, United Kingdom)
- Coca Cola (Chile, Philippines, Uganda, United Kingdom, Zambia)
- EY (Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, United Kingdom)

Strategic partnerships

NBDNs were asked two questions relating to the ILO GBDN: if they are actively promoting the use of the ILO GBDN Self-Assessment Tool among their members as well as which events and services of the ILO GBDN they participated in or used in 2023.

Seventeen NBDNs said they are promoting the ILO GBDN Self-Assessment Tool among their members, 7 NBDNs did not do so, 7 NBDNs stated that they were unaware of the tool's existence, and 1 NBDN did not respond to this particular question.



Figure II: Participants at a Bangladesh Business and Disability Network workshop on accessibility

Regarding ILO GBDN's 2023 events and services, the most used ILO GBDN events/services were the [10th Global Annual Conference "Disability in sustainability efforts: Businesses leading the way"](#), the bi-monthly newsletter, and the [LinkedIn page of the ILO GBDN](#). The 10th Global Annual Conference and/or the bi-monthly newsletter were almost always selected by NBDNs (with 78% of respondents choosing one or both services). The other events/services, i.e. [publications](#) and [webinars](#), were chosen as well, but not as frequently. The ILO GBDN's annual

regional conference, dedicated to the Arab States in 2023, was only selected by the Qaderoon Business Disability Network in Saudi Arabia, as the only NBDN in the Arab States at the time of the survey.

Regarding regular collaboration with national employers' organisations, 19 NBDNs said they do collaborate on a regular basis with them, while 8 NBDNs said they do not. The remaining 5 NBDNs stated that their network is hosted by a national employers' association (Bangladesh, Chile, Pakistan, Uganda, Ukraine). In response to the question about collaborating with the Local Networks of the United Nations Global Compact, 10 NBDNs said they collaborate on a regular basis with them (Bangladesh, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Spain, Ukraine), 16 NBDNs said they do not, and the remaining 6 stated that there is no such network in their respective country.

Key achievements and challenges

Achievements

When asked about their three key achievements in 2023, NBDNs provided a wide range of answers. However, many NBDNs shared common themes.

Several NBDNs described how their NBDN grew in 2023. This was in relation to **growing one's membership and reach**, but also internal growth for the coordinating entities of some NBDNs. For instance, the Australian Disability Network described how their network grew substantially in 2023, internally from 23 to 57 employees, and they also increased their memberships and even government appointment projects. The Austrian DisAbility Business Forum, Kenya Business and Disability Network and Uganda Business and Disability Network all expressed how growing its membership was one of the top achievements of their network in 2023. The China Chapter of the ILO GBDN explained how their network extended local support to ten more cities to build an ecosystem for inclusive employment.

Many NBDNs described how an achievement of theirs was **conducting trainings** to allow for knowledge sharing for both employers and persons with disabilities. For example, the Forum of Inclusive Companies COMFAMA in Colombia held a business mentoring and training session with the support of the ONCE Foundation for companies on recruiting persons with disabilities. The Disability Employers' Network in New Zealand established a public "disability confidence and accessible training" series that now runs quarterly. The India Business and Disability Network and the Philippine Business and Disability Network both held capacity building workshops and sensitivity trainings. The Qaderoon Business Disability Network in Saudi Arabia hosted a tech camp to provide IT skills to 150 persons with disabilities, done in partnership with the Majed Society and funded by the Ihsan Platform.

Establishing and **building partnerships** was another common achievement among several NBDNs. For instance, the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network signed agreements with the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the ILO Country Office for Bangladesh to establish new multi-year projects that will see the expansion of previous work related to occupational safety and health, social protection as well as vocational skills development. The Swiss Employers for Inclusion Federation began to prepare an inclusion project with the Federal Department for Social Insurances with the goal of creating more formal job opportunities for persons with disabilities, moving away from sheltered workshops.

Lastly, **holding events** around disability inclusion in business was another common achievement shared among several NBDNs. For example, the UnternehmensForum in Germany held four in-person meetings with their members and guests and conducted various webinars and online meetings. The Disability Employers' Network in New Zealand and the Philippine Business and Disability Network each held in-person annual conferences. The conference in New Zealand brought together over 140 people to discuss disability and neurodiversity inclusion at work. The conference in the Philippines was the second of its kind and over 200 people attended. The Business Disability Forum (BDF) in the United Kingdom held their Disability Smart Awards in person for the first-time since the COVID-19 pandemic, held their annual conference and hosted a partner dinner.



Figure III: Participants at the Philippine Business and Disability Network second annual conference

Challenges

There were common themes among NBDNs regarding their challenges in 2023 as well.

The challenge that almost half of the NBDNs expressed was related to **lacking resources**. This includes both financial resources and human resources. The China Chapter of the ILO GBDN, the India Business and Disability Network, the Indonesia Business and Disability Network, the Nepal Business and Disability Network, the TAKpełnosprawni Foundation in Poland, the Qaderoon Business Disability Network in Saudi Arabia, and the Uganda Business and Disability Network all expressed that funding was a challenge, which negatively impacted their work as they did not have enough financial resources to implement all they had planned or would like to do. The Australian Disability Network, the Austrian DisAbility Business Forum, the UnternehmensForum in Germany, and the Disability Employers' Network in New Zealand, all described how they do not have enough human resources to keep up with growing demand.

Some NBDNs also expressed concerns about the **deteriorating economic climate** in their respective country. For instance, the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network explained how economic and political uncertainties created challenges for them to effectively engage with stakeholders, which caused some delays in providing services to their members. The China Chapter of the ILO GBDN described how the economy had slowed down, which affected their membership base because fewer multinational enterprises reached out to the network and fewer members got involved in the network's work. The German UnternehmensForum also stated that economic uncertainty was one of the key challenges they faced in 2023.

Another key challenge several NBDNs faced in 2023 was **growing their membership base**. The Inclusive Business Network in Costa Rica, the India Business and Disability Network, and the Uganda Business and Disability Network all stated that a small membership base was a limiting factor for their work in 2023. The Pakistan Business and Disability Network explained how as a new network (established only at the end of 2022), they anticipate financial sustainability and growing their membership base as key challenges going forward.

Plans for 2024

A few NBDNs described how one of their goals in 2024 is to **improve the governance structure** of their network. For instance, the Australian Disability Network said they would like to consolidate their organisation, the Austrian DisAbility Business Forum said they would want to improve the structure of their network, and the Nepal Business and Disability Network stated that there is need to shape their network governance more clearly.

Several NBDNs stated they want to **improve their communication efforts** in 2024. The Australian Disability Network and the Austrian DisAbility Business Forum replied that they would like to engage in more impactful communications towards the companies in their network. Similarly, Inclusion Manifesto in France plans to better communicate about their actions and contents of their working groups to their membership base. Some networks also stated they would like to communicate about and promote their existing resources and initiatives more to increase their visibility.

Although several NBDNs shared they were able to increase their membership base in 2023, many NBDNs identified **growing their network** as a primary goal for 2024, including the Business Network for Social Inclusion in Brazil, the Kenya Business and Disability Network, the Nepal Business and Disability Network, the Philippine Business and Disability Network, the Swiss Employers for Inclusion Federation, and the Ukraine Business and Disability Network TOGETHER.

NBDNs in Latin America

In early May 2024, an in-person ILO GBDN workshop for representatives of all 11 NBDNs in Latin America took place in Santiago de Chile, hosted by the Federation of Chilean Industry (SOFOPA). Based on preparatory calls with all Latin American NBDNs and the workshop itself, the key insights were:

There are opportunities to open spaces for more inter-network dialogue, exchange, and support.

There is need for “glocalization”. While international and regional synergies can benefit NBDNs, these connections need to be localised adequately.

Thematic topics that Latin American NBDNs will need to develop further include the intersectionalities of persons with disabilities at work, a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises, environmental sustainability and disability inclusion, as well as the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the world of work.

Some NBDNs have transcended their original objective of providing a space for peer-to-peer support among companies and now show impact on public policies, and generate evidence to promote disability inclusion in the business community.

► Conclusion and recommendations

As membership in NBDNs can be one of the most effective means for companies to improve their disability inclusion performance, it is important to understand the challenges NBDNs face and the goals they have for the future to keep promoting disability inclusion in the workplace. The main themes of the achievements, challenges and goals many NBDNs described were related to membership, and the various ways this can affect their network.

Several NBDNs expressed that they were able to increase their membership in 2023, while others said it was a challenge they faced, and many others stated it as a key area of work for 2024. Membership is interlinked with other aspects of the achievements, challenges and goals networks described. Getting companies interested in joining NBDNs and growing the network typically allows for more resources which can enable networks to create more technical guidance or hold more events and trainings for members, ultimately further promoting disability inclusion in companies. Furthermore, it could be beneficial to learn why some NBDNs aren't promoting the ILO GBDN Self-Assessment Tool to their company members.

Expanding the NBDN internally, beyond getting companies as members, is also a vital aspect of sustaining a network. Many NBDNs described how they don't have enough human resources to keep up with the growing work demands and this limits their ability to implement the activities and projects they would like to complete.

To keep NBDNs running strongly and sustained over time, it is useful to conduct outreach and awareness on what networks do and how they can benefit companies regarding their disability inclusion journeys. Many companies may not know NBDNs exist, therefore it is important for NBDNs to communicate on the important work they are performing and to create relationships and build connections with other key players who they can collectively work with on disability inclusion issues.

As NBDNs can provide a lot of support and technical guidance to companies that are wanting to begin their disability inclusion journey or are wanting to further the work they are currently doing, it is important to understand what these networks need in order to be successful. Learning from NBDNs what they deem as achievements and understanding the challenges they face to be successful is beneficial and can help them sustain themselves better and ultimately continue to work on disability inclusion issues.

Key recommendations to NBDNs

- Identify multinational enterprise members in other NBDNs that are not yet members in one's own NBDN and encourage these companies' membership, e.g. by collaborating with other NBDNs and the ILO GBDN.
- Initiate or strengthen strategic partnerships with relevant actors at both national, regional and global level, e.g. by reaching out to Local Networks of the United Nations Global Compact (if they exist in the country in question), sector-specific business associations, as well as international bilateral and multilateral development partners.
- Diversify NBDN's funding streams, including funding from domestic and international partners, charging fees for NBDN's activities and membership, and linking the NBDN's work to development programmes in which NBDNs can play the role of implementing partners.
- Promote the use of the free ILO GBDN Self-Assessment Tool for companies among NBDNs' corporate members and encourage them to share their most pressing needs to allow NBDNs to better plan and prioritise their actions and services vis-à-vis their members.

► Driving disability inclusion in companies at country level



We are the world's only coming-together of leading multinational companies working with the ILO – the United Nations agency for the world of work – to the benefit of business, persons with disabilities and economies and communities worldwide. As ILO Global Business and Disability Network, we aim to promote decent work for persons with disabilities in the private for-profit sector – with a geographical focus on developing countries. At global level, our Network comprises more than 35 leading multinational enterprises from diverse industry sectors as well as several international non-business entities with specialised disability expertise, including the International Disability Alliance. At the level of individual countries, more than 35 National Business and Disability Networks on all continents pertain to our Network.

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