

Disability Discrimination at Work

An estimated 470 million of the world's working age people have some form of disability. These disabilities differ in the nature of impairment as well as the degree of severity. In combination with these disabilities, issues such as gender, age and economic status, all impact upon their status in and access to the labour market.

The absence of common definitions and methodologies across countries are an obstacle to the comparison of national statistics, when available, as well as inhibit the development of a better understanding of disability and work. The ILO defines persons with disabilities at work as "individuals whose prospects of securing, returning to, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical, sensory, intellectual or mental impairment".

Overall, people with disabilities experience common patterns of discrimination. They suffer high unemployment rates, are confronted with prejudices regarding their productivity and are often excluded from the labour market. They also face discrimination at the hiring stage. A survey carried out in France shows that less than 2% of those having mentioned their disability in their CV were called for an interview. People with disabilities are mainly recruited through temporary job agencies to minimize risks for employers.

Discrimination worsens with age. Women have fewer chances than men to find a job, and are more likely to suffer physical violence and sexual abuse.

KEY FIGURES

- Over 60% of people with disabilities are of working age, however, they experience an unemployment rate 80-100% higher than average non-disabled workers;
- In Europe, 52% of all people with severe disabilities do not participate in the labour force;
- A 2003 survey conducted in the USA had found that 73% of the employers surveyed stated that disabled employees did not require special facilities;
- In Australia, the average recruitment cost of a disabled worker was 13% more than the cost of an employee without disabilities, while his or her performance was equal;
- In United Kingdom, people with disabilities at 26 years of age are four times more likely to be unemployed than people without disabilities.
- In 2005, people with disabilities of working age have an employment rate of only 38% compared to 78% for those without disabilities. Two-thirds of persons with disabilities that are unemployed said they would like to work but could not find a job;

- The wage gap for women with disabilities in Australia is 44% higher than those without disabilities. For men with disabilities the gap is 49% higher than non-disabled men indicating that disability factored heavily in lower earnings.

International and national actors over the past decades have shown a commitment to increasing employment, job retention and return-to-work opportunities for people with disabilities. This is largely due to the recognition of their potentially significant contribution to national economies. National approaches to combat discrimination against persons with disabilities reflect a shift from a "moral" or "medical" model to a rights-based approach, focusing on their social inclusion and the removal of structural inequalities while providing access to the labour market.

SUCCESS STORIES

In 2006, the UK Government invested £ 360 million in a programme entitled "Pathways to Work" to support people with disabilities efforts to move back into the labour market. In order to reduce the estimated 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefits, this programme includes work-focused interviews and access to personal advisers. To date, over 25,000 disabled people have transitioned back to work contributing to a rising employment rate of 29%.

The "Arbeid med bistance" (AB) employment programme launched in Norway in 1992 assists people with disabilities in finding and retaining employment through the use of job coaches and supporting co-workers to help them enter the labour market. The programme has helped 35% of the 2,500 participants find steady paid work. Equally important is that 92% of the participating employers changed their perception of the risk associated with hiring disabled people.

The ILO technical cooperation project "Developing Entrepreneurship among Women with Disabilities" targets disabled women in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, providing training in micro-enterprise skill. The project supports them in starting business activities through partnership with local NGOs and microfinance institutions. ■