

Women and men with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS face similar issues of discrimination in the world of work. They have little access to decent jobs and are often prevented from taking part in fair recruitment processes. They are excluded from training and career opportunities and face negative attitudes from management, human resources and co-workers in general.

In Asia and the Pacific businesses are increasingly operating so-called 'inclusive workplaces', recognizing the business case for employing and retaining people with disabilities or HIV/AIDS and putting in place policies to support this and counter discrimination. But, while such initiatives are mushrooming in Asia, unemployment rates of people with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS remain high. Advocates of these two discriminated-against groups have started to realise that they share common issues and challenges; they were given a chance to explore these mutual concerns at a meeting organised by the ILO in Bangkok, on 27 October 2010.

"Within the HIV groups we have many priorities, and disability has never occurred to me as an issue. Now I see that we are advocating for the same equal rights and we have experiences to share," said Mr Addy Chen of the Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), during the meeting.

"Persons with disabilities, women in particular, experience all of the risk factors associated with HIV, and are often at increased risk because of poverty", said Ms Saowalak Thongkuay, Regional Development Officer, Disabled Peoples' International, Asia-Pacific Region (DPI/AP), based in Thailand. "They are frequently excluded from education and health care, they lack information, resources, legal protection and are vulnerable to substance abuse. Furthermore they face an increased risk of violence, rape, stigma and discrimination".

Research on HIV and disability is still lacking in Asia Pacific, but grassroots initiatives are beginning. The Bangkok meeting allowed representatives of disabled people's organizations, people living with HIV/AIDS in Thailand, and United Nations' agency representatives to brainstorm about the challenges such discrimination poses. The meeting also mapped visions and actions related to HIV and disability in the region, particularly Thailand. Participants agreed to encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas between the two interest groups.

One important aspect of the meeting was the opportunity it gave for those with disabilities or HIV/AIDS to share experiences. A strong consensus emerged on the need for Thailand to address barriers that people living with disabilities and HIV face in getting access to sexual and reproductive health, treatment, care and support. While the two communities have a variety of priorities there was recognition that issues such as stigma and discrimination - particularly related to healthcare and the workplace - exemplify the common problems faced by persons with HIV and those with disability.

The October meeting gave people with disabilities and living with HIV an opportunity to highlight issues critical to them and commit themselves to developing a partnership between the two movements. The month of December, which includes both World AIDS Day (1 December) and Disabled People's Day (3 December), provides an opportunity for us all to deepen the debate of HIV and disability as human rights issues. It is now time for attention to be drawn to the rights of people with disabilities and HIV and AIDS in the world of work. ILO will work with constituents to formulate a comprehensive strategy for delivering decent work.

The ILO is currently implementing pilot activities in China, Thailand and Viet Nam aimed at raising awareness of workplace discrimination relating to HIV and disability. The work is part of an ILO/IrishAid initiative on Promoting Employability and Employment of Persons with Disabilities through Legislation.

Advocates for the rights of those with HIV/AIDS also have a new tool to work with, in the form of a new international human rights instrument, the ILO Recommendation on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work (No.200). The Recommendation clearly articulates the responsibility of workplaces to facilitate the access of all workers, their dependents and families, to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support.

Likewise the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) serves as a platform for campaigning for the rights of persons with disabilities. The rights of these two groups of peoples to decent work and decent lives are thus firmly established.

For more information please visit: [HIV/AIDS](#), [disability](#) and [video on disability and HIV/AIDS](#).

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