

Disability

The Challenge

Despite major gains in recent years, people with disabilities still face discrimination and other barriers to full participation in social, economic, political and cultural life. Of an estimated 650 million people with disabilities, 470 million are of working age. They are more likely to be unemployed or earn less than non-disabled people and be in jobs with poor promotional prospects and working conditions, especially if they are women. Many work in the unprotected, informal economy. Few have access to skills development and other opportunities that would enable them to earn a decent living. The potential of very many disabled women and men remains untapped and unrecognized, leaving a majority living in poverty, dependence and social exclusion.

Excluding disabled persons from the world of work has costs for societies, in terms of their productive potential, the cost of disability benefits and pensions and implications for their families and carers. The ILO estimates that this exclusion may cost countries between 1 to 7 per cent of GDP.

Promoting equality of opportunity for – and inclusion of – people with disabilities is central to social and economic development, emergence from the global financial and economic crisis and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.



The ILO Response

ILO concern with disability issues is based on its commitment to social justice and achieving decent and productive work for all. All ILO work on employment derives its current mandate from the Global Employment Agenda (2003) and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008). These together with the Global Jobs Pact (2009) include an emphasis on enhancing support to vulnerable women and men, including disabled persons.

ILO standards, including the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), its associated Recommendation (No. 168), the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195) and the *ILO Code of practice on managing disability in the workplace*, 2002, provide the framework for the ILO's response to requests for support for this target group, emphasizing the inclusion of disabled persons in general training and employment-related programmes and in the open labour market. These are actively promoted through meetings, seminars and training programmes, both general and disability-specific.

In addition to advocacy work, the ILO promotes equal opportunities for disabled people in training and employment through:

- research and building of knowledge on good practices in vocational rehabilitation, skills development, promotion of employment and self-employment, as well as access to credit;
- capacity-building in response to specific requests and through courses offered at the ILO International Training Centre in Turin, Italy, focused on disability-related issues in training and employment; and
- technical cooperation services.

The ILO takes a twin-track approach to promoting equal opportunity, equal treatment and mainstreaming of persons with disabilities. **Track one** allows for disability-specific programmes or initiatives aimed at overcoming particular disadvantages or obstacles, while **Track two** seeks to ensure that disabled persons are included in general skills development as well as in enterprise- and employment-related services and programmes on vocational training and employment.

Currently, the focus is on:

- developing, in the framework of public-private partnerships, an ILO Global Business and Disability Network, providing information to businesses about including and retaining disabled persons in the workplace;
- encouraging greater involvement of workers' organizations in promoting skills training and employment opportunities for disabled persons;
- compiling and disseminating examples of good practice in inclusive vocational training and disability inclusion through the development of guides, and their translation into national languages;
- technical cooperation projects in selected countries of Africa and Asia, to promote the employability and employment of persons with disabilities through effective legislation, and to develop and test an approach to supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in general skills development and enterprise- and employment-related programmes and services;
- international partnerships – in particular, collaboration with UN and intergovernmental agencies, the Inter-Agency Support Group for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and UN country teams on including disability in poverty reduction and development programmes; and
- communications campaigns based on media alliances in selected countries, to challenge mistaken assumptions and stereotypes concerning the working capacity of persons with disabilities;
- encouraging the inclusion of disability issues more widely in ILO activities through a Disability Inclusion Initiative at ILO headquarters, marking a renewed commitment to disability mainstreaming in a more strategic and effective manner. Led by the Employment Sector, this initiative will gradually be introduced to field offices from 2010;
- supporting inclusion through incorporating disability considerations into existing tools and initiatives such as Know About Business (KAB) and women's entrepreneurship development.

Key Tools and Resources

In addition to the above-mentioned ILO standards:

Buckup, S. 2009. *The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work*. Employment Sector Working Paper No. 43 (Geneva, ILO).

Gilbert, M.; ILO Skills and Employability Department. 2008. *Count us in! How to make sure that women with disabilities can participate effectively in mainstream women's entrepreneurship development activities* (Geneva, ILO).

ILO. 2008. *From rights to reality: Trade unions promoting decent work for persons with disabilities*. Video (Geneva).

O'Reilly, A. 2007. *The right to decent work of persons with disabilities* (Geneva, ILO).



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