

Employment of Persons with disabilities: how can we change society's view

EESC hearing, 13 November 2019

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The International Disability and Development Consortium is a network of civil society organisations coming together around a common objective: promoting inclusive international development and humanitarian action with a special focus on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights by all people with disabilities.

Our membership includes disability and development NGOs, mainstream development NGOs, representative organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs), as well as national networks and international member-based networks.

Through our members, IDDC is active in over 150 countries around the world.

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To be inclusive, development action must be respecting 6 core principles

- Equity and equality
- Leaving no one behind, including marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities.
- Empowerment of persons with disabilities
- Awareness raising and capacity building
 - Ensuring that government ministers and civil servants know what disability is, what inclusion means, what their obligations are and how society benefits.
 - Inclusive development cannot be achieved without the participation and engagement of everyone in the community.
- Technical cooperation

- Donor countries should share experience, expertise and good practice with partner countries.
- Coordination with all stakeholders
 - Donors: ensure that development aid does not create undue barriers or finance inaccessible or discriminatory projects
 - Partner countries: make sure that policies are actually inclusive and that civil servants and administrations are implementing policies effectively.
 - Coordinating with civil society, private sector, and DPOs

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What does the international framework says about access to employment?

- UNCRPD, a legally-binding Convention. Article 27 “recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others” and it prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment.
- Agenda 2030 dedicates a Sustainable Development Goal on Decent Work and Economic Growth, i.e. SDG8. SDG8 makes an explicit reference to persons with disabilities. It calls on Member States to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.”

Due to our area of expertise, my intervention will focus on the access to employment and decent work for persons with disabilities in lower and middle income countries. However some findings can apply to the EU level. Let’s have a quick look at key figures:

- 1 billion people have a disability, i.e. nearly 15% of the world’s population
- According to ILO, global economic loss related to the exclusion of persons with disabilities is at least up to 7% of GDP
- According to the UN, in developing countries, 80% to 90% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, especially women with disabilities

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Before answering today’s three question, I think it is nessary to first take stock of the situation faced by persons with disabilities in terms of access to employment and decent work.

A non exhaustive list of employment-related risks faced by persons with disabilities includes:

- Exclusion from employment that may lead to lower income for persons with disabilities and therefore increase their risk of poverty.
- Discriminatory wage gaps.
- Precarious or unstable work such as in the informal sector or part-time work, making persons with disabilities more vulnerable to exploitative arrangements and unsafe working conditions.

The barriers in accessing productive and decent work are many. The high levels of prejudice, stigma and stereotypes contribute to discriminatory hiring practices excluding persons with disabilities from the workplace. The interplay between a lack of education and training opportunities, a lack of reasonable accommodation in the workplace, and inadequate laws and policies inhibits opportunities for decent work for persons with disabilities.

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Now what can be done to change the view of society on persons with disabilities in the field of employment ?

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Our members agree that one of the main challenge is the prevailing disability stigmas in attitudes and perceptions. For instance, Inclusion International reports that a lack of exposure to people with intellectual disabilities in workplaces has led to a broad assumption that they are incapable of formal sector employment or have qualities that make them unsuitable for wage employment.

Reflecting on the experience gained through programmes and projects they implement, our members highlighted 4 intertwined factors that help change the view of society on persons with disabilities in the field of employment.

- Leadership and participation of DPOs and persons with disabilities must be central to all initiatives/programmes. People with disabilities who operate successful enterprises in their local communities are the best advocates for change!
- Advocacy and campaigning towards government, civil servants, employers to develop and implement laws and policies that contains the CRPD paradigm and promote inclusive skills development, formal and informal employment on equitable basis for persons with disabilities.
- Conduct training and develop resources for employers and other actors in the private sector to provide information about people with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities.

- Share best practices and role models. Recognise employers who have employed persons with disabilities and highlight exceptional performers with disabilities during public functions and in the media.

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I would like to share with you some insight about the project 'Inclusion Works!'. 'Inclusion works!' is an ongoing project, actually it started recently in July 2019. The consortium is led by our member Sightsavers and includes among others 3 further members of our network: ADD International, Humanity & Inclusion, and Inclusion International. The project aims to understand how supply chains and mechanisms can be influenced, at different levels, for greater disability inclusion in the formal and informal employment sectors. Across 4 target countries, they are focusing on two or three specific industries, to test different approaches and interventions to understand what is required to facilitate disability inclusion in employment within the labour market system. One of the first actions in the project has been to complete a labour market assessment in each country; to understand how the demand for and supply of skills comes to market, how the market is regulated and what gaps or opportunities emerge from conversations with job seekers, employers, and government agencies.

Preliminary results revealed emerging interest from employers to be inclusive of disability in their workforces, particularly those with measured diversity and inclusion imperatives, and even more particularly those which are learning from relative successes in gender diversity and extending that to disability inclusion.

Apart from the barriers mentioned previously, participants to the assessment also voiced that we need go beyond jobs and consider livelihood aspirations

Another interesting finding was the fact that attracting applications from persons with disabilities, despite efforts to reach out to them, remains a challenge. They observed that while employers lack disability employment confidence, job seekers are lacking employment readiness and feelings of low self-worth. This finding pinpoints one of the inefficiencies in formal labour market systems: the absence of a capacity building intermediary.

Testing solutions to solve this 'missing middle' will be one of the priorities of Inclusion Works!

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To determine the key elements of success, I would like to give you a brief overview of projects and programmes implemented by our members in this field. As I think you will

receive the presentation afterwards, I included a link to the webpage of each project in case you wish to know more about them.

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In Ethiopia, Disability Partnership Finland, together with its local partner Disability Development Initiative (DDI), implemented a Project called PIEE which enabled small scale vocational education and creation of small businesses, through loans, for unemployed persons with physical disabilities in the city of Addis Abeba (2013-2019). The Project will end this year and the preliminary results are positive: around 75 % of participants continue their businesses and have become sustainable. Participants show more self-confidence and wellbeing, they have more social contacts and are more independent economically compared to their earlier life situation.

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The Access to Livelihoods (A2L) flagship programme, implemented by Leonard Cheshire is based on a model designed to be flexible and to offer an individually tailored package of support to reflect people's individual needs, skills and ambitions through the Livelihood Resource Centres (LRC), including: career counselling, employability and skills training, matching to waged or self-employment opportunities, and follow-on support. The Centres also engaged in advocacy and campaigning, increasing awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, and driving forward change in the policy and practice of local employers and governments.

Partnerships and the use of technology played an important part in the programme. Leonard Cheshire worked closely with employers and other local providers to maximise the impact and sustainability of the programme. Let's mention the creation of Jobability.org, an online portal which matches job seekers with accessible employment opportunities, and provides useful resources and inspiring success stories.

Overall, Access to Livelihoods supported 28,029 people with disabilities into programmes, supporting 18,374 into either waged or self-employed work, and worked with over 3000 employers.

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The AGORA programme is an ongoing programme developed and implemented by FOAL, the Foundation ONCE for Latin America, in 14 Latin American countries. The programme promotes training for the employment of people with a visual impairment

and their inclusion in the labour market. As part of the programme, FOAL develops alliances with public administration, businesses and DPOs. Thanks to the programme, many people with a visual impairment managed to secure employment.

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Light for the World is currently supporting a Project named 'Make 12.4% Work'. Its approach is very unique as it is an initiative driven and led by young persons with disabilities. However I am not going to get into this project as I know that my colleague Francois will in his intervention.

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The last example is not focusing on a project but on a beneficiary of a CBM-supported project. Her name is Jemimah and she has paralyzed legs following a medical intervention. She managed to go to school because her parents insisted, as she explained coming from a Massai community, female children really don't go to school. This raises the other crucial issue of intersectionality.

Unemployed, Jemimah joined Bombolulu workshop as a trainee in the tailoring and dressmaking workshop. However her dream was not into tailoring, she wanted to do an administrative course, and she eventually did it with the support of CBM. The training, which she later on complemented with others such as on microfinance, enabled her to work as receptionist, executive secretary, personal assistant to the executive officer, acting coordinator for microfinance. Apart from her office work, Jemimah does a lot of advocacy for disability issues and for raising awareness about disability rights

This example is one of many success stories and shows how, when being included in the community, when having a decent work, when doing what they dream of, persons with disabilities are catalysts of change.

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We can derive from all these examples 6 key elements of success

- Empower Persons with Disabilities and DPOs, including in the projects/programmes implementation
 - Best advocates for change
- Rely on the families and communities
 - Supporting family members of people in understanding employment rights and advocacy
- Ensure access to education, skills development, including soft skills, and vocational training to enable persons with disabilities to acquire market based skills that increase job opportunities and increase success on job retention and job satisfaction
- Establish career counselling and Family based planning so that persons with disabilities choose a career path that is suitable and viable and take their interest and market opportunities into consideration
- Collaborate with and train of employers. Change happens less because of confrontation and much more because of collaboration and the application of coaching approaches at each level of the system.
- Share best practices and inspirational stories

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Last but not the least, what could be changed in the existing framework to make it more effective?

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Lessons learned from projects highlight in particular 6 areas of improvements that are equally valid within the European Union:

- Invest in applied research, documenting and sharing of evidence based good practice in order to assist in scaling up successful interventions.
- Develop but also effectively enforce legislation and employment policies that comply with the CRPD.
- Promote supported employment and corporate social responsibility. This can be done through quotas, subsidies, tax breaks, preferential conditions in public procurement processes
- Shift the perception of reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodation is not only about renovations and assistive technology, it also includes adaptations to the way that employers and employees work and communicate
- Ensure that donors have a clear policy on disability inclusion. Experience demonstrated that organisations receiving funding from donors without a clear policy on disability inclusion are more hesitant or resistant to the idea of actively seeking out and including persons with disabilities in their programs and services.
- Ensure flexibility and adaptability in donors' aids to help efforts on disability inclusion

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I would like to conclude my intervention with IDDC Recommendations to ensure access to employment and decent work. Those 7 recommendations were drafted based on the inputs of our 32 members and released in July this year.

As a party to the CRPD and as one of the largest donors of overseas development assistance, the EU has a responsibility to ensure that all its policies and programmes related to external action and international cooperation are disability-inclusive and in line with the CRPD.

To reduce inequalities and leave no-one behind by 2030, the IDDC network therefore recommends policy-makers, donors and employers to

1. Include persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in any discussion centred on the economy, technology and global wellbeing. This includes making reasonable accommodation for their engagement.
2. Ensure that national legislation protects persons with disabilities from discrimination on the basis of disability in all matters of employment, vocational training and access to entrepreneurship.
3. Consider a flexible combination of income security and disability-related support to promote labour market participation of persons with disabilities and create a positive link between employment and social protection schemes on disability.
4. Provide incentives, support and guidance to employers including on accessibility, reasonable accommodation and awareness.
5. Promote inclusive vocational skills development systems, including technical vocational education, training systems, programmes and other skills development programmes.
6. Support self-employment by persons with disabilities by strengthening access to entrepreneurship, skills development and financial services.
7. Gather systematic labour data disaggregated by disability, analyse and utilise it to develop and implement disability-inclusive policies and practices and connect data with policymakers.