



FACTS ON *Disability* *and Decent Work*



International
Labour
Organization

“It is in our common interest to continue our work to shape new approaches for inclusive societies and productive economies with dignity, justice and employment for all of us – to ensure that everyone is counted in, not counted out.”

Juan Somavia, ILO Director General

People with disabilities represent an estimated 10 per cent of the world’s population, or some 650 million people worldwide. Approximately 470 million are of working age. Many have demonstrated that with the right opportunities along with adaptations and support, if needed, they can make a major contribution at all levels of the economy and society. Yet, they are often excluded and marginalized, and are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis.

The current economic crisis highlights the barriers faced by people with disabilities and brings into sharper focus the need for inclusive and sustainable development. The mainstreaming of women and men with disabilities in all aspects of society and development and the economy plays a crucial role in helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) of reducing poverty.

What has been the impact of the crisis on persons with disabilities?

While there is very little reliable, global data about persons with disabilities in the crisis, recent news headlines helped shed some perspective:

- Companies in Japan cut nearly 2,800 jobs for disabled persons last year, the highest level in six years;¹
- In Australia, declines in GDP have led to cuts of US\$ 52 million in federal spending on people with disabilities;²
- In the United Kingdom, where it costs three times more to raise a disabled child, families with disabled children are hit hard by the crisis with one in six reporting they are struggling to afford food or heating;³
- A recent US-based study on Social Security Disability Insurance shows increases in the number of disabled people applying for claims reached a high of more than 2.3 million in 2008.⁴

The ILO’s Global Jobs Pact adopted by consensus of workers, employers and governments at the International Labour Conference in June 2009, provides a roadmap for recovery – at the local, national and global level – from this crisis with a renewed quest for a fair and sustainable globalization. It is based on the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda which embraces employment, rights, social protection and dialogue. The Pact promotes ongoing donor support for the realization of the MDGs of halving poverty by 2015. It also helps to bridge the equality gap between women and men with disabilities and non-disabled people in a downturn and contributes to social cohesion and stability.

DISABILITY AND POVERTY

Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. The links between poverty and disability are well known:

- The UN estimates that 80 per cent of disabled persons in developing countries live in poverty.
- Around 20 per cent of the world’s poor have a disability, according to the World Bank.
- Many disabled persons in developing countries live in rural areas where access to training, work opportunities and services are limited.
- Ninety-eight per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school, according to UNESCO.
- People with disabilities are less likely to be in employment than non-disabled persons. They are also more likely to earn lower wages than non-disabled persons.
- Among persons with disabilities, men are almost twice as likely to have jobs as women.

In many parts of the world, stigma and discrimination cause a majority of disabled women, men and children to live in poverty, dependence and social exclusion.

¹ “Japan firms step up job cuts for disabled”, in *Jiji Press* (Tokyo), 15 May 2009.

² “Budget cuts mean less for disabled”, in *The Australian*, 30 May 2009.

³ “Families with disabled children are carers hardest hit by economic crisis”, in *eGov Monitor* (London), 5 Dec. 2008, <http://www.egovmonitor.com/> (28.10.2009).

⁴ “Recession, job losses hit those with disabilities hard”, in *Press Release Newswire*, 17 Feb. 2009, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/Allsup/SSDI/prweb2054694.htm> (28.10.2009).

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.

Women and men with disabilities can and want to be productive members of society. In both developed and developing countries, promoting more inclusive societies and employment opportunities for people with disabilities requires improved access to basic education, vocational training relevant to labour market needs and jobs suited to their skills, interests and abilities, with adaptations as needed. Many societies are also recognizing the need to dismantle other barriers – making the physical environment more accessible, providing information in a variety of formats, and challenging attitudes and mistaken assumptions about people with disabilities.

For more information:

<http://www.ilo.org/disability>



KEY STATISTICS - LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

- 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.⁵
- In the United States, only 3 in 10 disabled people aged 16 to 64 work part- or full-time.⁶
- In the Republic of Korea, 38.2 per cent of disabled persons work compared to 61.9 per cent of non-disabled persons.⁷
- In Paraguay, 18.5 per cent of people with disabilities participate in the labour force compared to 59.8 per cent of their non-disabled counterparts.⁸
- In New Zealand, 12 per cent of the working age (15 and over) population is disabled.⁹

GENDER AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

- In EU countries, 49 per cent of disabled women and 61 per cent of disabled men are employed, compared to 64 per cent of non-disabled women and 89 per cent of men.¹⁰
- In the United States, 33.4 per cent of disabled women and 40.7 per cent of disabled men work, compared to 73.1 and 86.6 per cent for their non-disabled counterparts.¹¹
- In the Republic of Korea, 20.2 per cent of disabled women and 43.5 per cent of disabled men are employed compared to 49.2 and 71.1 per cent for non-disabled women and men.¹²

⁵ A. O'Reilly: *The right to decent work of persons with disabilities* (Geneva, ILO, 2007).

⁶ Disability Funders Network, http://www.disabilityfunders.org/webfm_send/98 (28.10.2009).

⁷ Korea Ministry of Labour: *Statistics on employment for persons with disabilities 2007* (Gwacheon-si, 2007).

⁸ Dirección General de Estadística Encuestas y Censos (Paraguay): *Censo Nacional de Población y Viviendas* (2002), <http://www.dgeec.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/Web%20Paraguay%20Distrital/Mapas%20de%20Indicadores.pdf> (28.10.2009).

⁹ Statistics New Zealand: *Hot off the Press: 2006 Disability Survey* (Wellington, Statistics New Zealand, 2007), <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/799A77CC-4DF6-445C-96DA-F5A266538A72/0/2006disabilitysurveyhotp.pdf> (28.10.2009).

¹⁰ Eurostat: *Employment of people with disabilities* (ad hoc module of the Labour Force Survey 2002), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> (28.10.2009).

¹¹ M.J. Bjelland; W.A. Erickson; and C.G. Lee: *Disability statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS)* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, 2008), <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org> (28.10.2009).

¹² Korean Statistical Information Services: *Online Employment Survey Database*, Aug. 2008, <http://www.kosis.kr> (13.01.2009).

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