

BUSINESS CASE FOR EMPLOYING DISABLED PERSONS

As employers build experience in employing workers with disabilities, they increasingly report that employing people with disabilities has a significant positive impact on the workplace in terms of efficiency, productivity and overall success. The business case is based on the following:

- people with disabilities are as productive and reliable as their non-disabled peers; make good dependable employees and have higher retention rates;
- hiring people with disabilities increases workforce morale;
- people with disabilities are an untapped resource of talents and often can draw on transferable problem-solving skills; and
- people with disabilities represent an overlooked and multibillion-dollar market segment that not only includes the person with a disability but his or her family and friends.

PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED PERSONS – THE ILO'S ROLE

The ILO promotes the employability and employment of women and men with disabilities through its standards on discrimination and disability, the development of knowledge on good practice in training and employment, policy advisory and advocacy work, and donor-funded technical cooperation projects.

The key elements of a rights-based approach - equality of opportunity, equal treatment and non-discrimination - are contained in ILO Conventions concerning employment in general and persons with disabilities in particular. Chief among the standards used by the ILO to promote the rights and opportunities of disabled persons are the *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)*, the *Equal*

Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the *Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159)*, as well as the *ILO Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace* of 2002. New impetus has been given to the ILO's work to promote equal opportunities for women and men with disabilities by the UNCRPD that entered into force in 2008.

In November 2012, the ILO Governing Body welcomed the commitment to include people with disabilities in all areas of work of the ILO through a Disability Inclusion Initiative.

For more information on the ILO's work on disability issues: www.ilo.org/disability

THE ILO GLOBAL BUSINESS AND DISABILITY NETWORK

Active since 2010, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network is a public-private partnership comprising multinational companies, employers' organizations and national business networks as well as selected non-governmental and disabled people's organizations.

The Network aims to encourage knowledge-sharing and joint activities among companies of all sizes so as to build disability expertise, facilitate the development of national networks and promote the business and human rights cases for disability inclusion in the workplace.

For more information on the ILO Global Business and Disability Network:

www.businessanddisability.org

Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch
Conditions of Work and Equality Department
International Labour Office (ILO)
4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 GENEVA 22 (Switzerland)
Tel.: (+41-22) 799 7970/7249
Fax: +41 22 799 6388
e-mail: disability@ilo.org



International
Labour
Office

DISABILITY

A Human Rights Issue

DISABILITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

In recent decades, there has been a fundamental transformation in the way disability is understood in international policy terms. Rather than being seen as a personal problem to be overcome simply by medical intervention, there is growing recognition that barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities stem largely from the way society is built and organized, from how people think about disability and the assumptions they make.

Today, countries around the world have initiated changes that accommodate differences and give people with disabilities opportunities to take their place in society - in education and training courses, at the workplace, in politics, the arts and culture, and social activities in general. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted in 2006, has given further impetus to this rights-based understanding, called the “social model” of disability.

TACKLING EXCLUSION DUE TO SOCIAL BARRIERS

The disadvantages faced by women and men with disabilities can be reduced or removed by tackling the barriers that are found in laws and policies, in inaccessible built environments, transportation, information and communications, and very fundamentally, in mistaken assumptions and stereotypes about the abilities and capabilities of persons with disabilities.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES - A DIVERSE GROUP

There are over 1 billion people with disabilities around the globe today, accounting for 15 per cent of the world’s population.¹ They are a

diverse group of men, women, girls and boys, with varying skills, abilities, interests, dreams and hopes. They have different types of disabilities, including physical, visual, hearing, intellectual and mental health disabilities. Sometimes their disabilities are visible, other times not. Their situation and status in society varies greatly, depending on whether they have had a disability from birth, acquired it in childhood or teenage years, or in adulthood, since this frequently affects their path through school, training, further education and employment, as well as their opportunity to form a family of their own.

People with disabilities often face multiple discrimination due to a combination of factors. Women with disabilities, for example, face particular difficulties in taking their place and making their contribution in society, because of the combined stereotypes about “women” and “people with disabilities”. Further obstacles arise from the fact that they frequently live in great poverty. Indigenous people with disabilities are less likely to benefit from affirmative action measures than other disabled people. Yet, given the opportunity, disabled people have shown that, even if they are poor, they have the ability and motivation to get and succeed in jobs, or to learn business skills, manage credit and start or develop income-generating small business activities.

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Having a disability is sometimes confused with not having abilities. More often than not people with disabilities can perform the same tasks as non-disabled persons and frequently excel at these tasks. Some disabled persons may need support to enable them to do so in the form of reasonable accommodation, or affirmative action measures. Improving the accessibility of buildings, transport and information also plays an important role.

As they take their place in the labour force and in society, disabled people have demonstrated their potential to do well in school and higher education; acquire a wide range of skills; contribute significantly in the workforce and the economy at different levels, ranging from low-skill jobs to professional jobs, managerial and decision-making positions and as entrepreneurs; and make a difference in politics and in the life of their communities.

COSTS OF EXCLUSION

People with disabilities are less likely to be in full-time employment than non-disabled persons, up to twice as likely to be unemployed and far more likely to be outside the active labour market.² And when in employment, people with disabilities are more likely to be in low-paid jobs with poor career prospects and working conditions.

There is an enormous cost to society of excluding disabled persons from employment. A recent ILO study estimated the annual loss of Gross Domestic Product at between 3 and 7 per cent. This arises from the lost productivity, the foregone tax income, as well as the dampening effect on consumer spending. In addition, countries with social security systems have experienced high costs of disability benefits. While a social safety net is certainly required for those who are unable to work, there are great inequities and inefficiencies in having a large proportion of the working age population in a situation of dependency. Many disabled people who are currently unemployed or economically inactive would choose to work if they had the option and if appropriate supports were available.

¹ WHO, World Bank (2011) *World Report on Disability*

² OECD (2010) *Sickness, disability and work: Breaking the barriers: A synthesis of findings across OECD countries*