



ILO Global Business and Disability Network Discussion Note

Introduction

Across the world, employers are realizing the value of a diverse labour force, one that is inclusive of people with disabilities. National governments, recognizing the barriers to socio-economic participation that disabled persons face, have enacted legislation, including non-discrimination and quota systems related to unequal access to decent work. The business case for hiring disabled persons is becoming increasingly well known, while at the same time, corporate social responsibility, global human rights initiatives to promote and protect the rights of disabled persons, and related business and human rights movements have captured the attention of employers organizations, multinational corporations and small and medium sized enterprises. National and regional networks of employers have been formed to address diversity issues in general and, in some cases, disability in particular.

Proposed Global/Regional Networks

The ILO is developing a global network of employers' organizations, private sector businesses, multinational companies, existing employer networks on disability and selected nongovernmental organizations for the purposes of both meeting the needs of the Network members and advising the ILO. Advice to the ILO would include that related to activities, projects and products aimed to increase workplace diversity, open new markets, create job and training opportunities for disabled persons as well as result in employers across the globe realizing ILO disability standards, national non-discrimination and quota laws and industry and company policies. Since most companies and the ILO are organized regionally, a regional structure might be more practical for operational activities and meetings.

The ILO believes that by participating in such a network and the knowledge sharing and activities it will facilitate, companies will benefit from improved productivity, reduced turnover, safer and better workplaces and increased customer and community brand loyalty. Employers' organizations will increase their capacity to address their member needs related to diversity, corporate social responsibility, legal adherence and human resources.

Network Activities

It is anticipated that the Network will engage in the following activities:

- Sharing knowledge and identifying good practices among companies and employers' organizations. For example, as a first knowledge sharing activity, the ILO is finalizing a publication of 25 company profiles showing their work on disability as it relates to hiring and retention, products and services, and corporate social responsibility.
- Developing joint products and services for employers and companies to facilitate hiring. For example, one need that is emerging from companies is a need to understand national disability laws, especially as they relate to labour issues and hiring.
- Strengthening the work of ILO employers' organizations, who have greater access to small and medium size companies at the national level, and building their technical expertise on disability issues. For example, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon in Sri Lanka has maintained an Employers' Network on Disability for years, which has received support from many national and multinational companies.

- Linking companies to ILO activities and partners at the national level and working through their local offices and supply chains. For example, Marks and Spencer has a programme called “Marks and Starts,” which integrates disabled workers into its supply chain. The ILO in Bangladesh is helping the company and its NGO partners to streamline training so that more disabled persons can work at participating supply chain factories.

Expected Impact in the Biennium (2010-2012)

The ILO (Employers’ Bureau and Disability Programme) plans to work with an initial group of interested parties to include ILO employers’ organizations, selected multinational corporations and networks that already exist related to the issue of disability and employment to realize at least the following outcomes by the end of 2012:

- Increase the ILO and constituent knowledge on contemporary good practice related to disability
- Strengthen at least two national employers’ organizations to address the issue of disability in the workplace
- Demonstrate changes at the enterprise level within a selected number of companies related to the training, hiring or retention of disabled persons
- Form at least two partnerships that increase the employability or employment of disabled persons
- Increase the ILO’s knowledge base related to disability and employment and develop a knowledge sharing platform to share this information with Network members
- Produce at least two tools or products that meet the needs of the Network and further the employment of disabled persons and the capacity of employers to include disabled persons in the workforce.

Why the ILO?

The ILO is uniquely positioned to organize such a network because of its access to employers’ organizations throughout the world, the related standards, tools, initiatives and projects it has already undertaken, its global reach, and the fact that several employers’ organizations and multinational companies have already approached the ILO for the types of knowledge sharing and networking services that the Network will provide.

It will also put into effect the ILO’s recently adopted Public Private Partnership policy and demonstrate the credibility in accessing the knowledge and practices of private enterprises for wider dissemination and capacity-building of ILO employers’ organizations.

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