



► Policy Brief

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Artificial Intelligence and the Employment of Persons with Disabilities – Opportunities, Risks and Recommendations

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the world of work, offering potential for innovation, efficiency, productivity and business growth. For employers, AI potentially offers powerful tools to foster more inclusive workplaces by removing barriers and enabling greater participation of persons with disabilities. At the same time, if not thoughtfully designed and implemented, AI – particularly when used in organisational approaches – risks reinforcing existing disability-based biases and creating new forms of exclusion. Addressing these challenges is essential to harness the full potential of AI, while promoting equitable access for and treatment of persons with disabilities.



The ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN) promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. This policy brief aims to equip companies with an understanding of the implications of AI use when it comes to the employment of persons with disabilities – highlighting opportunities to harness, critical risks to mitigate, and actionable recommendations to foster an inclusive and equitable future of work.

AI as an enabler for more inclusive workplaces

The use of AI tools by individuals with disabilities, including in the workplace, tends to be positive and empowering.¹ AI is taking Assistive Technologies to a new level by improving functionality and customisation.^{2,3} For instance, for individuals with hearing, speech, or visual impairments, AI-powered tools

¹ OECD, 2023: [Using AI to support people with disability in the labour market](#)

² Digital Learning Institute: [Revolutionising Accessibility: The Role of AI in Assistive Technology](#)

³ EY, 2024: [GenAI for accessibility: more human, not less](#)

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such as real-time captioning, speech-to-text, and sign language interpretation can bridge otherwise inaccessible communication channels.⁴

For example, the Microsoft app *Seeing AI* narrates the world for visually impaired persons, describing visual environments and reading text aloud. *IntelliGaze* allows people with mobility impairments to operate their computer using eye control. *Voiceitt* is an app for people with speech impairments, including those



recovering from stroke and brain injury, and those with cerebral palsy, Parkinson's or Down syndrome. It learns speakers' pronunciations over time.⁵ Further, for those with cognitive disabilities, generative AI can act as a crucial support system, summarising complex information and breaking down large tasks into smaller, more manageable steps to help with organisation and time management.⁶

AI also has the potential to mitigate unconscious human bias in hiring. By training systems to focus exclusively on

skills and qualifications, companies could potentially reduce the impact of human assumptions regarding job seekers with disabilities during the initial screening process. Some AI tools can anonymise candidate information, helping to ensure evaluations are based purely on job-related criteria. An example is the use of chat-based, untimed AI interviews. This format allows many persons with disabilities, including neurodivergent individuals or those with speech impairments, to demonstrate their skills without the stress or potential misunderstandings that can occur in traditional video or in-person interviews. Further, a 2025 UK government study suggests that neurodivergent employees may be gaining significantly more from chatbots than their neurotypical peers.⁷

Bias, opacity, and new forms of exclusion

While the use of AI by individuals with disabilities tends to be positive, institutional use of AI-powered tools may disadvantage and exclude job seekers and workers with disabilities.⁸ AI introduces significant risks if deployed by employers without active oversight, as it can perpetuate historical biases and create new forms of automatic exclusion – with serious legal, economic and ethical consequences.⁹

AI systems trained on historical hiring data may inadvertently reproduce existing labour market patterns, including the underrepresentation of persons with disabilities. Since many datasets reflect historically lower employment rates for persons with disabilities, algorithms can unintentionally perpetuate these trends if safeguards are not applied. The AI may wrongly learn that this is a "desirable" trend – reinforcing a bias

⁴ Accenture, 2021: [AI for disability inclusion](#)

⁵ Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), 2022: [Use of Artificial Intelligence to Facilitate Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities](#)

⁶ World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), 2020: [Empowering people with disabilities through AI](#)

⁷ UK Department for Business and Trade, 2025: [The Evaluation of the M365 Copilot Pilot in the Department for Business and Trade](#)

⁸ The Institute for Ethical AI, 2020: ["Disability and AI" Whitepaper](#)

⁹ Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, 2021: [Artificial intelligence and the rights of persons with disabilities](#)

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against job applicants with disabilities.¹⁰ Additionally, AI can introduce new forms of disability-based discrimination.¹¹ A 2024 study found that AI résumé screeners ranked CVs with disability-related references (i.e. leadership awards, scholarships, panel presentations, and association memberships) lower than identical résumés without such information.¹²

Similarly, AI video tools that measure speech patterns or non-verbal cues like eye contact can discriminate against candidates with disabilities, including those who stutter, persons with facial paralysis, hearing loss, or neurodivergent individuals, by misreading these behaviours as signs of disengagement or incapacity.^{13,14}



A core challenge for AI-powered hiring tools is their limited transparency, sometimes called the "black box" problem. Complex, multi-layered algorithms make it difficult, even for their creators, to explain why a particular decision was made. Employers thus face challenges in ensuring accountability and fairness.¹⁵

Increasingly, policy and regulatory frameworks across regions, such as those from the European Union (EU) and the United States, are highlighting the need for greater transparency, accessibility and bias mitigation in AI applications.¹⁶ Similarly, regulators should address the area of performance monitoring, where AI-powered tracking systems can unintentionally disadvantage employees who need flexibility or adjustments, including due to their disability.

Recommendations on responsible and disability-Inclusive AI

As a coming-together of more than 40 multinational enterprises, more than 45 National Business and Disability Networks across the globe, and 7 non-business members like the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the ILO GBDN started addressing the impacts of AI on the employment of persons with disabilities in 2019. Sessions at recent ILO GBDN's global conferences (2024 "[Inclusiveness in a digital economy: Avatars, accessibility, and Artificial Intelligence](#)"; 2023 "[Artificial Intelligence and the future of technologies: Impact and opportunities](#)") and its virtual events like "[How do you lip-read a robot? AI-powered HR technology has a disability problem](#)" aim to raise awareness about AI's promises as well as the risks to both employers and persons with disabilities.

In partnership with initiatives like "[Disability Ethical? AI](#)" and the "[Equitable AI Alliance](#)", the ILO GBDN works towards changing company's legal, ethical, and cultural approach on the use of AI for the recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities. To harness the opportunities and mitigate risks, companies should adopt a proactive, human-centred, and ethical approach to AI deployment in the area of employment. The

¹⁰ [Warden AI, 2025: Disability Bias in AI: How and Why to Audit](#)

¹¹ [The Institute for Ethical AI, 2020: "Disability and AI" Whitepaper](#)

¹² [University of Washington, 2024: Identifying and Improving Disability Bias in GPT-Based Resume Screening](#)

¹³ [Center for Democracy & Technology, 2020: Algorithm-driven Hiring Tools: Innovative Recruitment or Expedited Disability Discrimination?](#)

¹⁴ [Bloomberg Law, 2025: AI Hiring Tools Elevate Bias Danger for Autistic Job Applicants](#)

¹⁵ [Quinn Emanuel, 2025: When Machines Discriminate: The Rise of AI Bias Lawsuits](#)

¹⁶ [See the EU Artificial Intelligence Act and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022: The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Use of Software, Algorithms, and Artificial Intelligence to Assess Job Applicants and Employees](#)

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following recommendations are emerging practices that companies may consider, in alignment with principles of disability equality and responsible business conduct – while recognising that regulatory, normative and policy frameworks on AI are still evolving.

- **Responsible deployment and governance:** AI should augment, not replace, human decision-making. Employers should make provisions for meaningful human oversight and review of all AI-generated Human Resources-related decisions – given these will impact people with disabilities as existing employees, as potential new hires, and as employees who will acquire their disabilities in the future. Clear accountability should be established for AI system performance and any discriminatory outcomes that may arise. Employers should also encourage providers of Human Resources technologies to demonstrate that they have taken the necessary steps to mitigate technology-induced risks to disadvantaged people – specifically persons with disabilities.
- **Vendor due diligence:** When procuring AI solutions, employers should vet vendors for their commitment to accessibility, ethical AI principles, and demonstrated ability to mitigate bias against persons with disabilities. Strong contractual clauses that hold vendors accountable for the accessibility, fairness, and non-discriminatory nature of their AI tools can help employers mitigate the risk of engaging in disability-based discrimination.
- **Inclusive culture:** Companies should embed AI considerations into their broader disability, equity and inclusion strategies. This includes providing disability confidence training for Human Resources professionals and managers on the ethical use of AI and promoting digital literacy for employees with disabilities.¹⁷
- **Collaboration and sharing of good practices:** Companies are invited to engage with the ILO GBDN, National Business and Disability Networks, other companies, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, ethical AI initiatives, regulators, and other experts to share experiences, learn from latest good practices, and contribute to the development of disability-inclusive AI standards.
- **Ethical and non-discriminatory design and development:** Inclusive AI starts with co-creation. Companies that develop AI should actively involve persons with diverse disabilities, their representative organisations, and accessibility experts and experts in Human Resources policy and practices in the entire AI design, development, and testing lifecycle.¹⁸ This would help to ensure that tools are inherently unbiased, accessible, and accurately assess candidates' potential. Microsoft's *AI for Accessibility* initiative, for example, is a grant programme that specifically invests in ideas developed “by or with people with disabilities”, demonstrating a tangible commitment to these principles.¹⁹

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¹⁷ [World Economic Forum \(WEF\), 2025: Advancing Responsible AI Innovation: A Playbook](#)

¹⁸ [Nordic Welfare Centre, 2025: AI for all – inclusive technology is a collective responsibility](#)

¹⁹ [Microsoft: Accessibility innovation](#)