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APPROACHES TO INCREASING EMPLOYMENT AND QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

EVIDENCE AND GOOD PRACTICES PAPER

November 2022

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared by EnCompass LLC and its partner MSI, a Tetrattech company, for the Data and Evidence for Education Programs (DEEP), Contract No. GS-10F-0245M. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Kamal Lamichhane, Emma Venetis, Amy Mulcahy-Dunn, and Kate Batchelder, with support from Bethany Little and Randi Rumbold. The report benefits from the insights and expert review provided by Daniel Mont, Doug Kruse, Michelle Yin, and Suadd Abdulle. Additional technical experts supported this report through correspondence and interviews. We would like to thank them directly for their time and efforts: Alejandra Bonifaz, Amy Porter, Christina Muli, David Simpson, Diana Elizeche, Eleazar Ntazika Mugarira, Ester Manurung, Gwaliwa Mashawka, Gwendolyn Schaefer, Maria Matthew Schuelka, Jose Cabezudo, Juan Manual Sanchez, Natalie Khoury, Padam Paiyar, Raul Montiel, Roberta Contin, Roman Cuyer, Suka Mapa, and Yadidia Snezeyi.

ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DOL/ODEP	Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy
DPO	Disabled persons' organization
GNI	Gross National Income
HDAK/UKB	Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze and Umurimo Kuri Bose
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEL	Institute for Educational Leadership
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPS	Individual placement and support
JAPRI	Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri
JEED	Japanese Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Job Seekers
LIFE	Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment
LMICs	Lower- and middle-income countries
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PACER	Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights (Center)
SE	Supported employment
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound
TCE	Transition and Customized Employment (Anoka County)
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
WGSS	Washington Group Short Set

I. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report is to provide an understanding of the context, barriers, and practices related to approaches that increase employment and quality of employment among youth with disabilities, primarily in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This report largely draws on existing literature, activity reports, and consultations with practitioners and individuals with disabilities. The definition of youth varies depending on the country, context, and bilateral or multilateral agencies involved. USAID defines youth as people ages 10 to 29 (“Youth in Development Policy: 2022 Update,” 2022). However, given the focus on employment, this report discusses youth ages 15–29. This report presents examples of policy measures and model cases to show what approaches are currently being applied in various contexts.

The research reflected in this evidence and good practice paper is guided by the following questions:

- What does the evidence tell us about the most effective ways to increase new employment, sustain employment, and improve the quality of employment among youth with disabilities?¹
- What approaches are most effective in varying contexts (formal vs. informal sector, distance learning, on-the-job training)?
- Data permitting, how does the effectiveness of these approaches vary by type of disability and intersectionality with other equity dimensions such as race/ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, level of educational attainment, caste, and family background (household structure, socioeconomic status), etc.?
- How do labor supply factors (such as job seekers’ skills, attitudes, and knowledge), demand-side factors (such as employer hiring practices, attitudes, accessibility of workplaces, etc.), and labor market conditions affect or limit employment opportunities among youth with disabilities?
 - What kinds of data are needed to inform these approaches?
- What kind of approaches (such as legislation and/or regulations) are effective in promoting disability inclusion within the private and public sectors?
- What additional data and research are needed to fully answer the questions in this area?

The report is organized as follows: Section 1 presents the overview and problem statement on disability and employment, Section 2 outlines the barriers to entry into the labor market, Section 3 discusses some of the promising approaches and policy measures to increasing employment for youth with disabilities, Section 4 focuses on the informal sector context, and Section 5 offers some conclusions with additional research and data collection recommendations. [Annex 2](#) provides a summary of these barriers to entry into the labor market and promising approaches to remove or mitigate barriers across various aspects of employment that are discussed in this report.

I.1 OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The right to employment for persons with disabilities is enshrined in Article 27 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The same article further

¹ [Quality of employment](#) includes earnings and wealth, health and well-being, job skills for the future, job security and stability, and labor rights.

emphasizes the opportunity to earn a living through work freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible to persons with disabilities (“Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),” 2006). The CRPD also prohibits all forms of employment discrimination, promotes access to vocational training, promotes opportunities for self-employment, and calls for reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Hand-in-hand with the CRPD, and as a means of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, employment has been explicitly identified as central to poverty eradication—either in the wage sector or in self-employment activities.

Gainful employment brings direct income, greater independence, greater self-esteem, and self-fulfillment (O'Day and Killeen, 2002). Employment provides opportunities to build social relationships, increase social status, establish daily rhythms, and create a sense of meaning (Campen and Cardol, 2009). Persons with disabilities—like their non-disabled peers—may experience additional positive changes through employment, such as discovering new talents and skills, developing positive work habits and attitudes, expanding professional networks, learning new time management strategies, playing a decision-making role in the family, and experiencing increased visibility and contribution in the community (Lamichhane, 2012). Importantly, income increases persons with disabilities’ ability to pay for the extra costs that sometimes fall on persons with disabilities such as personal assistance services, assistive devices, accessible transportation, and healthcare. In addition, formal employment permits employees to benefit from social security benefits and related safety net systems (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021). A stable income also allows persons with disabilities to engage financially in their community, to “vote with their money,” and to contribute to and build the community they wish to experience. This can, in turn, create more opportunities for other persons with disabilities.

Although progress has been made, countries are far from achieving the goals embedded in the CRPD.² Persons with disabilities wishing to enter the labor market and obtain quality employment face a complex system of environmental and societal barriers that limit their labor force participation (“Making the Future of Work Inclusive of People with Disabilities,” 2019), such as institutional discrimination (Barnes, 2002). Significant numbers of persons with disabilities are excluded from the labor market and those who are in the labor market are more likely to work in the informal sector, are more likely to work in low-skill jobs with detrimental working conditions, and tend to earn lower wages than their counterparts (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021). Persons with disabilities are also more likely to experience microaggressions, harassment, and violence at work than their non-disabled peers (“Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work,” 2020).

Key Points

- Under the CRPD, persons with disabilities have a right to employment in an environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible.
- Employment of persons with disabilities has significant benefits both to persons with disabilities themselves and, through their contributions, to their families and communities.
- Many persons with disabilities face poor working conditions, earn lower wages than their nondisabled peers, experience forms of harassment in the workplace, or are excluded from the labor market altogether.



² For example, as of 2016, only 18 percent of country constitutions explicitly guaranteed the right to work for adults with disabilities (“Assessing National Action on Work Rights for Persons with Disabilities,” 2016).

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Globally, an estimated 15 percent of the total population, approximately 1 billion people, are persons with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2011). Using national census and survey data from 40 countries, many of which are LMICs, Mitra and Yap compared the employment-to-population ratio among adults (ages 15 to 59) with and without disabilities.³ This indicator reflects the share of the adult population who work for pay or are self-employed. Among the 35 countries with available data, the employment-to-population ratio was on average 56 percent for nondisabled persons and 34 percent for persons with disabilities. Where differences were statistically significant, the employment-to-population ratio was on average 25⁴ percentage points lower for persons with disabilities.⁵ Data on youth with disabilities is available in a smaller number of countries. Among the 24 countries for which data were available, the employment-to-population ratio was on average 19⁶ percentage points lower for youth with disabilities (ages 15 to 29) than nondisabled youth (see Annex 3 for country-specific statistics).

Youth with disabilities are not just underrepresented in employment. Among the 37 countries with available data, 22 had significantly higher rates of youth with disabilities not in employment, education, or training than nondisabled youth (Mitra and Yap, 2021).

Unemployment rates can be a misleading indicator for persons with disabilities because these rates do not include people who are not actively seeking formal employment. While the high employment rates among persons with disabilities that are reported in some LMICs might suggest high rates of informal employment, it may be more likely that a large proportion of persons with disabilities in those countries are not seeking employment at all. This may be because the extent of the barriers for this group of people is not adequately addressed by infrastructure or by support that accommodates their needs in order to function and work (“Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific,” 2016; Mani, Mitra, and Sambamoorthi, 2018; Lamichhane, 2015, Chapter 5).

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Women with disabilities face dual discrimination when entering the labor market; they face discrimination as women and as women with disabilities. For example, employment rates for women with disabilities are significantly lower than those for men with disabilities in most Asian and Pacific countries where statistics are available (“Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific,” 2016). Looking at the Mitra and Yap data disaggregated by gender (Exhibit 1), we see that employment rates for men with and without disabilities are higher than they are for their female counterparts. While the magnitude of the average disability gap

³ The employment-to-population ratio is considered a better indicator than the employment/unemployment rate as a large proportion of persons with disabilities are not in the labor market (neither employed nor actively looking for work) and therefore would not be counted in employment or unemployment statistics.

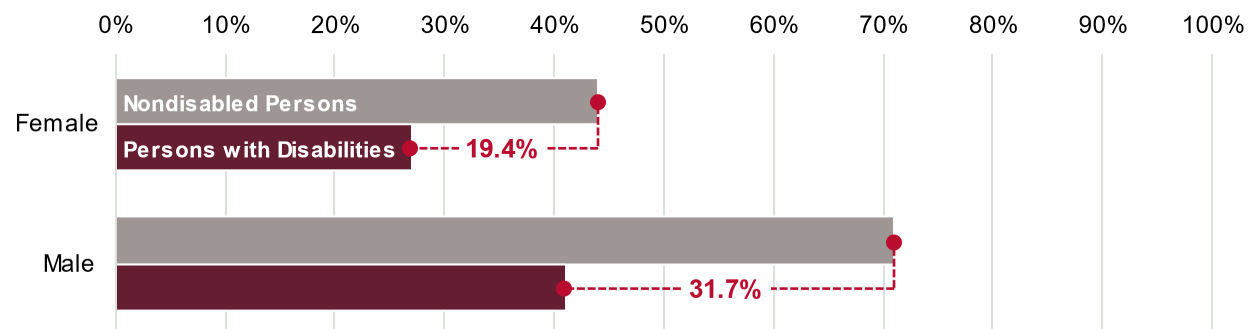
⁴ Author’s calculation of unweighted average of statistically significant differences between adults with no difficulties and those reporting having at least “a lot of difficulty” based on Mitra and Yap 2021 data.

⁵ Following WGSS guidance, “persons with disabilities” are those who report having at least a lot of difficulty along any functional domain.

⁶ Unweighted average of statistically significant differences between youth (ages 15 to 29) with no difficulties and those reporting having at least “a lot of difficulty” based on Mitra and Yap 2021 data.

is larger for men (31 percentage points) than for women (19.4 percentage points),⁷ women face lower employment rates regardless of their disability status.

Exhibit 1: Employment-to-population ratio⁸



	NONDISABLED PERSONS	PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	AVERAGE DIFFERENCE
FEMALE	44	27	19.4
MALE	71	41	31.7

As with the overall employment-to-population ratio, the differences in employment for men and women also vary by country, although the trend of women with disabilities having lower employment than men with disabilities seems to hold.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY DISABILITY

Labor market participation and employment rates vary by the extent of the disability and disability type (“Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific,” 2021). Those with mental health or intellectual disabilities experience the highest unemployment rates (World Health Organization, 2011). In particular, persons with Down Syndrome (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021) face higher rates of unemployment than other persons with disabilities. Those with intellectual disabilities are also more likely to find employment in segregated settings (World Health Organization, 2011). In addition, persons with more extensive disabilities or multiple disabilities experience lower participation and employment rates. This is likely due to the significant physical, informational/communication, and attitudinal barriers to employment that people with multiple disabilities face (Mizunoya and Mitra, 2013).

Persons with disabilities who manage to enter the labor market, despite barriers, are slightly more commonly employed in low-paying, part-time positions with difficult or detrimental work conditions (World Health Organization, 2011; Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021). Likewise, persons with disabilities are slightly more likely to work in the informal sector than nondisabled persons (Mitra and Yap, 2021). Among the countries included in their study, Mitra and Yap’s data indicate that an average of

⁷ Author’s calculation of the average of significant differences based on Mitra, Yap 2021 data.

⁸ Following WGSS guidance, “persons with disabilities” are those who report having at least a lot of difficulty along any functional domain.

66 percent of nondisabled 15–59-year-olds and 72 percent of those with disabilities⁹ worked in the informal sector. The pattern was similar among youth with 58 percent of nondisabled 15–24-year-olds and 63 percent of those with disabilities working in the informal sector.¹⁰

Key Points

- Youth with disabilities are far less likely to be employed than nondisabled youth.
- Women with disabilities are less likely to be employed than men with disabilities.
- The gap in employment for those with and without disabilities is greater for men than women.
- Among persons with disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities experience some of the lowest employment rates.



WAGE DISPARITIES

Persons with disabilities in the labor market tend to receive lower wages than nondisabled persons even after controlling for differences in employee characteristics (Mitra and Sambamoorthi, 2009). Reasons for wage differences include discrimination, i.e., employers' assumption of lower productivity or inflated assumptions about workplace accommodations (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021); lack of educational opportunities, and lack of or mismatch of skills and employee strengths with job requirements ("Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals By, for and with Persons with Disabilities," 2018; Choe and Baldwin, 2017).

Wage differences tend to vary by type of disability. In Brazil, for example, males with intellectual disabilities experienced the highest wage disparities. The differences become more pronounced with the significance of the disability. Similarly, the Indonesian Family Life Survey data indicate that persons with mental disabilities earn 21.6–22.3 percent less in monthly wages than individuals with other disabilities that lead to activity limitations,¹¹ who earn 16.0–17.5 percent less in monthly wages than nondisabled persons (Caron, 2020).

Women with disabilities experience lower pay compared to nondisabled women and men with disabilities ("Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific," 2016). In addition to disability and gender, the intersections with race, ethnicity, caste, and other demographic characteristics could be reflected in differing wage rates.

Wage disparities also exist in high-income countries. In the United States, for example, Kruse et al., using 2008–2014 data from the American Community Survey, indicated that part of the disability pay gap is due to productivity-related job requirements (Kruse et al. 2018). The remaining pay gap—experienced by employees whose disabilities should not limit their productivity—reflects potential discrimination. While discrimination results in lower wages for all persons with disabilities, it appears to have the

⁹ Following WGSS guidance, "persons with disabilities" are those who report having at least a lot of difficulty along any functional domain.

¹⁰ Author's calculation of the unweighted average of statistically significant differences in the percentage of the population with no and with at least a lot of functional difficulties.

¹¹ Activity limitation is defined as having trouble performing activities of daily life. This includes physical functioning (walking for 1 km, standing up from sitting on the floor, etc.), activities of daily life (bathing, getting out of bed, etc.) and instructional activity of daily living (preparing hot meals, managing money, etc.).

smallest effect on the pay of deaf and hard of hearing women and men (lowering pay by 3.2 percent and 2.7 percent, respectively) and the largest effect for those with cognitive disabilities (lowering pay by 9.9 percent for women and 16.9 percent for men) and mobility disabilities (lowering pay by 7.7 percent for women and 22.3 percent for men).

Key Point

- Persons with disabilities receive lower wages than others in the labor market, with wages being even lower among women with disabilities and all persons with mental and cognitive disabilities.



2. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Employers and policy makers have yet to fully address the range of barriers limiting labor force participation of youth with disabilities. Employment stakeholders must understand and actively remove barriers to tap into the talents of and fully engage youth with disabilities in the global workforce. This section explores some of the factors that limit access to labor force participation and factors that result in underemployment. While there could be differences in the needs and barriers faced by youth with disabilities versus older persons with disabilities, there are common barriers both age groups face. This section discusses such barriers that apply to persons with disabilities, including youth, when seeking, obtaining, and maintaining work. Broadly, such barriers may be classified into four types: (1) factors related to employee and employer attitudes, (2) factors related to skills and knowledge, (3) factors related to workplace accessibility, accommodations, and safety, and (4) factors related to regulations. This same set of groupings will be used when discussing promising solutions in Section 3.



2.1 ATTITUDES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

NEGATIVE AND/OR LOW EXPECTATIONS AND SELF-ESTEEM

Because of disability-related stigma and discrimination, persons with disabilities often confront negative perceptions and treatment. In the workplace, persons with disabilities often face greater exposure to workplace violence or harassment (“Making the Future of Work Inclusive of People with Disabilities,” 2019). Given these threats, in many LMICs families may keep children with disabilities at home.

When exposed to discrimination from a young age, the resulting feelings of passivity and low self-esteem could work as internalized oppression. Low self-expectations developed by some persons with disabilities could affect all the decisions they make throughout their lives, including gaining productive employment. Shier (2009) underscores this finding by observing that low self-esteem is one of the challenges some persons with disabilities face in the workplace. Low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression are closely linked to isolation (Tulane University, 2020) such that low self-esteem can exacerbate isolation tendencies and vice versa. Low self-esteem is not inherent to having a disability; rather, it may develop over time as people are exposed to pervasive discrimination and poor treatment. Further, the social isolation faced by some persons with disabilities because of stigma and discrimination also restricts their access to social networks that could help them find employment (Luskin and Nicholson, 2008).

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Internalized oppression exists when a marginalized person or group internalizes “the messages of inferiority they receive about their group membership” (David and Derthick, 2014). This can be unconscious or involuntary, and can lead a marginalized person to act out negative stereotypes or otherwise reinforce their own oppression.

Persons with disabilities are often faced with immense prejudice and the belief from others that it is impossible or unreasonable for them to participate in daily or social life. As Watermeyer and Görgens (2014) explain “attempting to participate and function in social and occupational life in the face of substantial, even overwhelming expectations from the social world that one is not capable of doing so” is exhausting and discouraging. Some persons with disabilities may reach the conclusion that they cannot participate, as attempting to perform in the workplace under such circumstances can be emotionally dangerous. Others may begin to resign themselves to or even feel gratitude for their position in society, which only serves to reinforce their own marginalization. As they internalize the oppression placed upon them, persons with disabilities may withdraw from opportunities for learning and skill-building, “leading to lives of unrealized potential and damaged self-worth (Watermeyer and Görgens, 2014).

MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Societal misconceptions and lack of knowledge about the potential of persons with disabilities to perform jobs and discrimination are central reasons for lower labor force participation, unemployment, underemployment, and—if they are employed—their exclusion from promotion opportunities (Baldwin and Johnson, 2001; Lindsay et al., 2021). Such attitudes may stem from prejudice or the false belief that persons with disabilities are less productive than nondisabled persons.

“

I had met many obstacles while I was looking employment. For example, ... [w]hen I met with the management they told me that I am disable[d] and I couldn't do the job. I challenged them through social media and eventually they accepted me and they offer[ed] me [a] job.

”

In addition, misconceptions about the costs of accommodations to make workplaces accessible for employees with disabilities further limit employers' willingness to hire persons with disabilities. Furthermore, misplaced low expectations on the part of many agencies and professionals have meant that youth with disabilities do not generally receive adequate and relevant training and preparation for employment. Lack of investment in training and in creating accessible and enabling work environments can reinforce misconceptions regarding persons with disabilities' productivity.

“

While I was working with this organization, my area manager came to me one day and suggested that I should stop doing field work and would rather work in the office. I asked if he had any concern my competence my job. He said the reason is my disability [blind] but he has no concern about competence. He added that he is doing me a favor.

”



2.2 SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

MISMATCHED SKILLS AND PERCEIVED LOW PRODUCTIVITY

In most cases, finding a person whose skills and interests match a job’s requirements will ensure greater productivity. According to Choe and Baldwin (2017), when workers with disabilities find a job that is a good match for their skills, they enjoy higher wages and longer job tenure. While their disability should not dictate which jobs persons with disabilities seek, their productivity in a given job will be affected if their strengths don’t align with the job requirements when all accommodations are made.

Even if strengths and requirements do align, productivity can be negatively affected if the workplace does not practice universal design and if reasonable accommodations are not provided (these concepts are discussed in Section 2.3). For persons with disabilities, any gap between job requirements and skills that can be performed (due to mismatched job placement and/or lack of accommodations) can further promote the misperception that persons with disabilities are less productive.

FEWER EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Education and training can help break the link between disability and under- and unemployment by providing persons with disabilities with the knowledge and skills needed to carry out responsibilities associated with better quality, better paying, full-time jobs. In four high-income countries, Barone and Werfhorst (2011) found that education, particularly cognitive skills, influenced labor market participation with between 32 and 63 percent of the education effect stemming from cognitive skills. Multiple studies from around the world have confirmed that investing in education increases the probability of individuals entering the job market (Mitra et al., 2013; Lamichhane et al., 2014). For people with and without disabilities, increasing years of schooling increases the probability of getting full-time and white-collar jobs (Mizunoya, et al., 2018; Lamichhane and Okubo, 2014; Lamichhane 2015; Mitra et al., 2013).¹² Nepal

¹² White collar work refers to non-manual jobs, including clerical jobs, mid-level planning and accounting functions, and high-level managerial roles. White collar workers typically engage in sectors such as health care, education, banking, business, and other service industries. Blue collar work refers to those engaged in manual labor (Bersselaar, 2019). Although all jobs are equally important, because of their disabilities, youth with disabilities with sufficient skills are considered relatively easier to engage in white-collar work.

provides an example of the association between education and employment. Lamichhane and Sawada (2013) found that the estimated rate of financial return (calculated from hourly wages) to education was very high among persons with disabilities, ranging from 19.3 to 25.6 percent, which is two to three times higher than the 7 percent rate of returns for the general population in Nepal (Dunusinghe 2021) and 10 percent global rate of returns.¹³

Unfortunately, high-quality education and training remain limited for youth with disabilities. As of 2015, children with disabilities made up one-third of out-of-school children (Sæbønes, 2015). In total, as many as half of all primary and secondary school-age children with disabilities in LMICs are out of school (“The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World,” 2016). Even for those who do attend school, children with disabilities face a range of barriers to equitable, inclusive, quality education and are much more likely to drop out and never complete schooling than their nondisabled peers (Mizunoya et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2020; Kuper et al., 2018; Lamichhane and Takeda, 2022; Zhanga and Holden, 2022). Furthermore, youth with disabilities who have attended school may not get the support they need when transitioning from school to work (“Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific,” 2016).

“

I would like to see organizations support people like me [blind] to train and help to find job[s]. I would also love to have an office or one-stop shop, where disabled people can get information about available vacancies.

”

Participation in technical and vocational education and training is low, especially for persons with disabilities. Only 36 percent of the 58 countries surveyed in the fourth *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* reported an increase in the participation of persons with disabilities in adult education and learning since 2015 (“Leave No One Behind: Participation, Equity and Inclusion: Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education,” 2019). This was one of the smallest percentages of countries of any demographic group. In some countries, the availability of employment-related education and training for persons with disabilities has decreased. As of 2015, only 17 percent of countries identify persons with disabilities as a target group for adult education policies (“Leave No One Behind: Participation, Equity and Inclusion: Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education,” 2019). In many countries, persons with disabilities are overlooked for important technical and vocational training.

Where education might be available to persons with disabilities, they still face barriers to accessing education. For example, while technical and vocational education (TVET) is available to youth with disabilities in Malawi, a study of the TVET system found that many facilities lacked accessibility features like ramps, accessible toilets, and learning materials available in accessible formats, like Braille or large print. Additionally, where scholarships or other financial incentives for students obtaining work experience were available, only a small percentage of these funds were distributed to working students with disabilities (“Gender Equality and Inclusion Analysis of the Technical, Entrepreneurial, Vocational Education and Training System,” 2018). In some countries, vocational training for persons with disabilities is only offered in segregated settings and does not adequately prepare persons with

¹³ It is important to mention, however, that although the rate of higher returns to the investment in education for persons with disabilities has been observed, this should not be interpreted to imply that persons with disabilities out-earn nondisabled persons.

disabilities for the current labor market requirements and expectations of employers (“Making TVET and Skills Systems Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities,” 2017).

LACK OF ACCESS TO CREDIT AND FINANCING

Persons with disabilities face barriers to financing at multiple stages of the lending process. Even before applying for a loan, discrimination in persons with disabilities’ households may limit their ability to have equal property rights and own property. This lack of property rights, which disproportionately affects women with disabilities (Groce, London, and Stein, 2014), in turn means that persons with disabilities frequently don’t have the collateral that most lending agencies require. In some contexts, there are restrictions on the “legal capacity” of persons with disabilities, which can prevent them from independently managing their financial affairs. Persons with disabilities who attempt to apply for a loan often face an inaccessible application process without any accommodations. Once an application is submitted, misperceptions about persons with disabilities may cause lending institutions to assume that loans to persons with disabilities bear greater risk, regardless of their assets and credit history, and so loans may be denied (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021).

Microfinancing has proven effective in supporting the transition to self-employment and increasing economic empowerment, particularly among women and rural communities in LMICs. However, little is known about its impact on persons with disabilities. According to the Center for Financial Inclusion, persons with disabilities represent only 0.5 percent of current microfinance institutions’ clients (Goldstein, 2014). In general, findings suggest that people with disabilities don’t have access to information about microfinance services. For example, Nuwagaba and Rule (2016), found that persons with disabilities in Uganda face challenges learning about and engaging with microfinancing. Similarly, through field visits in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nicaragua, and Uganda, de Klerk (2008) found that access to finance is a daunting endeavor for persons with disabilities because of stigmatization and self-exclusion. Stigmatization can take the form of exclusion of persons with disabilities by the staff of microfinance institutions (e.g., deliberately excluding someone due to prejudice about their income-earning capacity), exclusion by other members of the microfinance institution (in cases when microfinance institutions use a group methodology and all members are jointly liable for each individual’s loan), or exclusion by design (e.g., microfinance institutions that require collateral as loan security or that don’t lend to persons with no recorded economic activity). Self-exclusion occurs when people choose not to take out loans due to a variety of reasons, including fear of debt if they fail, inability to afford microfinancing services, or excessive interest rates. Financing for persons with disabilities living in rural areas is further restricted as microfinance firms are often absent in rural areas (de Klerk, 2008). Additionally, Lewis (2004) studied self-employment and the use of microfinancing for women with disabilities in Zambia and Zimbabwe and concluded that key strategies still need to be put in place to include women with disabilities in finance, for micro-financing to be a viable transition strategy.



2.3 WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SAFETY

LIMITED ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

In an increasingly digital age, access to ICT has significantly eased the way we work. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many workplace environments shifting to online modalities. Studies have found that working remotely could be beneficial for persons with disabilities as they may have more power to make their homes accessible than their workplace (Hirst and Foster, 2021). However, many youth with disabilities lack access to ICT devices and ICT-assistive devices. Barriers to devices include restrictive costs, lack of information on relevant ICT, lack of awareness of what ICT can achieve, and lack of training in the adaptive use of ICT (Hersh and Mouroutsou, 2015; Quarless, 2017). These barriers are particularly germane in LMIC contexts where persons with disabilities and their families often live under both income poverty and multidimensional poverty¹⁴ (Banks et al., 2021; Clausen and Barrantes, 2020; Mont and Nguyen, 2018; Roncancio, 2018; Banks et al., 2017; Mitra et al., 2013; Trani et al., 2015; Trani and Loeb, 2012; Braithwaite and Mont, 2009).

Furthermore, even when ICT is accessible to persons with disabilities and they have familiarity with their use, these tools will not be effective unless their co-workers are also familiar with how to use these devices and use them routinely to create an inclusive environment. Lack of knowledge or improper use of assistive devices may counteract the assistive functions of the technology and exacerbate barriers in the workplace.

INACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

One of the employment challenges persons with disabilities face is getting to and from work due to the inaccessibility of transportation infrastructure. While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes accessible transportation, a large proportion of urban and inter-urban transport systems in most countries remains inaccessible to persons with disabilities, causing serious mobility constraints. Persons with disabilities often have to arrange and pay for private transport to get to work due to a lack of accessible public transportation. This cost means that the reservation wage (the minimum wage that a worker is prepared to accept), for persons with disabilities increases (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021). This additional burden can preclude some persons with disabilities from entering the labor market. In Canada, for instance, youth with disabilities ages 15 to 24 stated inaccessible transportation as one of the barriers to work (Campen and Cardol, 2009; Lindsay et al., 2021). Not being able to go from one place to another at reasonable costs and within reasonable timeframes limits opportunities for youth with disabilities.

¹⁴ Multidimensional poverty takes into account the various areas of life in which one might face deprivation. In Banks et. al's (2021) study, multidimensional poverty is defined to include livelihoods (work and old age security, food security), social inclusion (voting, decision-making), access to services (improved sanitation, clean water, healthcare expenditures), health and well-being (health events, violence), and living conditions (cooking fuel, floor material, overcrowding, asset ownership).

LACK OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Inaccessible workplaces that do not employ universal design or have sufficient support provisions pose significant barriers to the employment of youth with disabilities. Universal design is the concept of designing barrier-free infrastructure, technology, training, and programs that can be used by all people.

An ILO report (Buckup, 2009) showed that persons with disabilities are less productive when they live and work in environments that are disabling and not as a result of their disabilities. Further, if conducive environments are not created, some persons with disabilities will be excluded from the labor market, in particular those with more significant or multiple disabilities. In a study by Anand and Sevak (2017), one-third of non-working persons with disabilities reported that employment barriers could be addressed by workplace accommodations. Misconceptions about the cost required to create enabling work environments may make employers feel that these workplace investments are not warranted. (International Disability Rights Monitor, 2007).

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 guarantees reasonable accommodation for qualified persons with disabilities. Under Title I of the ADA, “reasonable accommodations” means making changes or adjustments to the application or hiring process, job tasks, and providing reserved parking, materials in accessible format, and equipment or software as well as improving workplace accessibility by allowing a flexible work schedule to allow persons with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunities.

Similarly, the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires that State Parties take all appropriate steps to ensure reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace. Under Article 2 of the CRPD, reasonable accommodations are defined as “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Denial of such reasonable accommodations is considered a form of discrimination (United Nations, 2006).

HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

While fair hiring practices and workplace accessibility are critical, the workplace environment is also affected by the behavior and attitudes of nondisabled co-workers and supervisors toward persons with disabilities. If nondisabled employees are resistant to working with persons with disabilities and supervisors accept such stigma, employers might be reluctant to hire workers with disabilities. Even if hired, workers with disabilities may face harassment, discrimination, and violence by their nondisabled colleagues and limited, if any, support from employers to address mistreatment.

Persons with disabilities, and particularly persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, are more likely to experience violence and harassment in the workplace than their nondisabled peers (“Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work,” 2020). Intimidation and verbal abuse are the most commonly reported types of harassment, though sexual harassment and physical violence also occur. Violence and harassment are often a result of negative stereotypes about the productivity of persons with disabilities and may include behaviors such as micromanagement, over-attribution of mistakes, or actions intended to negatively affect persons with disabilities’ self-confidence.

Additional harassing behavior includes actions specifically targeting persons with disabilities' accessibility; for example, colleagues may intentionally bump into persons with vision disabilities or put up barriers to prevent wheelchair access in the workplace. Furthermore, stigma and myths about psychosocial disabilities can lead coworkers to view persons with psychosocial disabilities as dangerous or unpredictable, and as a result, to avoid or ostracize them in the workplace (“Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work,” 2020).

“

I had met many challenges while I [was] teaching this school ... including people saying I don't deserve [to] teach due to my deafness. Although, [I] eventually moved to the district and they realized my capacity and accepted my disability.

”

Unfortunately, the lack of nondiscrimination policies and enforcement among employers and the lack of understanding about and appropriate skills for working alongside persons with disabilities means that harmful attitudes and behaviors toward persons with disabilities that exist outside of the workplace can also endure within the workplace. Without proper training and education about upholding the employment rights of persons with disabilities, employers may unintentionally allow for a hostile work environment for persons with disabilities.



2.4 REGULATIONS

EMPLOYMENT LAWS AND ACTS

Equal opportunity employment laws are intended as supportive mechanisms to provide reasonable accommodation for adaptations of the job and work environment. Denying these rights is considered a form of illegal discrimination (“Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific,” 2021). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs chronicles disability laws and acts that exist worldwide. Currently, 121 laws and acts appear in this registry.¹⁵ While the majority of countries have policy measures and instruments in place to protect the rights of workers with disabilities, the execution of these lags behind where it needs to be to move the needle toward improved labor market access for persons with disabilities, as evidenced in part by lower labor participation rates. A major barrier to the efficacy of these laws and acts is the lack of monitoring and enforcement to ensure they are effectively implemented true to their intents.

INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES TO WORKING

Disability benefits combined with wage discrimination against persons with disabilities can act as disincentives to enter, remain in, or return to the labor market (Chen and van der Klaauw, 2008). This is especially the case for those with more significant disabilities who require extensive, expensive personal assistant services or whose jobs can only provide them with an income that is comparable to

¹⁵ [United Nations Disability Laws and Acts by Country/Area](#)

the disability benefits they could be receiving otherwise. Additionally, if the cost of accommodations and assistive services required for some persons with disabilities to enter the workforce must be paid for out of pocket, their “reservation wage” goes up. When people have the option to choose between subsidies or jobs that offer low pay or unfavorable working conditions, persons with disabilities sometimes regard subsidies as safer because getting a decent job and sustaining it can be a hurdle.

Work incentives or disincentives are consequences of how cash benefit programs are designed, influencing persons with disabilities’ labor force participation rate, work experience, and rate of unemployment (Mont, 2004¹⁶). In some contexts, youth with disabilities can access social security benefits at a certain age, but when they start working, they lose this subsidy. The prospect of losing access to such benefits may increase hesitancy among youth with disabilities to enter the workforce (Hippolitus, 2021).

When evaluating the disincentivizing effect of the disability insurance program in the United States during the 1990s, Chen and van der Klaauw (2008) used merged survey-administrative data to find that the labor force participation rate of disability insurance beneficiaries would have been at most 20 percent higher had none of the persons with disabilities received benefits. Unless youth with disabilities can obtain employment that pays a steady wage higher than the social security benefit they receive, the risk of losing such benefits could decrease their motivation to seek a job. Although presently, this is most applicable in high-income countries where such benefits are more robust than in LMICs, it is still relevant to LMICs as they have started building their disability social protection programs.

Disability social protection programs benefit from the inclusion of proper policy provisions to address the complicated issue of support or benefits to persons with disabilities. Depending on the financial support needs of persons with disabilities, disability social protection programs that cut benefits when persons with disabilities begin working and start earning income may unintentionally serve as a disincentive to work for those individuals that require expensive support (e.g., 24-hour personal assistant services) regardless of their employment status.

3. APPROACHES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The following section provides examples of approaches designed to address the barriers to employment noted in section 2 and increase employment among youth with disabilities through various methods. The approaches are grouped similarly to the barriers: (1) approaches related to attitudes of employees and employers, (2) promising practices to increase skills and knowledge, (3) approaches related to workplace accessibility, accommodations, and safety, and (4) approaches related to regulations. While these approaches have been applied and show promise, evidence of their effectiveness is yet to be measured in many cases. The approaches presented include examples noted in the literature and those provided by stakeholders interviewed for this report.

Employers and international development stakeholders supporting employment programs for youth can collaborate with disabled persons’ organizations (DPOs) to understand the barriers that persons with

¹⁶[Disability Employment Policy](#). The World Bank.

disabilities face in local contexts and strategize effective ways to address these barriers to improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

DISABLED PERSONS' ORGANIZATIONS (DPOS)

Disability-inclusive development is not possible without the involvement of DPOs, also known as Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, or OPDs. DPOs refer to organizations run by and for persons with disabilities. These organizations are governed, directed, and managed by persons with disabilities themselves and exist in most countries. DPOs drive the global disability rights movement through advocacy and organizing. They bring the lived experience of disability to the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of disability-inclusive programs and can leverage the participation of persons with disabilities through their vast networks.



3.1 ATTITUDES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

DISABILITY INCLUSION TRAINING FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Disability inclusion training can target employers, local governments, higher education institution and TVET staff, business owners, human resource managers, and others who might hold negative attitudes or misconceptions about persons with disabilities and who influence employment opportunities for young people, including youth with disabilities. The training content can inform these stakeholders on:

- Employment regulations and rights of youth with disabilities
- Systematic challenges youth with disabilities face in the labor market and what changes they can support
- The abundant capabilities and skills that persons with disabilities bring to the labor market, making them assets rather than liabilities (“Conditions of Work and Equality Department (Work Quality) Bureau for Employers’ Activities (ACT/EMP) Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities,” 2014)
- Concrete steps stakeholders can take, such as using inclusive job postings, to promote inclusion through their roles and at their institutions
- How to leverage universal design to make employment processes and workplace environments more accessible for everyone
- How to budget for and arrange accommodating work environments
- Positive communication skills and ways of interacting with youth with disabilities and their colleagues

Once an employer recognizes that youth with disabilities can and do have the required skills, that it is not prohibitively expensive to make accommodations, or that regulations can have positive effects on the work lives of persons with disabilities, the opportunity for youth with disabilities increases. Training can also serve to build the capacity of staff and instructors from TVET institutions and higher education institutions on inclusive instructional design that incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning (“Inclusive Skills Training and Employment Program for and by Persons with Disabilities (ISTEP): Final Report,” 2017; “USAID Mitra Kunci Initiative: Final Report,” 2021). Including time during training

sessions for youth with disabilities to share their stories and offer first-hand experiences can be powerful as well. Additionally, DPOs are well positioned to be involved in such training sessions to contextualize training content to the local community (“Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri (JAPRI): Final Performance Review,” 2022).

PROJECT EXAMPLE

The [Inclusive Skills Training and Employment Program](#) in Ethiopia implemented a series of disability-inclusive employment training workshops for various stakeholders at many levels to increase awareness and knowledge on how to improve practices in their various capacities. The audience for the training included employment officers, TVET leaders and instructors, HR managers, media personnel, and the federal TVET agency. Topics covered during the training sessions were relevant to the participants to encourage uptake of inclusive practices across many types of actors (“Inclusive Skills Training and Employment Program for and by Persons with Disabilities (ISTEP): Final Report,” 2017).

ONGOING MENTORING AND COACHING

Through a meta-analysis of the literature in the United States from 1980 to 2014, Lindsay et al. (2016) found that though impact outcomes varied significantly, some mentorship programs resulted in significant benefits for youth with disabilities in transition to post-secondary education and to employment. While more research is needed to fully understand the impact of these programs, the authors found effective programs shared common characteristics:

- Lasted more than six months
- Were structured, often including a planned curriculum and paid program coordinator who trained mentors and oversaw the program
- Tailored content to the program’s specific objectives (e.g., vocational skills, specific job-tasks)
- Addressed key elements of the youth’s environment (e.g., family, community, institutions)
- Addressed the transition process and emphasized that the relationship between mentor and mentee is important for supporting the transition from post-secondary education to employment
- Were delivered in group-based or mixed formats (not solely one-on-one)

MENTORING AND COACHING EXAMPLE

One interesting, though not yet evaluated, approach to coaching and mentoring is being implemented in Japan. Under Japan’s Law for Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, enterprises employing five or more persons with disabilities are required to appoint a Vocational Life Consultant who offers advice and guidance to employees with disabilities on all aspects of their vocational life. The Japanese Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Job Seekers (JEED) provides training courses for those working as Vocational Life Consultants for supporting both workers with disabilities and employers. As a part of counseling and support for employers, local Vocational Centers for Persons with Disabilities provide support through job coaches and periodic follow-up services to employers who employ or are planning to employ persons with disabilities. The centers create a support plan for employers based on an analysis of individual employers’ needs and problems in employment management for workers with disabilities. Additionally, JEED lends assistive equipment free of charge to employers and employers’ organizations for a fixed period of time. While lending, counseling services are also provided to ensure that the appropriate equipment is chosen considering their workplace environments and the need of workers with disabilities.

Source: [Employment Support for Persons with Disabilities. Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, and Job Seekers.](#)

While more evidence on mentorship effectiveness, in particular in LMICs, is needed, there are examples of coaching and mentoring models that have been effective in USAID programming. For example, the Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri activity in Indonesia found that recruiting coaches and mentors with disabilities from local DPOs provides participants with strong local role models from within the community which increased confidence and motivation (“Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri (JAPRI): Final Performance Review,” 2022). Partner employers from the Umurimo Kuri Bose activity in Rwanda found that reported that employment placements that allow for shadowing or working alongside other employees can offer additional support from colleagues and peers as youth with disabilities integrate into the workplace (Education Development Center, 2022). Additionally, the Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) activity in Armenia found that job and entrepreneurship coaching that is sustained beyond placement was an effective way to transition persons with disabilities to employment (“Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) for People with Disabilities Program,” 2016).

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: INCREASING ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AMONG YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Implementers: Institute of International Education (IIE) and Consortium Partners		Location: Indonesia
Target Groups: Youth with disabilities (age restriction extended given late entry of people with disabilities in labor force)	Delivery Modalities: In person. Training was adapted to a virtual platform in response to COVID-19. One-on-one coaching was provided following training.	Target Activities: Strengthening entrepreneurial skills and facilitating self-employment opportunities.
Description: The USAID-funded Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri (Become an Independent Entrepreneur, or JAPRI) program (2017–2022) promotes entrepreneurship and self-employment among underserved youth, including those with disabilities, in Indonesia by providing business motivation workshops, entrepreneurship training, and coaching and mentoring support. The business motivation workshop is designed to increase participants’ interest in entrepreneurship, identify entrepreneurial opportunities in the market, and develop and present business ideas. The entrepreneurship training provides technical guidance in developing business analyses and proposals, assessing production costs and resources, identifying marketing costs and strategies, and planning for		

financial management. Following the training, youth participate in four months of coaching (one-on-one sessions) and mentoring (group sessions) to support their businesses.

Working with its local DPO partner, Himpunan Wanita Disabilitas Indonesia (HWDI), JAPRI redesigned its training model by recruiting the expertise of persons with disabilities to serve as trainers, coaches, and mentors and redesigning the modules to be more inclusive and accessible, based on feedback from youth and adults with disabilities. In addition, JAPRI stakeholders—including local partners, government representatives, trainers, coaches, mentors, and youth participants—were required to attend a one-day disability perspective and interaction training (DPIT) to raise disability awareness and increase commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities in their work. The DPIT was facilitated by experts representing multiple disability types and included guidance for interaction with people with disabilities as well as a participatory audit of reasonable accommodations in the venue to give participants a practical opportunity to learn more about how programs can ensure youth with disabilities have equal access to activities. After participating in all training sessions, youth were able to apply for seed funding and access coaching and mentoring support as they started or built their businesses.

Resources and Capacity Needed: JAPRI’s relationship with its network of local partners—including HWDI—was key to the program’s success in identifying and leveraging local expertise and ensuring sustainability through local ownership. JAPRI worked closely with local government offices to conduct outreach and incentivize buy-in from local stakeholders. All consortium members received capacity-building support, including assessment of standard operating procedures and financial management training.

Challenges and Risks to Consider: Adapting the training to a virtual format during COVID-19 had greater implications for youth with disabilities participants than it did for nondisabled youth. Though the addition of interpretation in the local sign language into pre-recorded videos within modules increased accessibility for some participants, access was not comprehensively considered for all users and so some youth with disabilities were not able to participate in the training virtually.

Evidence and Impact: Of the 1,003 persons with disabilities who completed the virtual or in-person entrepreneurship training, 532 increased business earnings, 204 created new businesses, 961 improved skills, and 250 received seed funding. Several local governments and universities adapted and embedded the JAPRI model into their programming following the close of the project.

References:

- [Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri \(JAPRI\) Final Performance Report. 2022](#)
 - [JAPRI Quarterly Progress Report Quarter 4 Fiscal Year 2021](#)
 - [JAPRI Quarterly Progress Report 2 2017](#)
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INTERNSHIPS AND WORK-BASED TRAINING

Direct experience with employees with disabilities can be a key predictor of employers’ willingness to hire youth with disabilities. Wiggett-Barnard and Swartz (2012) surveyed human resources managers in South African companies and found that employers with prior experience in hiring persons with disabilities are more willing to hire persons with disabilities in the future. The employers suggested internships as an effective mechanism to encourage employing persons with disabilities. Internship programs were highlighted in many contexts as being highly positive for both the employer (to demystify youth with disabilities in the workplace) and the employee (as an opportunity to build on-the-job skills). Employers with previous experience working with youth with disabilities noted satisfaction related to their performance and agreed that youth with disabilities have the same competencies as nondisabled persons and, with the right support, youth with disabilities can be equally as productive and effective in the workplace (“Effective Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace Study Report,” 2021).

DEBUNKING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MISCONCEPTIONS

Families are uniquely positioned to instill positive or negative perceptions of what is possible for youth with disabilities. As such, implementing partners and researchers frequently note families as being central to encouraging youth with disabilities to have a more positive outlook on what is possible in their lives. If families believe that youth with disabilities are capable of gaining skills and engaging in wage or self-employment, youth and their families are more likely to pursue training and skills-building opportunities, education, support systems, and more.

Families can be targeted as companions when prioritizing inclusive practices. The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) identifies families as central to multiple priority areas for their inclusive strategy framework. These priority areas include (1) providing training for youth and families on rights, policies, and career opportunities, (2) supporting youth and their families to navigate systems that affect their lives (such as education, health/human services, and employment), and (3) engaging youth and families in job training opportunities within the community (“Policies for Increasing Employment among Opportunity Youth with Disabilities,” 2019). Referring to the experience of youth with disabilities ages 15 to 24 years old in Canada, Lindsay et al. (2021) stated that family support and social networks play an important role, especially when they provide information about work opportunities, as youth with disabilities felt encouraged to try out new things.

However, while awareness-raising programs for families of persons with disabilities are crucial, they may not be sufficient on their own, particularly for people living in poverty. Complementary policy interventions, such as targeted subsidies for poor families of persons with disabilities, are needed to encourage persons with disabilities' participation in school or employment. Subsidies such as lowering the credit constraints households face through a scholarship program and conditional cash transfers to increase school participation by persons with disabilities would reduce parents' possible preferential treatment of nondisabled youth (Lamichhane and Takeda, 2022).

OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Outreach through advocacy groups, inclusivity champions, and large-scale communications campaigns, such as through social media, mass media, radio, and conferences, have been used to influence the perceptions employers and the public have of youth with disabilities and address the stigma related to persons with disabilities in the workplace. The LIFE Armenia program used public awareness campaigns (including nationwide awareness campaigns, photo exhibits, job fairs, annual press conferences, and a national conference on employment of persons with disabilities) to improve the perception of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Endline assessment results indicated that “the LIFE program had a positive impact on public awareness about persons with disabilities and the problems faced by them. It is noteworthy that in recent years the public consciousness has stressed the importance of barriers faced by persons with disabilities' unemployment and the need to support it” (“Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) for People with Disabilities Program,” 2016). Outreach events can be used to highlight the success stories of youth with disabilities and provide positive models of what youth with disabilities are capable of. Using publicity to share achievements can motivate others. Celebration days and public awards for organizations promoting inclusion invite municipal and district government officials to draw attention to the inclusion achievements of various stakeholders, setting a positive example and encouraging others to make similar strides and to be recognized for their achievements in inclusion for youth with disabilities.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

The [Effective Labor Inclusion project](#) in Paraguay conducted three awareness campaigns using positive publicity. The topics included (1) accessibility in the downtown area, (2) improved accessibility of public transit, and (3) [promoting the right to vote for persons with disabilities](#). These campaigns were conducted through television, radio, newspaper, flyers, social networking, posters, press conferences, visits to media, and digital newsletters. The campaign for improved accessibility on public transit, “Inclusion on Wheels,” included persons with disabilities in public, including on public transit, distributing flyers and placing “reserved seat” stickers. This campaign sparked media interest around how persons with disabilities can reach their place of work without accessible transportation.

The [Persons with Disability Internship and Employment project](#) in Macedonia created awareness by convening discussion panels during town events that included municipal leaders, NGOs, and others on inclusion for persons with disabilities.

The [Employment for All \(UKB\) project](#) in Rwanda worked to combat stereotypes that impede inclusion for youth with disabilities by building a network of employer champions who modeled disability inclusion and job placement to other employers.

The [Mitra Kunci Initiative](#) in Indonesia gave out inclusivity awards to companies and government institutions. These awards helped to create public awareness and excitement about what can be done to improve access to work training and economic empowerment for youth with disabilities.

JOB FAIRS

Job fairs are another platform to promote awareness and advocacy for youth with disabilities. Job fairs can include information on available employment opportunities and can be a forum to improve the perception of persons with disabilities in the workplace. DPOs or other stakeholders can recruit youth with disabilities to attend job fairs to expose them to opportunities they may not have previously considered possible (“USAID Mitra Kunci Initiative: Final Report,” 2021). “Job fairs can also give an opportunity to DPOs, NGOs, donor organizations, state employment agencies, employment centers, and other stakeholders to synergize and strengthen collaborations” (“Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) for People with Disabilities Program,” 2016).



3.2 SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Providing soft skills or any other training using an inclusive education approach can be an opportunity for youth with disabilities to be in training environments alongside non-disabled youth, building their confidence and communication skills in the mainstream environment while also exposing nondisabled youth to their peers with disabilities in positive learning environments. When taking this approach, skills training ideally should be designed to be inclusive from the inception rather than simply retrofitting an existing training to adapt to youth with disabilities (Education Development Center, 2022). Where this

can't be done, existing training should be adapted to be as inclusive as possible. Inclusive training designs include elements such as targeted outreach to youth with disabilities, transportation and physical space accommodations, and the inclusion of interpretation and/or accessible software for any training that features an online component. Universal design for learning¹⁷ can also offer broad inclusion in training programs. However, there is also a need for training modules or components that are tailored specifically for youth with disabilities to build skills such as managing mobility in the workplace, how to request accommodations, and honing their communication skills.

It is important to emphasize that training should be based on skills demanded in the marketplace, not just on perceptions of what persons with disabilities can do. Persons with disabilities must have autonomy when choosing a career path. Identifying strengths and interests, and empowering people to find gainful employment in the areas in which they have their best skills, make for effective management of human resources.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

The Bridges to Employment Project in El Salvador established resource centers that youth can access as a “one-stop shop” for services, including career guidance, training and educational opportunities, coaching on hiring processes, and entrepreneurship resources (“Bridges to Employment: Final Report,” 2020).

SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

Growing evidence underscores the importance of soft skills in obtaining and successfully retaining employment.¹⁸ Soft skills training has been shown to benefit youth with and without disabilities by instilling greater confidence and bolstering skills that employers seek, such as communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, flexibility, collaboration, and initiative (Lindsay et al. 2021; “Making the Future of Work Inclusive of People with Disabilities,” 2019).

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Implementers: Education Development Center (EDC) and Local Partners, including DPOs and youth serving organizations		Location: Rwanda
Target Groups: Youth with and without disabilities	Delivery Modalities: In person. Training was adapted to accommodate youth with disabilities.	Target Activities: Strengthening employability skills and creating a more inclusive workplace environment.

¹⁷ [Universal design for learning](#) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. Instead of changing the learner, UDL aims to change the design of learning environments to reduce barriers so that all learners can engage in rigorous, meaningful learning.

¹⁸ The [USAID Education Policy 2018](#) definition of soft skills is “a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.”

Description: Umurimo Kuri Bose (Employment for All, or UKB) was a two-year (2020–2022) USAID-funded activity aimed at fostering a more disability-inclusive workforce development system in two ways: by strengthening the employability skills of youth both with and without disabilities, and by cultivating a more disability-inclusive workplace environment. Several interventions were undertaken to increase the employability skills of youth including youth leadership and peer support activities, voluntary savings groups where participants received small loans from group savings to use for income-generating activities, resiliency and human rights training, literacy and numeracy skills training for youth who need it, and on-the-job training with partner businesses over two to four months, and technical and vocational training over six months.

Youth were also trained in soft skills such as goal and objective setting, personal development, communication, leadership, entrepreneurship skills, employer/employee rights and responsibilities, safety and health at work, work habits and conduct, and financial management. This training took place over one month, with eight modules spanning 130 hours, and was participatory and interactive. The curriculum was adapted to be inclusive and allow for youth with disabilities to take part in the participatory activities through support and guidance for both trainers and participants. “Trainings should be tailored for youth with disabilities, with a focus on skills they need at work. In addition to technical skills, trainings should promote the development of soft skills that can lead to improved self-efficacy, self-confidence, and communication skills. Further, trainings should focus on entrepreneurship skills, since many youth with disabilities show a preference for self-employment” (“Effective Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace Study Report,” 2021). It is important to note that soft skills training should be designed and tailored to the participants’ backgrounds and cultural contexts.

To foster a more inclusive work environment, UKB first conducted awareness raising among the community, the government, and other stakeholders on gender and disability rights. Private sector companies were selected through a labor market assessment, and these companies underwent training on disability awareness to better understand how they can support and accommodate youth with disabilities working for them during the work-based learning and on-the-job training described above. Some of these companies went on to offer youth permanent positions after the training was complete. Finally, the activity fostered wider acceptance through a Youth Development Alliance, bringing youth programs together to reduce discrimination in their programs, and through forming business champions to advocate for youth with disabilities in their employer communities.

Resources and Capacity Needed: Collaboration is essential for this activity. EDC worked with a consortium of DPOs and youth-serving organizations in regular communication on planning. They also had partners in training institutions and private businesses to conduct their activities, and they pulled together stakeholders in youth development for the Youth Development Alliance. EDC also leveraged its resources and other projects to conduct a labor market assessment, a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) analysis, and a study on disability inclusion in the workplace to inform the implementation of the UKB activity’s interventions.

Challenges and Risks to Consider: Youth with disabilities often have less opportunity in education, and therefore less literacy and numeracy skills. The work-based learning and on-the-job training opportunities were created to allow those with less education to gain workplace skills. A lack of community and employer understanding can also be a barrier that the awareness raising and training aim to address, but further consideration must be given to the business cost of some adaptations such as sign language interpreters and phones or computers for those with visual impairments, both of which are costly. Finally, while the soft skills training was adapted for youth with disabilities, some accommodations were unable to be met, such as the provision of a stipend for transportation to the training.

Evidence and Impact: UKB staff have described the soft skills training as a mindset shift, and they have outlined the benefits of including both youth with and without disabilities. Bringing the two groups together is important to promote an inclusive learning environment and to address stigma against people with disabilities. Therefore, this approach helps youth with disabilities feel less stigmatized and nondisabled youth see and understand the abilities of their peers. Additionally, the on-the-job training was found to help youth acquire necessary skills, gain confidence, and flout negative perceptions of persons with disabilities.

References:

- [Huguka Dukore Akazi Kanoze \(HDAK\) and Umurimo Kuri Bose \(UKB\): Effective Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace Study Report 2021](#)
 - Umurimo Kuri Bose: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis
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SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT (SE)

Supported employment (SE) is “competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support services” for individuals with the most significant disabilities (Wehman, 2012). Oftentimes, SE is long-term, ongoing support. Work adjustment, workplace accommodations, flexibility, and working jointly are some of the measures being implemented as SE. SE can help dismantle job-readiness barriers for youth with disabilities and translate unskilled or skilled youth with disabilities into valuable human resources. The concept of SE has been popularly implemented in developed countries for those with significant intellectual and psycho-social disabilities. Under this approach, employment is considered an achievable goal, and youth with disabilities’ aspirations, learning needs, individual skills, former experiences, and job preferences are taken into account when designing support programs, making sure that both job-matching and in-work support are arranged, and prioritizing flexibility.¹⁹

Numerous studies in high-income countries have found positive impacts of SE in the lives of persons with disabilities through increasing employment in the competitive labor market, not only for those with intellectual or psycho-social disabilities but also for veterans with spinal cord injuries and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (Frederick and VanderWeele, 2019; Ottomanelli et al., 2012). A meta-analysis and review of randomized controlled trials (Frederick and VanderWeele, 2019) found the SE framework and individual placement and support (IPS) approaches to be more effective than general placement and non-specialized support for increasing competitive employment of those with significant disabilities. According to this study, there is good evidence that the IPS approaches can be expanded and remain effective with employees other than those with significant intellectual or psycho-social disabilities, who were the original targets of SE intervention.

Further, Ottomanelli et al. (2012) examined whether SE is more effective than standard vocational rehabilitation in returning veterans to competitive employment. In their study, a randomized controlled, multisite trial of SE versus standard vocational rehabilitation studied the vocational issues of over 200 veterans with spinal cord injuries for 12 months of follow-up. They examined whether veterans' probability of working in competitive employment in the community would increase. Results indicated that participants in the SE group were 2.5 times more likely than the standard vocational rehabilitation group to obtain competitive employment.

Despite SE programs being successful in high-income countries, such provisions are not common in many LMICs. Recently, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or donor-funded projects have started emphasizing the lack of SE measures in LMIC contexts. However, given the effectiveness of SE for those with intellectual or psycho-social disabilities and other disability groups, such as veterans with spinal cord injuries and/or post-traumatic stress disorder in the United States and other high-income countries, governments and other relevant authorities could consider this approach as a viable option for increasing the employment of youth with disabilities in LMICs.

TRANSITION TO WORK

As discussed above, despite longer years of education, studies have found that those with significant disabilities are less likely to get a job in LMICs, suggesting that education alone is not sufficient for youth with disabilities to enter the labor market. Therefore, transition-to-work programs can provide youth with encouragement and confidence, which can bolster their skills such as independent living, work habits, communication skills, and attitudes that employers look for when making hiring decisions (Rutkowski et al., 2006). In their review of the literature on the transition to work of youth with

¹⁹ [British Association for supported employment](#)

disabilities both in LMICs and high-income countries, Engelbrecht et al. (2017) concluded that positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities are experienced when specific approaches are implemented at programmatic levels such as transition-to-work. While exploring the ways to facilitate employment for persons with disabilities, Marsay (2014) identified policy, support structures, education and training, individual and societal attitude shifts, self-determination, and enabling environments as crucial factors in the transition of persons with disabilities into the South African labor market.

Studies from high-income countries have identified positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities when transition-to-work programs are implemented. The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) cites that transition-to-work programs should prepare students for competitive, integrated employment by encouraging informed choices about employment options and using “place-then-train” models (Hill, Kline, and Richards, 2018). IEL suggests affirmative approaches to encouraging meaningful opportunities could include efforts such as sharing information on the benefits of integrated employment, career development planning, providing vocational assessments, arranging peer mentoring, facilitating visits to work sites, and providing benefits counseling.

For youth with disabilities' successful school-to-work transitions, transition services by education systems, employers, and rehabilitation services are recognized as key factors (Rutkowski et al., 2006). According to Rutkowski et al. (2006), the transition service called “Project SEARCH High School Transition Program” uses employer-based interventions for high school students with significant disabilities to facilitate their obtaining competitive employment. The program combines real-life work experience with training in employability and independent living skills, in addition to individualized placement assistance. This program supports integrating classroom instruction and on-the-job training—support that cannot be achieved with occasional workplace visits or simulated work environments (Rutkowski et al., 2006).

PROJECT EXAMPLE

The Anoka County Transition and Customized Employment (TCE) project in Minnesota, USA, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP) was established as an interagency partnership between the Anoka County Workforce Center’s core agencies, seven local school districts serving Anoka County, Minnesota, Anoka County Social Services, the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights (PACER) Center, and Rise, Incorporated (a private nonprofit-supported employment provider). The project aims to improve the school-to-career transition of young adults with significant disabilities who were receiving educational assistance through Individualized Education Programs. The TCE project focused mainly on (1) encouraging students with disabilities to work, (2) educating students and their families about strategies that facilitate paid, integrated competitive employment and promote successful transitions from school to productive roles as citizens of their communities, (3) promoting decision-making, self-determination, and self-reliance to increase the integration of students within everyday community environments, and (4) providing such opportunities without regard to race, culture, national origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or nature of disability. Across the five years of the program, TCE enrolled 475 youth with various disabilities from seven autonomous school districts in the county. The evaluation of TCE’s performance revealed that 62 percent of all enrolled students had individualized job placements in the workforce at competitive wages and competitive employment wage outcomes were attained by 72 percent of all enrolled out-of-school participants, including high school graduates, youth with disabilities completing their Individualized Education Program, academic objectives, and secondary education dropouts (Rogers et al., 2008).

Gragoudas (2014) emphasizes the role of self-determination skills in curriculum to prepare youth with disabilities for the labor force and the impact these skills have on youth having a clear understanding of their abilities and requesting reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Receiving training on these skills in school prepares the youth to negotiate and request accommodations in the work setting.

LMICs have a particular need for school-to-transition services given the gaps in implementing disability anti-discrimination laws. Although NGOs have started providing transition services to youth with disabilities, the impact of such initiatives and services is rarely studied. That said, it is expected that because school-to-work transition programs are successful in employing youth with disabilities in high-income countries, this can be done in LMICs in collaboration with schools, parents, DPOs, and employers.

JOB AND SKILL MATCH

Employment programs can help identify opportunities that match youth with disabilities' skills with relevant jobs, helping avoid some of the skills mismatch that exists. Enabling youth with disabilities to find employment in areas where they have interest and can contribute their skills may increase productivity and lead to an encouraging environment for persons with disabilities to continue contributing to the workforce (Choe and Baldwin, 2017). Workplace accommodations are also a key element in reducing the perceived skill gap. Many persons with disabilities are perfectly able to complete the tasks required in a workplace if reasonable accommodations are provided.

Internships provide an opportunity for youth with disabilities to explore their skills and strengths. Programs can offer financial incentives to employers, such as offsetting wages, for paid internships. For some youth with disabilities, self-employment may be the best match for their skills. Support services for youth with disabilities who prefer to enter self-employment include entrepreneurial support, such as training on starting a business, business coaching, and facilitation of networking with established entrepreneurs.

Employment programs and services such as these can provide important opportunities for youth with disabilities. However, some programs may contain bias against youth with disabilities, or promote discrimination and low expectations of youth with disabilities, that ultimately hinder their job search. It is important that employment programs are created thoughtfully and monitored to ensure they provide positive, supportive experiences.

PROGRAM PACKAGES

While the evidence base is limited for understanding the outcomes of various approaches for increasing employment for youth with disabilities, especially in LMICs, many approaches are gaining traction and proving to have promising effects. Bechange, Jolley, Gascoyne, et al. (2021) contribute to the evidence base by investigating employability and livelihood outcomes for a cohort of youth that participated in an economic empowerment program in rural Uganda. The study examined the impact of an intervention implemented by Sightsavers (an international NGO) between 2016 and 2018.

The program offered a package of activities, including vocational and business skills training (bookkeeping, savings, access to credit, etc.), provision of business start-up kits (knitting, tailoring, plumbing, catering, etc.), and linking trainees (through job fairs or other means) to local entrepreneurs (who provided job placements or internships). Participants were visited twice following the training and internship. The follow-up visits were used to check how the participants were doing, and to advise on access to savings groups and opportunities for local livelihoods programs.

The findings from the study indicate that there were statistically significant changes among participants of the program between baseline and follow-up in the following areas: having a job or income-generating activity (increased from 34 percent to 66 percent), accessing financial resources (increased from 20 percent to 80 percent), and experiencing family, community, and peer support (increased 48 percent to 52 percent, 44 percent to 56 percent, and 47 percent to 53 percent, respectively).

The findings of this study suggest that similar targeted approaches, and perhaps even combinations or packages of approaches, have positive impacts and could be beneficial to increasing access to employment for youth with disabilities in LMICs. The authors are also careful to mention that such livelihood programs would need to “go beyond the traditional focus on vocational skills training, to address questions of partnerships and linkages with existing social protection programs, and so include strategies that actively seek to dismantle barriers and influence access to financial support for youth with disabilities in the long term (Bechange, Jolley, Gascoyne, et al., 2021).”

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS

Implementers: University of Minnesota, Royal Thimphu College, University of Birmingham, Fora Education		Location: Bhutan
Target Groups: Persons with disabilities, with a focus on young adults (ages 16–30)	Delivery Modalities: Community support personnel and micro-grants	Target Activities: Increasing understanding of the situation for persons with disabilities in Bhutan and providing community support persons to facilitate employment, education, and social opportunities

Description: Understanding, Developing, and Supporting Meaningful Work for Youth with Disabilities in Bhutan: Networks, Communities, and Transitions is a UK-funded project that began in 2019. The project has three phases. The first phase is complete and focused on information gathering to gain a better understanding of the current context for persons with disabilities in Bhutan via a national survey. Phase 2 lasted from 2020 to 2022, and consisted of piloting community interventions including disability equity training, supporting inclusion champions, offering micro-grants, and piloting a Community Inclusion Coordinator (CIC) position. Additionally, an Employment Assessment Toolkit was designed and implemented by the inclusion champions and CICs.

Micro-grants were issued to youth with disabilities who submitted a business plan or proposal for training, gaining employment, entrepreneurial endeavors, or social initiatives. Royal Thimphu College recruited three CICs through a job notice in the paper. An additional ten inclusion champions who were already working with youth with disabilities were selected by the project for additional training and engagement with the project. The champions were volunteers, while the CICs were given a competitive salary. Both the inclusion champions and CICs traveled to the United States to receive a two-week training and observe the work of similar, existing coordinators in the United States. Their roles started loosely defined, and through an iterative process came to include supporting youth with disabilities as job coaches and community advocates and supporting technical training, post-secondary learning, and employment or entrepreneurship opportunities. Practically, this can mean setting youth-identified SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound goals) and helping youth work toward these goals. The CICs and champions have also supported youth with disabilities to be hired in the formal sector including hotels, factories, and small businesses.

Resources and Capacity Needed: Access to or the ability to collect the necessary information to understand the local context around work and persons with disabilities is essential for these interventions. In addition, bringing coordinators to the United States to understand what was possible for their role was deemed important, and would require some resources and funding to undertake. The CICs were paid a competitive salary that would need to be sustained.

Challenges and Risks to Consider: In interventions such as this, understanding the local context around persons with disabilities is crucial, as the context may pose challenges that require adjustments to the intervention.

In Bhutan in particular, there are low expectations of persons with disabilities. The Bhutanese do not stigmatize persons with disabilities, but rather do not want to pressure them to do more than they are able. This is coupled with a lack of knowledge about what is possible for persons with disabilities or how to achieve what is possible. There also tends to be a funneling of persons with disabilities into particular industries without taking into account the interests of individuals. Finally, there are differences to be considered for different types of disability. For instance, the school structure in Bhutan has a rigid curriculum that those with physical disabilities may be able to keep up with while those with developmental or intellectual disabilities may not. In addition, for Bhutanese, life is not all about work or making money or the individual, but is more about a family and community contribution, which does not have to be monetary. All of these contextual elements had to be considered and taken into account when designing and implementing this intervention.

Evidence and Impact: The Phase I survey showed that more education for persons with disabilities in Bhutan did not lead to more employment. This finding emphasized that it was essential to support the transition from school to work and provide opportunities for youth with disabilities to explore different career opportunities. Most of those who received micro-grants and engaged in entrepreneurship activities made a profit, benefiting themselves, their families, and their communities. In addition, intangible benefits included increased confidence and happiness, increased sense of self-worth, and increased motivation. The staff of the project considered the CICs successful and said they had a lot of impact on the participating youth.

References:

- [“I want to achieve more so that I can inspire more people”: Living and Working with Disability in Bhutan](#)
- [Employment and Participation in Meaningful Activities for Persons with Disabilities in Bhutan](#)



3.3 WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SAFETY

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Based on data from a 15-country study, Hersh and Mouroutsou found several factors that affect the use of ICT by persons with disabilities. To increase persons with disabilities’ access to these technologies, they cite the following necessary actions: provide funding for ICT, encourage the production of minority language and free-of-charge assistive and other learning technologies, and improve the provision and technical support in all learning institutions (Hersh and Mouroutsou, 2015).

Further, the ILO recommends promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the digital economy through various methods, such as promoting digital skills, particularly among youth and women; fostering re-skilling and up-skilling of persons with disabilities to maintain relevant skills as technology evolves; and establishing requirements for a universal design approach to digital products and services (“Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Digital and Green Economy,” 2022). To help ensure that new technology is accessible and useful for youth with disabilities, technology companies should involve youth with disabilities in their innovation process and hire persons with disabilities to help ensure products and services are inclusive (“Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities,” 2021).

To increase the accessibility of workplaces to persons with disabilities, employers should maximize the use of accessible digital technology within the work environment. This may include incorporating new technologies into the work process, such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, hands-free navigation, voice recognition, smart glasses that help users better understand emotional and social cues, and more. It is also critical to ensure that digital tools are being used in ways that support accessibility. For example, digital tools should have well-spaced text in large fonts, color palettes should be used

intentionally to accommodate color blindness, alternative text should be provided for all images, captions should be provided for all videos, and audio versions of text content and image descriptions should be available (“Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities,” 2021). Training may be required to ensure employees are prepared to use these assistive features.

Access to technology is also critical in job training. Technology can be used to make job training more inclusive to youth with disabilities. For example, the CISCO Networking Academy in Kenya provides IT courses that are designed with accessibility features or are compatible with assistive technology for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Technology can also allow youth with disabilities to receive training on digital and technology skills. For example, Modis has developed a program that trains youth with Asperger’s who are interested in positions in data analysis and coding. Additionally, the Sun ITeS Consulting Private Limited firm in Bangalore, India provides training to persons with disabilities on the skills needed to become IT professionals. Many of the people trained in this program went on to be hired by the firm (“Making the Future of Work Inclusive of People with Disabilities,” 2019).

INCREASING ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

There are many different tools and strategies that can be used to increase the accessibility of a workplace. These may include transportation assistance, accessible buildings, assistive devices and equipment, flexible work hours, and extended break times.

To support transportation and make buildings more accessible, employers may consider providing ramps, elevators, tactile surfaces on platforms, Braille signs, audio and visual announcements, stipends, alternative transportation options (such as using a van or car rather than walking, riding a motorbike, or other means), low-floor vehicles, and promoting wheelchair-friendly routes (“Effective Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace Study Report,” 2021). In some cases, employers may benefit from collaborating with DPOs and governments towards making transportation services accessible. Examples of equipment that can be used to accommodate youth with disabilities in the workplace include voice recorders, Braille paper, ramps, and modified restrooms (“Inclusive Skills Training and Employment Program for and by Persons with Disabilities (ISTEP): Final Report,” 2017). Flexible scheduling or extended break times can also be strategies employers use to accommodate doctors’ or therapeutic appointments and time to take medications (Council for State Government, 2022).

In some cases, it may be appropriate to modify job descriptions or schedules (sometimes called “customized employment”) to ensure a job meets the needs of both the employee and the employer (Council for State Government, 2022). These same strategies can also be implemented by training centers and TVET institutions to increase the inclusivity of skills training opportunities. Funding from governments and donors for accessible infrastructure and equipment is often a one-time expense that can have a lasting impact.

While many strategies to promote accessibility of the work environment require one-time costs, some accommodations could be challenging to source, such as sign language interpreters in contexts where this resource is limited and expensive. Creative strategies, such as colleagues learning basic signs to communicate with a deaf worker, along with partnerships with DPOs, governments, NGOs, and other entities may be required to overcome these challenges.

Reasonable accommodations, such as those described above, may be necessary for some persons with disabilities to perform all the skills required by their job and exercise their strengths. However, many workplace flexibilities and adjustments currently provided as reasonable accommodations could actually be offered to the entire workforce, aligning with the principles of universal design. Universal design

strategies aim to make products, environments, operational systems, and services accessible and welcoming to the most diverse range of people possible (“Universal Design,” n.d.). The benefit of using universal design from the start is that it creates a more accessible and inclusive workplace where everyone has an equitable experience and accesses avenues to maximize their contributions (Mackelprang and Clute, 2014). To the extent that the accessibility offered by universal design approaches may not be sufficient to accommodate everyone, reasonable accommodations can still be utilized to gap-fill for the benefit of those persons with disabilities who may need them.

One tactic that can be encouraged to improve workplace accessibility and identify areas for implementing universal design is performing accessibility audits. For example, in Indonesia, Save the Children conducts workplace assessments to evaluate an employer’s readiness to receive interns with disabilities (“Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities,” 2021). The assessment focuses on physical spaces, facilities, and workplace policies and can result in meaningful changes to the workplace. By proactively conducting audits of their workplaces, employers can make changes to improve the accessibility of their workplaces.

Additionally, while accommodations and design are critical, another key component of an inclusive work environment is a welcoming and positive culture. Even with all of the tools they need to succeed, persons with disabilities may not be able to fully contribute to their workplace if their employers or coworkers treat them without respect and dignity, or otherwise contribute to a workplace culture that is hostile to persons with disabilities (“Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work,” 2020). Training for employers and nondisabled employees can help create a positive workplace environment.

TRAINING SESSIONS FOR EMPLOYERS ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY

When employers are made aware of the processes and support available to make a workplace accessible, they may be more likely to take up more inclusive staffing practices. Additionally, if youth with disabilities know that an employer will accommodate their needs, they might be more likely to pursue a broader range of employment options.

Building the capacity and understanding among employers regarding the implementation of universal design and reasonable accommodations through training sessions, guidebooks, pocket guides, and other types of knowledge materials can be a useful step for employers to address the needs of youth with disabilities in the workplace. These materials can address universal design, workplace accessibility, human resource policies, peer support, and social integration in the workplace (“Inclusive Skills Training and Employment Program for and by Persons with Disabilities (ISTEP): Final Report,” 2017).

PROJECT EXAMPLE

The Mitra Kunci program in Indonesia developed extensive training materials and knowledge products for employers and other entities on concrete steps they could take to make the workplace more inclusive for persons with disabilities. These materials included a Guidebook on Equality and Inclusion in the Workplace. Content in these materials was developed by business leaders, advocates of inclusive employment, and members of the disability community to assist company leaders and other stakeholders (including ministries and agencies) to adopt inclusive policies and practices (“USAID Mitra Kunci Initiative: Final Report,” 2021). The materials serve as references with practical information for developing accessible physical and social environments, strategies for implementing inclusive employment policies, and more.

TRAINING FOR NONDISABLED EMPLOYEES

Nondisabled employees should be provided with training to increase their awareness and knowledge of persons with disabilities and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Training topics should include the rights of workers with disabilities, supporting a nondiscriminatory workplace culture, the need for workplace accommodations, and awareness of the challenges employees with disabilities face in the labor market. Training for nondisabled employees can help them to become better equipped to work alongside persons with disabilities and to make the workplace more accessible to and accepting of persons with disabilities. It can bring awareness to the abundant capabilities and skills that persons with disabilities bring to the workplace and help explore the mutual benefit of employees with and without disabilities working together (“Conditions of Work and Equality Department (Work Quality) Bureau for Employees’ Activities (ACT/EMP) Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities,” 2014).

Training on the need for workplace accommodations may be of particular importance as it can help to prevent resentment among colleagues due to accommodations. Training in reasonable accommodation policy should take place as early as possible in the course of a worker’s employment and should emphasize that reasonable accommodation can be relevant and valuable to all workers, even if they do not currently require accommodation (“Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work,” 2020).

Training for nondisabled employees can take many forms, from educational material to interactive experiences. The type of training most appropriate may depend on the type of work being performed. For example, in France, the insurance company Generali has developed videos in which staff with disabilities, especially less visible disabilities, share their experiences in the workplace. Alternatively, kitchen staff for the hotel operator Accor Group received training to better understand the experience of and need for accommodations for their colleagues with vision disabilities. In another example, managers at Standard Bank, which operates across 18 countries in Africa, are trained on working with and providing accommodations to workers and clients with disabilities (“Promoting Equity Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Through Workplace Adjustments: A Practical Guide,” 2016).



3.4 REGULATIONS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS

In the 1960s and 1970s, an era associated internationally with civil rights movements, a wide variety of strategies, programs, and policies embracing the inclusion of persons with disabilities started to gain traction worldwide. Consequently, after celebrating 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, many countries enacted disability laws that were mainly in line with the welfare approach, which were not sufficient to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, leading persons with disabilities to become vocal in advocating for their rights and interests globally. Due to this and other efforts, the framework of understanding disability has shifted over time from a medical model to a social and human rights model.²⁰

Through the collective efforts of persons with disabilities, the CRPD human rights treaty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, was a significant milestone. Because of the substantial impact of the CRPD on shifting the paradigm from charity to rights, many countries have either amended their previously existing disability welfare laws or enacted new laws to eliminate disability-based discrimination in the public and private sectors. Additionally, as the understanding of disability transformed, so, too, did the policy focus and approaches to increasing access to employment (“Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific,” 2021). Programs such as full or partial disability cash benefits, vocational rehabilitation and training, supported work, public sector employment²¹, hiring quotas, tax incentives for employers, and anti-discrimination laws are widely acknowledged as some of the strategies working toward increasing the employment of persons with disabilities (Mont, 2004: [Disability Employment Policy](#)).

According to the UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development (2018), over 60 percent of countries have provisions in their labor laws prohibiting discrimination in employment and guaranteeing equal pay for persons with disabilities. However, many countries still have work to do to effectively monitor and enforce these labor laws.²²

QUOTA SYSTEMS

Many countries have introduced quota systems as a policy measure to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. According to the ILO 2019 report, more than 100 countries have employment quotas in their national legislation. The quota rate, characteristics of organizations to which the quotas apply (size, public, private), compliance monitoring approaches, and repercussions for noncompliance vary from country to country. According to the UN Disability and Development Report (2018), the most effective quota systems include the payment of a levy by the non-complying company for every position not held by persons with disabilities, to be used for a special fund to finance measures promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. However, there are yet to be thorough evaluations of the effectiveness of quotas in increasing employment for persons with disabilities

²⁰ [You can learn more about social- and human rights-based models here](#)

²¹ Sheltered employment is another approach that is sometimes used. However, USAID does not support this approach as it limits and further segregates employment among persons with disabilities.

²² [Disability Laws and Acts by Country](#) are available online.

(“Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals By, for and with Persons with Disabilities,” 2018).

There is some concern about the use of quotas. In several cases, they have failed to have a significant impact due to poor enforcement or because they are not accompanied by other efforts to support persons with disabilities to gain the education or skills needed to qualify for open positions (Mora, Orellanda, and Freire, 2021). There are also examples of employers hiring persons with disabilities on paper but sending them home so that they obtain zero employment experience (“Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals By, for and with Persons with Disabilities,” 2018). Additionally, quota systems have little effect in contexts where the majority of people work in the informal labor market (“Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals By, for and with Persons with Disabilities,” 2018).

Despite some concerns, the ILO finds quota systems to be compatible with both the CRPD and the earlier ILO Convention on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons (C. No. 159) of 1983.²³

QUOTA EXAMPLE

In Nepal, the quota system was enacted into law in 2007 and was later guaranteed by the Constitution of 2015. The quota system applies to public-sector employment, not just for persons with disabilities but for other marginalized or minority groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and *Dalits* (low caste people). The 2007 amendment of Nepal’s Civil Service Act (“Civil Service Act, 2049,” 1993) states that 45 percent of public-sector jobs are to be reserved for these marginalized populations. Moreover, 5 percent of the reserved places are to be allocated to persons with disabilities. There is competition for these places within each marginalized group, with a process that requires the position be offered to the most qualified candidates from the group. This approach, when applied fairly, may effectively provide job opportunities without sacrificing quality and competition.

In Nepal, only those who are younger than 35 can enter public sector jobs, except for women and persons with disabilities, who can enter until they turn 40. In this sense, youth with disabilities are the main beneficiaries of this quota system. Such a system has proven useful in countries like Nepal where opportunities are not otherwise equally distributed to persons with disabilities.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF QUOTAS

Cambodia’s law has an affirmative action component. Firms are required to hire one person with disabilities for every 100 employees, and government employers are required to hire one worker with a disability for every 50 workers (“Making the Future of Work Inclusive of People with Disabilities,” 2019; Lo, 2012). Likewise, China has an affirmative action mandate, imposing a quota of 1.5 percent of a firm’s employees to be persons with disabilities, while Indonesia requires that one out of every 100 employees should be a worker with a disability (Lo, 2012; Sudibyo, 2002).

QUOTA SYSTEM AND DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT LAW

²³ Detailed report available in ILO 2019 Volumes 1 and 2.

Some critics who express concerns about the quota approach argue that anti-discrimination laws should be sufficient. Research has shown that in many cases, anti-discrimination laws are a necessary but not always sufficient measure to address labor market discrimination. For example, in examining the impact of Cambodia's introduction of the 2009 anti-discrimination law that required employers to provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities, Palmer and Williams (2017) found that employment of persons with disabilities fell by around 9 percentage points in the four years following the introduction of the disability law. The authors speculated that employers reduced their demand for persons with disabilities to avoid the cost of workplace accommodations for workers with disabilities, given the required accommodations that must be made. This reaction is, in itself, a form of discrimination. To avoid anti-discriminatory legislation leading to further discrimination, more effective enforcement of the anti-discrimination laws is necessary. Unfortunately, discrimination like the kind described here can be difficult to prove. Therefore, in addition to more effective enforcement of legislation, additional interventions, such as quota systems—either through direct enforcement by governments or through litigation—should be utilized.

SUBSIDIES TO THE EMPLOYER

Providing subsidies to employers to make workplace accommodations, including accessible infrastructure, purchase of assistive technologies, or funding for sign-language interpreters, is a strategy to offset potential costs for workplace accommodations as well as a way to incentivize employers to hire persons with disabilities.

Wage subsidies are regarded as an effective approach to increase the employment of persons with disabilities, including youth with disabilities. According to *Disability at a Glance, Chapter 3 ("Disability at a Glance 2015: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific," 2016)*, wage subsidies cover a portion of employees' wages, usually for a limited time, as a way to lessen the risk perceived by employers of hiring persons with disabilities. Since wage subsidies directly target the recruitment process of private firms, they have the potential to increase employers' willingness to hire persons with disabilities. Similarly to high-income countries, governments in LMICs can provide subsidies to help defray the costs of creating more accommodating work environments for persons with disabilities. Government subsidies can also be used to incentivize companies to hire persons with disabilities.

While study findings are mixed on the effect of such subsidies in high-income countries (Deuchert and Kauer, 2017; Thomsen, 2013; Baert, 2016; Liu and Stapleton, 2010), depending on the context, the extent of one's disability, and the skills required, such subsidies could reduce unemployment of persons with disabilities. In the United States, subsidies are made through the Ticket-to-Work incentive act (Liu and Stapleton, 2010). Other high-income countries, such as Austria, Norway, and Sweden, have implemented temporary subsidy schemes that are phased out over time. The rationale behind these subsidy schemes is that on-the-job training for persons with disabilities takes more time, but that the productivity gap can be closed (Deuchert and Kaier, 2017).

To create awareness of the ability of persons with disabilities and other groups who have difficulties entering the labor market, the government of Norway has designed a grant for wage subsidies that can be temporary or permanent and covers up to 80 percent of the salary the first year and is then reduced over time. The grant is based on individual applications and assessments by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. As all other possibilities need to be exhausted before this grant can be obtained, this is not an automatic right; rather, it is based on an assessment and determination by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration.

Denmark, Finland, and Sweden all have similar types of support for wage subsidies (O'Brien and Dempsey, 2004). In Denmark, a subsidy scheme known as the “Flexjob” scheme provides salary reimbursements to firms that employ those whose disability is regarded as long-term or whose work capacity is permanently reduced (Gupta and Larsen, 2010). This subsidy scheme has unlimited duration and has been widely used—more than 85,000 individuals have been found eligible since its introduction in 1998, almost four times more participants than initially predicted (Deuchter and Kauer, 2017). The scheme was found to increase employment probability for persons with disabilities ages 35-44 by 10.5-12.5 percentage points as compared to nondisabled persons (Gupta and Larsen, 2007).

BENEFITS AND INCENTIVES TO WORK

To overcome disincentives to working caused by ineffective benefits, insurance, or social assistance programs, benefits should cover the needs of those with more significant disabilities who cannot work

as well as extra costs (e.g., purchasing assistive devices) to motivate persons with disabilities to seek wage-earning work. As social assistance benefits can have positive effects by assisting individuals throughout unemployment and income insecurity while they continue to seek employment, Cote (2021) recommended having a better understanding of extra costs required for persons with disabilities followed by having national disability registries and disability/equal opportunity cards that facilitate access to diverse schemes such as cash transfers, support services, and concessions.

4. APPROACHES TO MAKING THE INFORMAL SECTOR MORE INCLUSIVE

The informal sector (including entrepreneurial and self-employment activities) is often considered to have greater flexibility and easier entry than the formal employment sector (also known as wage employment). The formal sector, for example, often relies on formal qualifications for entry that can be exclusionary given the low rates of school completion among youth with disabilities in many LMICs. In contrast, the informal sector tends to rely on competencies that can be gained on the job, through coaching, or through other means.

While the informal sector may pose challenges, such as a lack of stability associated with formal sector jobs or difficulty navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship, it has many appealing qualities for engaging youth with disabilities in employment opportunities. That said, if program or intervention activities are focused on the informal sector, some of the approaches described earlier, such as training employers on workplace accommodations, will be less relevant, while approaches such as increasing access to credit and more accessible lending processes may be more relevant. Additionally, influencing the informal sector to be more inclusive at a large scale would be challenging. This section discusses the informal sector context, why it appeals to youth with disabilities, and some promising practices to support youth with disabilities engaging in this sector.

INFORMAL SECTOR CONTEXT

In many LMICs, labor markets are largely informal and most workers with disabilities are self-employed in the informal sector (Mizunoya and Mitra, 2013). In India, for example, 87 percent of persons with disabilities who work are in the informal sector (Mitra and Sambamoorthi, 2006). Similarly, in Lao PDR, where most individuals with disabilities have little access to education, over 80 percent of the persons

with disabilities who work are in the informal sector. In a sample of persons with disabilities from low- and middle-income households in Lebanon, two-thirds of respondents were self-employed. The study found that respondents were largely marginalized from the mainstream labor market because of factors associated with disability-based discrimination, such as the likelihood that they have inadequate educational qualifications (Wehbia and El-Lahibb, 2007).

In LMIC countries in general, the lack of education opportunities, including vocational and technical training, for persons with disabilities combined with discrimination limits formal sector employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This absence of formal sector employment opportunities combined with the lack of income support from social security programs (Mizunoya and Mitra, 2013) results in most persons with disabilities either relying on the support of their families, on subsistence-level informal activities (Sonthany, 2006), or self-employment to generate an income.

Despite the prevalence of informal sector employment, it is important to note that persons with disabilities have the potential to engage in white-collar, full-time, and better-paid jobs in formal sectors if they are equipped with skills gained from quality education and if the workplace environment is inclusive and accessible. It is, however, important to note that in this case, barriers such as those discussed in Section 2 need to be overcome.

THE APPEAL OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The informal sector has commonly been characterized as an “easy-entry sector that workers can enter to earn some cash in preference to earning nothing” (Fields, 2005). Compared to the formal or wage employment sector, the informal sector (including contingent and part-time employment) may have fewer barriers (such as those discussed in Section 2) to entry. As mentioned, the informal sector tends to rely less on formal qualifications and more on competencies. It also allows for greater scheduling flexibility that some persons with disabilities require (for preparing for work, traveling to/from work, dealing with health concerns, and setting a comfortable work pace). A combination of these attributes may make informal employment an attractive option for persons with disabilities. While some jobs in the informal sector may provide lower pay and fewer benefits than those in the formal sector, many people, including those with significant disabilities, often choose these jobs because they meet other key criteria they have when selecting from employment options (Schur, 2003).

APPROACHES TO FOSTER ENTRY INTO THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Navigating the path of entrepreneurship in the informal sector can be challenging, even in the most supportive contexts. Developing a business from an idea into reality involves a diverse set of skills and resources. Examples of promising practices exist (as discussed below) and could be applied to encourage youth with disabilities to explore this sector.

While more evidence is needed, there is some indication that coaching and mentoring, when paired with other initiatives such as training and financing, are well-suited to foster entrepreneurship among youth with disabilities who want to start their own business (Halabisky, 2014). Coaches from the community can provide first-hand contextual knowledge and guidance on things such as business plan development and business advisory services.

In addition to skills and knowledge, entrepreneurship often requires an initial capital outlay for business start-up, such as for purchasing supplies and inventory. Access to seed funding or start-up funds for business ventures can be difficult for youth, particularly for youth with disabilities, who tend to have less business experience and financial cushion to draw from and less access to funding sources (de Klerk,

2008). Referring to the difficulty youth with disabilities face in accessing microfinancing in Uganda, Nuwagaba and Rule (2016) emphasized the need to provide a learning platform for such programs. Promoting access to start-up funds is one way to make the informal sector more inclusive. Promising practices for establishing pathways to start-up funding include working with financial institutions to ease access to seed fund loans, awarding microgrants, and starting voluntary savings clubs for a group of program participants.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

In Indonesia, the JAPRI program focused on self-employment for youth 18 to 30 years old, including one arm of activities dedicated to youth with disabilities. JAPRI participants completed an initial Business Motivation Workshop and additional training on entrepreneurship skills. Following the training, participants worked with coaches as they started new businesses or expanded existing ones. In addition to the training and coaching, the JAPRI project also held a competitive application for seed funding loans to be used to start or strengthen businesses for 250 persons with disabilities. Recipients report being able to purchase additional equipment and supplies to expand their entrepreneurial activities. The recipients of the funding were enthusiastic about the opportunity to improve their businesses (“Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri (JAPRI): Final Performance Review,” 2022). This model accelerated self-employment by increasing participants’ confidence and providing a support system for entrepreneurs.

A pilot initiative in Bhutan is another example that highlights a positive experience by awarding supportive funding for youth with disabilities to start a business. Funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund, this pilot awarded microgrants to youth with disabilities to purchase supplies or to pay for skills training to start a business. The youth reported feeling a sense of hope stemming from receiving this business grant: “There was hope that people like me could do something ... the microgrant has changed everything in my life. I’m glad that I can make a change in my society.” Another said, “I became financially independent by getting self-employed. I am also able to support my family to buy essentials with the profit. Finally, I am able to help my brother studying at Paro College of Education [to become a teacher] with pocket money” (Tshewang, Schuelka, and Kafley, 2022).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Data indicate employment rates among youth with disabilities are lower than their nondisabled peers (Mitra and Yap, 2021). The evidence suggests that many factors serve as barriers to quality employment for youth with disabilities. Factors that hinder quality employment include social stigma, employer misconceptions regarding youth with disabilities’ ability to carry out the job, limited access to education and training, lack of access to credit and financing, disabling environments, lack of workplace accommodation, and more.

Additionally, although domestic laws in many countries have been amended or enacted to meet the obligations of the CRPD, the protection of labor market rights of youth with disabilities is an under

examined issue. Realistic, effective, and enforceable labor rights-based legislation is needed to make strides in labor market rights protection. Policies aiming at interventions to address workplace and environmental accessibility (e.g., transportation, housing, Internet, digital technologies, information, and communications) should be encouraged as these components comprehensively improve access to employment by youth with disabilities.

Employment for youth with disabilities is an economic and workforce issue as well as an important human rights issue, as underscored by the CRPD. Governments, donors, and organizations have been called on to ensure that youth with disabilities have policies and programs that support them in their endeavors to access quality employment.

A range of promising approaches exists that can help address these barriers and increase employment prospects and quality for youth with disabilities. These approaches address foundational attitude issues, skills and knowledge, workplace accessibility and accommodations, and regulations. In many cases, research and data are still needed to determine the effectiveness of approaches in different contexts and with different populations. When effective, these approaches will have positive impacts to increase access to quality employment for youth with disabilities around the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Youth with disabilities face a multitude of diverse barriers to accessing quality employment. The types and strengths of barriers differ by context and by individual. Therefore, it is important, before any approaches are taken, to analyze the context in which an activity is operating. Carefully consider the policy landscape, local attitudes, available resources, and current initiatives. Collaborate with DPOs to gain local knowledge and perspectives. Using situational analysis tools (such as the [Disability Data Tracker](#) from Leonard Cheshire, Humanity & Inclusion, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights) can help ground your analysis. Situational analyses can determine the key barriers to quality employment for youth with disabilities in the given context which serves to both inform the selection of the appropriate approaches to use in current activities and helps increase the understanding of the local context for future work.

Many organizations and activities are implementing promising practices aimed at increasing the employment of youth with disabilities. However, as noted above, the evidence of what works—and where—is lacking. Outcome-level data related to effectiveness disaggregated by context and respondent demographic characteristics are often missing. Therefore, support is needed from practitioners to build the evidence base.

When implementing youth workforce development activities that include approaches for increasing support for youth with disabilities, monitor and evaluate activities to identify effective practices, determine areas for improvement, make adjustments in programming to increase effectiveness, and in this way, help to build the evidence base. Collaborate closely with and seek input from youth with disabilities, DPOs, and other local partners in your evaluation work to learn about what is working and what is not. See [Annex I](#) for more information about disability data collection.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In addition to building evidence from practitioners monitoring and evaluating their activities, additional support is needed from researchers. Important questions for future research include:

- What is the efficacy of different approaches to improving employment opportunities for youth with disabilities? For example, is it more effective to have inclusive vocational training for all youth, or targeted vocational training programs for youth with disabilities, or a combination of the two?
- What is the best policy or combination of policies (e.g., quotas, tax incentives, wage subsidies, reasonable accommodation funds, supported employment) to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities in a given context?
- What is the impact on persons with disabilities of companies using artificial intelligence to screen job applicants?
- What would it take for employment rates to be the same between persons with and without disabilities? What additional barriers would need to be removed? Even if most barriers were removed, would the same percentage of persons with disabilities want to work as nondisabled?
- What are the additional costs of going to work encountered by persons with disabilities (e.g., transportation, interpreters)? How do these costs differ across contexts?
- How effective is universal design in the workplace for employees with and without disabilities? How does it alter their experiences in the workplace? What are the cost implications and how might this affect accessibility and reasonable accommodations?

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I: EFFECTS OF DATA QUALITY

Readily available, high-quality data can be used to understand context-specific barriers to better employment for youth with disabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of different employment intervention approaches, and to guide decisions for empirically- and locally-informed program and policy design. Generating good quality data and evidence is, therefore, essential.

In general, the collection of disability data does not happen often enough. While analyzing national census or survey data from 41 countries, Mitra and Yap (2021) found that disability questions of any kind are absent from 24 percent of countries and 65 percent of household surveys and censuses. In cases where disability data do exist, differences in definitions, data collection tools, and approaches affect comparability. A lack of comparable data and evidence can be misleading and can undermine faith in and use of the resulting data. The questions below illustrate frequently encountered differences in disability-related questions.

EXAMPLE OF INCONSISTENT DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Survey 1

Questions:

1. Are you disabled in any way? Yes/No
2. What is your disability?
 - a. Blind. Yes/No
 - b. Deaf/dumb. Yes/No
 - c. Crippled. Yes/No
 - d. Mentally retarded. Yes/No

Disability Prevalence Found: 0.9 percent

Survey 2

Questions:

1. Are you disabled in any way? Yes/No
2. What is your disability?
 - a. Blind. Yes/No
 - b. Partially sighted. Yes/No
 - c. Deaf/dumb. Yes/No
 - d. Hard of hearing. Yes/No
 - e. Mentally ill. Yes/No
 - f. Ex-Mental. Yes/No
 - g. Mentally retarded. Yes/No
 - h. Physically handicapped. Yes/No

Disability Prevalence Found: 2.7 percent

Survey 3

Questions:

1. Do you have difficulty seeing even if wearing glasses?
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all
2. Do you have difficulty hearing even if using a hearing aid?
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all
5. Do you have difficulty with (self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating (for example understanding or being understood by others?)
 - a. No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all

Respondent was considered to have a disability if they reported “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” in at least one domain.

Disability Prevalence Found: 8.5 percent

In addition to a lack of comparability in data collection tools and approaches, sample sizes are frequently not sufficient to permit disaggregation by disability status (extent and type of disability) as well as other

demographic characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, sex, and location. This then limits the understanding regarding the impact of disabilities and the intersectionality with other equity dimensions. For example, the lack of data disaggregated by age group makes it difficult to understand the specific experiences of youth with disabilities.

There are also gaps in available local expertise in LMICs to guide research and data collection efforts (Lamichhane, 2015, Chapter 11). Furthermore, scholars and researchers in disability studies are rarely hired to help in the process of designing and implementing surveys by governments and international agencies, resulting in knowledge gaps or biases in survey design.²⁴

A clear and harmonized understanding of the constructs being measured when collecting data on disability along with consistent use of rigorously developed data collection tools and approaches will help ensure comparable data both within and across countries (Mitra and Yap, 2021). Advocacy for robust data collection is needed to encourage governments and agencies to identify important disability-focused issues (Lamichhane, 2015, Chapter 11).

Governments and international agencies should develop clear guidelines for data collection using standardized approaches based on a common framework or understanding of disability. The social model of disability conceptualizes disability as a situation where an unaccommodating environment prevents individuals “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments” from participating fully in society (United Nations, 2006). This model and the data collection tools that reflect this can provide a common framework for standardized data collection. The Washington Group on Disability Statistics instruments, including the recently developed [Washington Group/ILO Disability Module](#),²⁵ are examples of tools that apply the social model if used as intended.

Researchers should design their samples to permit data disaggregation by disability status and a range of context-relevant demographic characteristics and equity dimensions (such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, race, disability type, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and others).

In addition to using harmonized data collection tools and thoughtfully designed samples, some practices can be used to ensure more reliable data. These include:

- Hiring qualified researchers who are familiar with disability studies in the context of LMICs.
- Ensuring questions and data collection approaches are accessible to all respondents.
- Adapting and translating data collection instruments to reflect the local context, working with DPOs to support this adaptation.
- Ensuring enumerators employed to collect the data are well-trained and aware of issues relating to disability so that persons with disabilities are no longer prevented from participating. Qualified, well-trained enumerators may help to avoid situations in which enumerators refuse to ask or reword disability questions due to their concerns about the perception of disability in a given culture.

Additional [best practices for collecting data on disabilities](#) are available to guide the process to ensure collection of disability data is reliable.

²⁴ Based on researcher experience.

²⁵ This module will be used for the first time in Vietnam in 2022.

ANNEX 2: SUMMARY OF BARRIERS AND APPROACHES

Exhibit 2: Barriers to labor market entry and promising approaches



ATTITUDES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

BARRIERS

- Negative and/or Low Expectations and Self-Esteem
- Misconceptions Regarding Persons with Disabilities

APPROACHES

- Disability Inclusion Training for Stakeholders
- Ongoing Mentoring and Coaching
- Internships and Work-Based Training
- Debunking Family and Community Misconceptions
- Outreach Programs and Public Awareness Campaigns
- Job Fairs



SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

BARRIERS

- Mismatched Skills and Perceived Low Productivity
- Fewer Education and Training Opportunities
- Lack of Access to Credit and Financing

APPROACHES

- Training Opportunities
- Soft Skills Training
- Supported Employment
- Transition to Work
- Job and Skill Match
- Program Packages



WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SAFETY

BARRIERS

- Limited Access to Information and Communication Technology
- Inaccessible Transportation Services
- Lack of Universal Design and Workplace Accommodations
- Hostile Work Environments

APPROACHES

- Access to Technology
- Increasing Accessible and Inclusive Work Environments
- Training Sessions for Employers on Universal Design and Workplace Accessibility
- Training for Nondisabled Employees



REGULATIONS

BARRIERS

- Employment Laws and Acts
- Incentives and Disincentives to Working

APPROACHES

- Anti-discrimination Laws
- Quota Systems
- Quota System and Disability Employment Law
- Subsidies to the Employer
- Benefits and Incentives to Work

ANNEX 3: TABLES

Exhibit 3: Employment ratio of people with disabilities to the overall population, by country's income level

Country	Year*	GNI* (USD) per capita	Employment for people 15–29: no difficulty %**	Employment for people 15–29: any difficulty (%)**	Employment ratio**
Low-Income Countries***					
Rwanda	2020	780	48	36	0.75
Uganda	2020	800	61	61	1.00
Mali	2020	830	53	48	0.90
Ethiopia	2020	890	47	41	0.87
Lower Middle-Income Countries***					
Myanmar	2020	1,350	60	42	0.70
Nigeria	2020	2,000	40	39	0.98
Bangladesh	2020	2,030	34	21	0.45
Vietnam	2020	2,650	69	45	0.65
Morocco	2020	3,020	32	20	0.63
Indonesia	2020	3,870	48	31	0.65
Upper Middle-Income Countries***					
South Africa	2020	6,010	27	26	0.96
Peru	2020	6,030	55	33	0.60
Mexico	2020	8,480	46	31	0.67
Mauritius	2020	10,230	45	14	0.31

*Source: [World Bank Data](#)

**Source: Mitra, S. and J. Yap., "The Disability Data Report," Fordham Research Consortium on Disability: New York. (2021).

***Based on [World Bank analytical income categories](#).

Exhibit 4: Informal employment rate for people ages 15–29 with and without difficulties, by country's income level

Country	GNI* (USD) per capita	Self-employment rate** for people with no difficulty (%)	Self-employment rate** for people with any difficulty (%)
Uganda	800	80	80
Mali	830	84	81
Ethiopia	890	91	86
Bangladesh	2,030	62	52
Vietnam	2,650	57	69
Morocco	3,020	34	31
Indonesia	3,870	61	76
South Africa	6,010	18	19
Peru	6,030	79	91
Mexico	8,480	24	29
Mauritius	10,230	7	6

Notes: All data is based on 2020 GNI data.

*Source: [World Bank Data](#)

**Source: Mitra and Yap, 2021.