



International  
Labour  
Organization

GLOBAL BUSINESS  
AND DISABILITY  
NETWORK

# ► Making the Future of Work inclusive of persons with disabilities

November 2019 Conference Report



## ▶ Disability as part of the future of work

---

New forces are transforming the world of work, bringing with them risks and opportunities for persons with disabilities. The ILO's Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN) hosted a landmark event on 21-22 November 2019 to identify key issues that need to be addressed to make the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities. With over 250 experts and leaders from business, civil society and international organizations, the conference built bridges between global efforts on the future of work and disability inclusion.

In its centenary year, the ILO's declaration for the future of work makes achieving equal opportunities for persons with disabilities one of the key areas for the organization's work. In this event, the ILO and GBDN members – multinational companies, national business and disability networks, and supporting organizations – gave a platform to create a coalition that can act on making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities. The conference covered a range of the key technical and policy issues related to disability and the future of work, and set the stage for continued efforts in this area.

## ▶ Call to action

---

The GBDN and the ONCE Foundation launched the results of a first-of-its-kind global research on making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities. The publication discusses how key trends in a changing world of work can affect persons with disabilities and highlights key steps going forward to a disability-inclusive future.

In the opening session of the conference, specialists from the ILO, the World Economic Forum, the European Commission, the World Bank, the International Organization of Employers, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development discussed the report's findings and key issues in the future of work.

## Key objectives for an inclusive future of work

The research conducted by the GBDN and the ONCE Foundation within the framework of Disability Hub Europe, with support from the European Social Fund, identifies five key objectives for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the future of work. They are to be achieved by the key stakeholders working together, coming from the public authorities, the corporate sector, trade unions, NGOs working on disability, and academia. The objectives are:

- ▶ 1. New forms of employment and employment relations integrate disability inclusion.
  - ▶ 2. Skills development and lifelong learning made inclusive of persons with disabilities.
  - ▶ 3. Universal Design embedded in development of all new Infrastructure, products and services.
  - ▶ 4. Assistive technologies, existing and newly developed, to be made affordable and available.
  - ▶ 5. Measures to include persons with disabilities in growing and developing areas of the economy.
-

▶ The report was welcomed as a call for action: to ensure that disability is more prominent in initiatives on the future of work and to mainstream disability in work on social justice. The focus on disability inclusion is timely with the increased focus from businesses on social contributions as one of their bottom lines.

Panellists raised a range of issues important to consider in policy directions, including:

- The need for further data. Data needs to go beyond numbers to better understand barriers and opportunities.
- Inclusive jobs. Where is the next generation of accessible jobs? Jobs can be made inclusive from their design.
- Transitions in and out of work. Lifelong learning was raised in different ways, and will be important as career trajectories have to adapt and respond to new circumstances.
- Social Protection. Social protection systems need to promote entry into the labour market and will be a key component in responding to transitions in and out of work.
- Intersectionality. It is important to understand further the multiple barriers that people face to get into the labour market – to do this it needs to be understood how disability interacts with gender, geography and other issues.

Going forward to make the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities there will be key points to consider. Working with researchers and designing targeted research questions will help get the information that is needed, and understand more fully the points of discrimination that lead to lower employment rates for persons with disabilities. Alongside integrated disability policies and wider coverage of employment and other services, it will be important to explore financing and governance structures.

## Global Private Sector Initiatives on Disability

- ▶ • The Nippon Foundation is conducting research on persons with disabilities and the new economy. The business case for disability inclusion in the private sector needs to be updated in a changing world of work, and this research features particularly on the gig economy and its evolution.
- ▶ • Business Disability Forum works with its members to develop a Global Business Disability Framework and global taskforce to support multinational companies can adopt best practice on disability inclusion across their operations.
- ▶ • Valuable 500 is a global movement to put disability on the business leadership agenda. Companies and leaders pledge to raise disability at the board level and make a commitment to action.



Frame from the youtube campaign.

## ▶ **When it comes to disability, everybody has an opinion**

---

The ILO GBDN launched its new communications campaign, #invalidopinions. The campaign uses stories of persons with disabilities to highlight the beliefs and misconceptions – or “invalid opinions” – on disability can create barriers or hold people back from achieving their potential.

Panellists emphasized the way attitudes towards disability are changing and there is a certain momentum or “tipping point” taking our work forward: “now is our time”. Despite the achievements of persons with disabilities, stigma and stereotypes are still widespread. The campaign contributes to the important step of initiating and developing conversations that can change people’s minds. Featuring lived experience of persons with disabilities helps to challenge the prejudice of low expectations. Working together, and reaching out to new partner organizations, we can drive change.

## ▶ Roadmap for an inclusive future of work

---

The conference explore directions on the future of work with presentations from over 70 speakers and rich discussions inside and outside of the sessions. Marking the ILO centenary, the conference also marks the GBDN's own growth and the momentum which has built up private sector leadership on disability inclusion in business. Going forward, the GBDN will continue to act as a platform for this wider coalition to come together to jointly address the challenges and opportunities that the future of work holds.

The future of work is not predetermined, and there are many areas where initiatives are needed as building blocks for inclusion for persons with disabilities or to prevent new barriers that can arise. Alongside areas related to specific countries and initiatives that the conference explored, the sessions and results analysed by rapporteurs guide us in many of the areas where action is needed.

## ▶ Artificial Intelligence and its impact

---

"If you are not in the database, you never will be" – together with its power to transform, artificial intelligence offers the threat of establishing exclusion from the labour market. Artificial intelligence can be used to further inclusion through the tools it can create, innovative connections which could create new pathways into work or other mechanisms to support inclusion of persons with disabilities. One of the emerging threats, however, is the way recruitment systems are using untested artificial intelligence mechanisms that exclude those without standard profiles or do not include accessibility features.

- Human-centred design – and realizing the diversity of human intelligence – can guide artificial intelligence solutions.
- The disability community needs to be part of the conversations, design, and development of data sets.
- Develop regulation for application of artificial intelligence.

## ▶ Providing digital skills to persons with disabilities

---

Digital skills offer a great potential to build a talent supply for jobs in high demand. As well as the need for persons with disabilities themselves to develop their professional abilities, skills shortages currently impact business productivity and capacity. Targeted programmes of skills development add value to business, as well as the opportunity for decent jobs and meaningful careers for persons with disabilities.

- Develop partnerships and collaborations between business, government and civil society to achieve the shared goal and quality results.
- Training and certification can provide programmes at scale and mobility for persons with disabilities.
- Programmes can benefit from iterative approach of design, test, improve and then scale.
- Research on future of work needs to continue to identify the technology, knowledge skills, and ways of working that are emerging.

## ▶ Employee Resource Groups

---

“Let us be involved in everything” – employee resource groups bring persons with disabilities together in an organization. They can give a platform to individual stories and ensure the engagement of persons with disabilities in different areas of the organization.

- Form employee resource groups in organizations where they do not exist yet.
- Make sure the employee resource group is attractive to join and belong to, not a way of segregating persons with disabilities.
- Ensure senior leadership, organizational support and resources for the employee group.
- A maturity model could guide employee resource groups at different stages of development

## The Public Sector Leading by Example

---

The public sector has a unique role in terms of employment of persons with disabilities. As well as being a large employer, there are many different types of work. Furthermore, there is a symbolic importance of employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector. One of the challenges, however, is that public administrations are often long-standing institutions where old-fashioned human resources and rigid procedures may be hard to change. Inclusive employment efforts have built on strategy and leadership, been data-driven, and adapted policies, systems and tools within the public sector. Many pilot projects have given an impulse to inclusion through talent pipelines and other partnerships that promote inclusion.

- Create a compendium of tools for human resources and public administrations, in line with a rights-based approach to disability inclusion.
- Share best practices on relevant policies and initiatives. Particularly relevant topics include provision of reasonable accommodation, and on collecting relevant data.
- Systematic collaboration between public service administrations – for instance, through creation of a network.

## Mental health and neurodiversity in the workplace

---

Mental health is a universal that affects everyone, and at the same time has specific social and cultural specificities. Business is taking a range of approaches on mental health, from company-wide strategies to communications, services, and interventions to support employees. A range of approaches are being taken on mental health, from employment assistance to mobile applications that support a user's mental health. Some mental health related changes can be simple things that benefit everyone – simplifying or clarifying workflows or communications, for example.

- Prepare both employer and employee – for instance in working on both sides of the recruitment process, or through training programmes, e-learning and job-shadowing.
- New ways to share stories and raise awareness on mental health. For example:
  - o Leadership teams and employee resource groups can drive discussions.
  - o Moments for mental health discussions in regular meetings.

- o Open people to have harder conversations on challenging aspects of mental health.
- o Engage universities and other community partners to challenge stigma around mental health before people enter the workforce.
- o Further research to explore what universal design means in terms of mental health. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has a task force on cognitive accessibility.

## Assistive Technologies and Universal Design

---

Technologies are changing the nature of work for everyone and offer new employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, there are still serious cultural challenges and often employers are reluctant to hire persons with disabilities. Furthermore, as technology develops and disseminates quickly, there is a danger that some people are left behind.

- Solve problems locally, and see practical opportunities for improving people's lives. Solutions need to be found based on individual needs.
- Spread the message to the technology industry about how technology can change people's lives. This can be done through government campaigns and/or awards for where information and communications technology is benefiting people.

## Making inclusive Policy

---

Assumptions about who can participate in the labour market need to be reset. New collaborations can develop interventions, products and services that help to bring this transformation about. Diversity and transparency contribute to innovation and new technological solutions. The gig-economy potentially offers opportunities to persons with disabilities to work in the way it provides task-based work independent of geography. More attention also needs to be given to the care economy.

- The continuing importance of challenging stigma and social barriers.
- Further research can show how intelligent technology can transform lives of persons with disabilities.
- UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is developing a new General Comment on Article 27, the right to work.





International  
Labour  
Organization

GLOBAL BUSINESS  
AND DISABILITY  
NETWORK

# ► Making the Future of Work inclusive of persons with disabilities

November 2019 Conference Report