



International  
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# FACTS ON Disability in the World of Work

***Decent work is the ILO's primary goal for everyone, including people with disabilities. When we promote the rights and dignity of people with disabilities, we are empowering individuals, strengthening economies and enriching societies at large.***

Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

One of every 10 people in the world has a disability — some 650 million worldwide. Approximately 470 million are of working age. While many are successfully employed and fully integrated into society, as a group, persons with disabilities often face disproportionate poverty and unemployment. Their social exclusion from the workplace deprives societies of an estimated US\$ 1.37 to 1.94 trillion in annual loss in GDP<sup>1</sup>. An estimated 80 per cent of all people with disabilities in the world live in rural areas of developing countries and have limited or no access to services they need. Thus, providing decent work for people with disabilities makes social as well as economic sense.

In the world of work, persons with disabilities tend to experience high unemployment and have lower earnings than persons without disabilities. They are often relegated to low-level, low-paid jobs with little social and legal security, or segregated from the mainstream labour market. Many are underemployed. This affects their self confidence. Many become discouraged and drop out. Yet experience shows that when they find jobs suited to their skills, abilities and interests, they can make significant contributions in the workplace.

In a climate of economic and political uncertainty, the protection of the most vulnerable members of society assumes greater importance. What's more, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on reducing poverty will require the inclusion of significant, sustained action promoting employment, rural development and poverty reduction programmes that create productive and decent work for people with disabilities. Contributions by persons with disabilities will also provide economic and social benefits to states and reduce the substantive costs associated with exclusion.

## Key Statistics

In the world of work, persons with disabilities experience common patterns of discrimination — such as high unemployment rates, prejudice about their productivity and lack of access to the workplace environment. What are some of the indicators of the Decent Work deficit for persons with disabilities?

- ❑ In the European Union (EU) in 2003, 40 per cent of disabled people of working age were employed compared to 64.2 per cent of persons without a disability. What is more, 52 per cent of EU working age disabled persons are economically inactive, compared to 28 per cent of persons without disability.
- ❑ Among persons with disabilities, men are almost twice as likely to have jobs as women.
- ❑ Unemployment rates vary between types of disability, being the highest among those with a mental illness. In the United Kingdom, an estimated 75 per cent of those of working age with mental illness are unemployed. In Switzerland, mental illness has become the single most important reason for claiming disability benefits, accounting for over 40 per cent of the total.

Source: "The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disability", ILO Geneva, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Metts (2000) *Disability Issues, Trends and Recommendations for the World Bank*, World Bank Washington

## International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December 2007

The third of December has been observed annually as the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons since 1992. It provides opportunities for governments, workers and employers, organizations of persons with disabilities, and civil society to focus on and take stock of the gains to be made from the inclusion of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

This year's theme is based on the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. On this occasion, ILO offices in Geneva and around the world will work together to raise the visibility of the barriers preventing persons with disabilities from full participation in the labour market and highlight efforts to overcome these barriers, focusing, in particular, on good practice and collaboration among key stakeholders — government, workers' and employers' groups, disabled persons organizations and other NGOs.

## The role of the ILO

Decent work is the ILO's primary goal for everyone, including people with disabilities. Putting decent work into practice means promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities based on the principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment, mainstreaming and community involvement. This very principle has been an integral part of the ILO, since its formation nearly 90 years ago. The ILO works to achieve its goals of decent work for all through promoting labour standards, advocacy, knowledge building and technical cooperation services and partnerships, both within the ILO and externally.

### Key ILO standards relating to disability:

**Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention No. 159, 1983** — adopted at the start of the United Nations Decade of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention requires member States, in accordance with national conditions, practice and possibilities, to formulate, implement and periodically review a national policy on vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons. The Convention has now been ratified by 80 countries (October 2007).

**Recommendation No. 168, 1983** — accompanies Convention No. 159 and gives advice on its implementation.

**Human Resources Development Recommendation No. 195, 2004** — calls on member States to develop comprehensive and coordinated policies and programmes of vocational guidance and vocational training, closely linked with employment, in particular through public employment services. More importantly, it aims to extend national systems of services, information and guidance to all, including persons with disabilities.

**Vocational Rehabilitation (Disabled) Recommendation No. 99, 1955** — a stand alone recommendation considered to be before its time in proposing mainstreaming vocational guidance, training and placement of people with disabilities, where appropriate.

**Code of Practice "Managing Disability in the Workplace", 2001** — adds to the range of standards which the ILO uses in its work to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. It reflects the significant changes which have taken place in the understanding of disability, and in legislation, policies and services concerning people with disabilities since 1983. While it is a non-binding document, if employers accept the code they should be willing to implement all of the rules and procedures it contains.

*The first ILO Recommendation containing provisions relating to the vocational rehabilitation of workers with a disability:*

**Workmen's Compensation (Minimum Scale) Recommendation No. 22, 1925.**

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For more information:

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