

# ILO and disability inclusion

The International Labour Organization (ILO) promotes equality of opportunity and treatment for persons with disabilities in the world of work. Access of persons with disabilities to decent work is important both as an essential right and in terms of the economic advantages it brings. To achieve this goal, the ILO works to increase the employability of persons with disabilities, to support employers becoming more inclusive and to promote enabling legislative and policy environments.

## ► People with disabilities in the world of work

There are an estimated one billion persons with disabilities globally, with about 80 per cent of them living in developing countries. Despite major gains in recent years, people with disabilities are still at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion around the world. Largely overlooked in data collection and policy formulation, people with disabilities are often rendered socially invisible.

Around 800 million people with disabilities are of working age, and many of them face significant obstacles to equal opportunities in the world of work, ranging from attitudinal and physical to informational barriers.

Consequently, the right of people with disabilities to work and

employment is frequently denied. Disabled persons, particularly disabled women, experience higher rates of unemployment, economic inactivity and a lack of social protection in comparison to their non-disabled peers. Alongside the importance of ensuring persons with disabilities attain their right to work, there are

economic and business reasons for inclusion. These include the benefits to economies as a whole, businesses that adopt diverse practices and the persons with disabilities themselves.

*Employee with a disability  
in Bogor, Indonesia.*



### UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISABILITY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 marked a major shift away from the traditional, medical perspective on disability towards a rights-based social model. The Convention reaffirms that people with disabilities have the same rights and recognizes that "...disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".



## ► Access to work: A right and an economic advantage

The ILO approach to the inclusion of persons with disabilities is grounded in both assuring the rights of persons with disabilities as well as recognizing the economic benefits of inclusion.

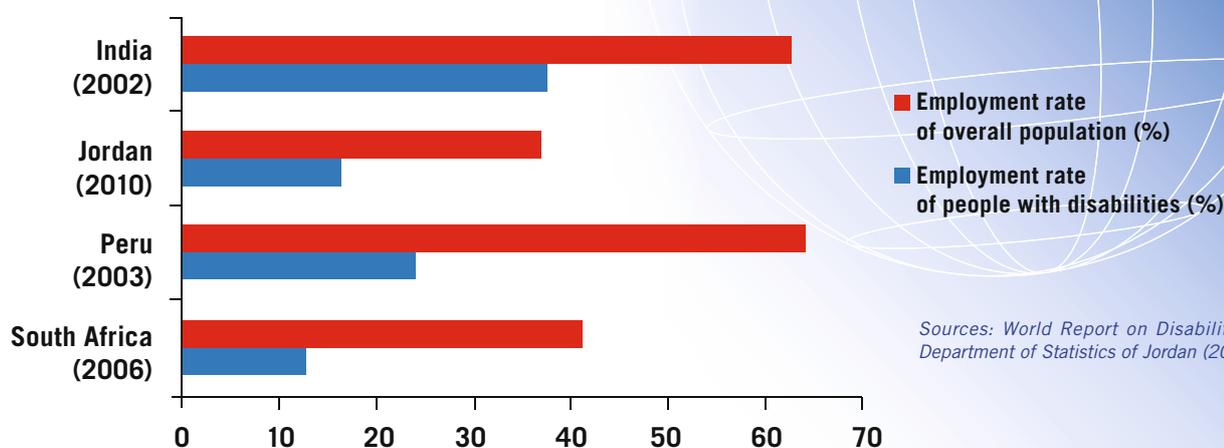
Ratified by more than 150 countries, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guarantees the right of people with disabilities to mainstream vocational training, employment and social protection. The work-related provisions of the United Nations Convention are reinforced by the ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159) as well as by the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

When persons with disabilities have access to decent work, it brings considerable economic advantages. Developing countries lose up to 7 per cent of their gross domestic product due to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market. Further, employers across the world increasingly recognize the benefits of diverse workforces and employing persons with disabilities.

*«It is time to discuss issues on employment because people with disabilities are left out.» Deborah Mazzi, small shop owner, Uganda.*



## ► Employment rates are lower for people with disabilities around the world



Sources: World Report on Disability (2011); Department of Statistics of Jordan (2010)

## ► Promoting access to decent work for persons with disabilities

The ILO, together with governments, employers' and workers' organizations as well as with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, works to promote labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities through three coordinated approaches:

### ► Increasing employability

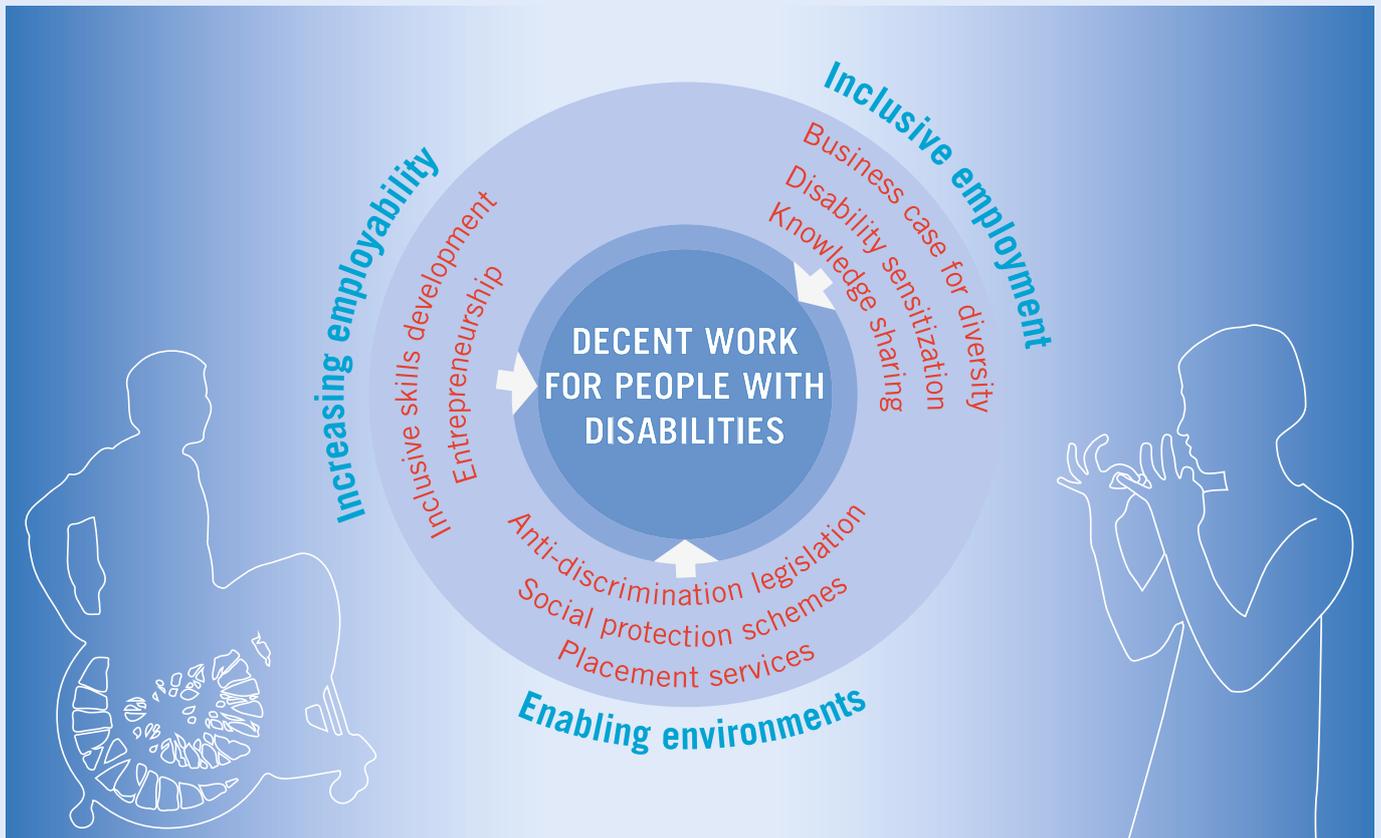
The ILO promotes inclusive mainstream skills and entrepreneurship development to make sure persons with disabilities are well trained when entering the world of work.

### ► Inclusive employment

The ILO works with multinational companies and national networks of employers to promote the business case for the employment of persons with disabilities.

### ► Enabling environments

The ILO works with governments, social partners and organizations of persons with disabilities to create a more supportive legislative and policy environment for disability inclusion.



## ► Increasing employability

Over recent years, a particular focus of the ILO's work on disability issues has been on making vocational education and training more accessible to people with disabilities. High quality skills development is one of the pathways that lead to employment.

### **Making vocational training in Zambia disability-inclusive**

Under the Irish Aid Partnership Programme, the ILO is supporting the Government of Zambia in reviewing relevant laws to include provision for vocational training and the employment of people with disabilities.

As part of its support, the ILO provides advice to selected public

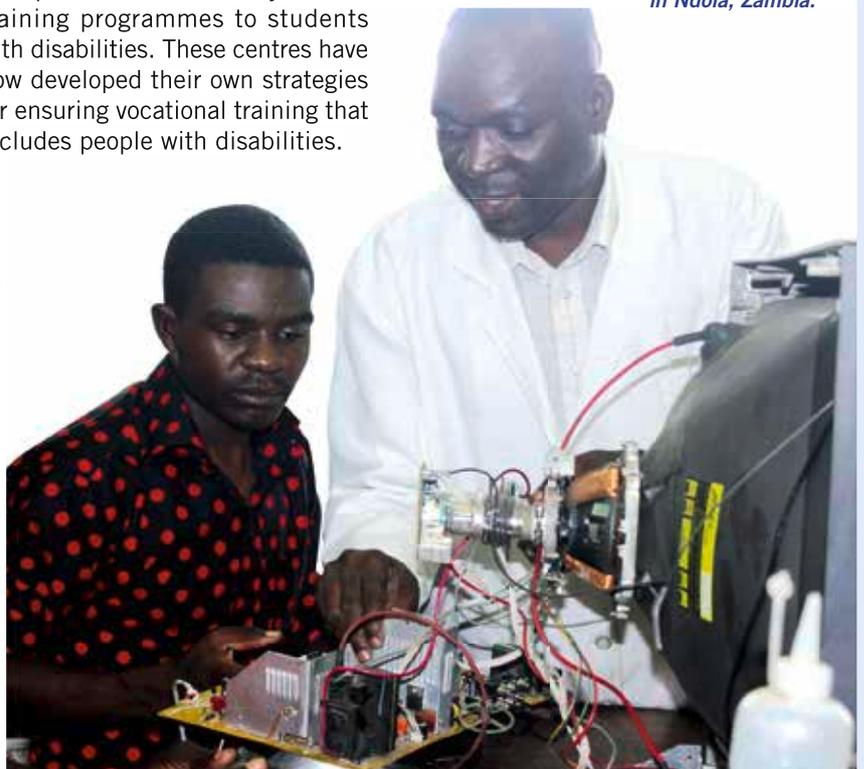
vocational training centres on how to improve the accessibility of their training programmes to students with disabilities. These centres have now developed their own strategies for ensuring vocational training that includes people with disabilities.

*Trainees with disabilities receiving vocational training in Ndola, Zambia.*

### **Reforming skills development in Bangladesh**

Within the Technical Vocational Education and Training Reform Project in Bangladesh, supported by the European Union, the ILO provided advice on the development of a national strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in skills training programmes.

Further, the Canadian-funded Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity Project of the ILO delivers training programmes for about 500 persons with disabilities.



## ► Inclusive employment

Businesses across the world are increasingly recognizing the benefits of diverse workforces and seeing how employing persons with disabilities contributes to achieving business objectives.

The ILO Global Business and Disability Network brings together multinational companies, networks of employers and businesses as well as organizations representing disabled people. Active since 2010, the Network has served as a platform for exchanges between businesses based in both developed and developing countries.

The ILO has been instrumental in the establishment of networks in Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Chile and Peru. National business and disability networks in these and other developing countries are promoting joint activities and knowledge sharing to ensure decent work for people with disabilities in the private sector.

### **Including persons with disabilities in the garment global supply chain**

The joint ILO and International Finance Corporation “Better Work Programme” works in eight countries across the world to support

both workers and businesses in the global garment supply chain. As part of this work, disability issues have been raised in several countries. In Indonesia, for example, the law stipulates that companies need to have at least 1 per cent of employees with disabilities. To develop the capacity of the garment sector, Better Work Indonesia piloted programmes to train and place persons with disabilities in factories and gave advice on how to employ people with disabilities.

## ► Enabling environments



*Wu Feng was born with an intellectual disability. After attending supported employment training, he is now employed by a supermarket in Beijing, China.*

The ILO works on both practical and structural concerns to ensure that the increased employability of persons with disabilities and more inclusive employers result in positive outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Alongside work on disability-sensitive legislation, the ILO promotes positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities, job-placement schemes that are responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities and disability-inclusive social protection.

The cooperation of the ILO with governments, trade unions, employers and

organizations of people with disabilities is crucial in this regard.

With support from Irish Aid, the ILO implements a project on Promoting Rights and Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Employment through Legislation (PROPEL). PROPEL works principally in Botswana, China, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Zambia. In each of these countries the ILO contributes to more disability-inclusive employment frameworks, legislation on vocational training as well as to national action plans on disability inclusion.

## ► The way forward

The ILO Disability Inclusion Strategy 2014-17 sets the direction for how the Organization as a whole works on disability rights as a cross-cutting issue.

The ILO’s work on disability inclusion focuses on promoting pathways into decent work for people with disabilities in developing countries. This builds on and extends the experience the ILO has gained on increasing their employability, and in promoting inclusive employment and enabling environments.

Pathways into decent work and promoting disability-inclusive social protection are key areas in which the ILO works and shares knowledge with other development partners and United Nations agencies. This work fits into the direction set by the Sustainable Development Goals.

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