



# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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**Matters related to the implementation of the Convention:  
round-table discussions**

## **Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities**

### **Note by Secretariat**

The present note was prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with United Nations entities, representatives of civil society and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate the round-table discussion on the theme “Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities”. The Secretariat hereby transmits the note, as approved by the Bureau of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to the Conference at its fifteenth session.

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\* [CRPD/CSP/2022/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. Today's world of work, as it stands, is not encouraging. The pandemic is deepening and prolonging pre-existing structural inequalities in every society. Recovery between and within countries is unequal, including in the world of work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 207 million people will be without jobs in 2022, which surpasses the pre-pandemic level by 21 million, while the number of extreme working poor increased by 8 million.<sup>1</sup>

2. Prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, the world of work was far from having achieved Sustainable Development Goal 8: full and productive employment and decent work for all. The rate of employment growth was insufficient to absorb the growing labour market. Inequalities and disparities in the labour market are higher for women, young people and persons with disabilities.

3. Persons with disabilities are facing significant exclusion in the world of work. According to data from 91 countries and territories, across eight geographical regions, only 36 per cent of persons with disabilities of working age are in employment.<sup>2</sup> Given that there are more than 1 billion persons with disabilities, the untapped potential is vast. One estimate suggests that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from employment results in a potential economic loss of about 6.7 to 8.7 per cent of annual national gross domestic product.<sup>3</sup>

4. The economic empowerment of persons with disabilities is achieved through decent work, in the form of employment, self-employment or entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment is the ability of persons with disabilities to bring about change and contribute to society as a result of increased economic capabilities and agency by participating in the labour markets on equal terms with others. It allows persons with disabilities to live life in dignity with respect to their rights at work and beyond.

## II. Relevant international frameworks and policy instruments

5. Adopted in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals provided the promise of a world in which no one would be left behind. With regard to the world of work, Member States committed themselves to sustainable and people-centred economies and decent work for all by 2030. This is reflected in Goal 8 (to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all). Targets 8.3 (development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises) and 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities) are particularly relevant in the context of the economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities.

6. The achievement of Goal 8 for persons with disabilities is closely interdependent on the achievement of other Goals and targets, including targets 9.c

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018* (New York, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> R. L. Metts, "Disability issues, trends and recommendations for the World Bank", Social Discussion Paper, No. 7 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2000).

(access to information and communications technology and universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries), 1.3 (nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors), 4.5 (equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities), 4.a (education facilities that are accessible and provide inclusive and effective learning environments) and 10.2 (social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex and disability).

7. In international frameworks such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the full and equal participation of women and men, including persons with disabilities, in the formal labour market is encouraged. Participatory measures to enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are also called for in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, to foster the entrepreneurship and innovation of persons with disabilities and to provide high-quality education training for young people and girls with disabilities. In addition, in the Paris Agreement, a legally binding treaty on climate change, 196 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are called upon to mitigate the risks of climate change by respecting and promoting human rights obligations, including the rights of persons with disabilities. Further emphasized in the Paris Agreement is the importance of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities.

8. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006 and ratified by 184 States parties,<sup>4</sup> is the main international treaty in which the obligations of States parties to ensure and promote the full realization of human rights of persons with disabilities are recognized. It underlines the fact that disability arises from interaction between persons with impairments and the attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

9. With regard to the world of work, article 27 (work and employment) of the Convention affirms the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, including in a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States parties need to take steps, inter alia, to prohibit discrimination; provide just and favourable conditions of work; ensure equal pay for equal work; promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors; provide reasonable accommodation; and promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business. Inclusive employment is more than placing individuals in jobs. It requires a systemic shift in the way in which employers conduct business and recruit and retain personnel.

10. Compliance with article 27 requires observation of other provisions of the Convention in order to optimize opportunities for the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities in the labour market. For instance, articles 5 (equality and non-discrimination, including the provision of reasonable accommodation), 6 (women and girls with disabilities), 9 (accessibility, including measures to ensure that information, communications and other public facilities and services, such as schools and workplaces, are accessible to persons with disabilities), 24 (inclusive education, including the provision of reasonable accommodation and the use of augmentative and alternative formats of communication) and 26 (habilitation and rehabilitation, including the availability, knowledge and use of assistive devices and technologies)

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<sup>4</sup> As at 7 February 2022.

are interdependent and interrelated with regard to the realization of the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment.

11. Recognizing that the full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the world of work and in society are key to achieving the Convention, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution [22/3](#), which is focused on the employment of persons with disabilities. In that resolution, States parties to the Convention are called upon to take appropriate measures, including through legislation, and private sector employers and workers' organizations are urged to provide measures to assist persons with disabilities in their access to and maintaining employment. In the same resolution, States are urged to actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in policies and programmes that influence the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, from the design to the implementation and monitoring stages. In its resolution [17/4](#), The Council endorsed the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework in June 2011, which provided a global standard to all States and business enterprises with regard to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights when conducting business.

12. At the International Labour Conference held in June 2021, the ILO tripartite constituents (Governments, workers' organizations and employers' organizations) of its 187 member States adopted the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The call to action was based on the recognition that the pandemic had disproportionately affected the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, and had increased poverty and widened inequalities. The call to action was issued on the basis of the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which relies on the successful implementation of inclusive economic growth and development, the protection of all workers, universal social protection and social dialogue.

13. Entrepreneurship is recognized as an important driver of job creation, inclusive economic growth and innovation and the addressing of the economic, social and environmental challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It has the potential to reduce inequalities, increase social cohesion and expand opportunities in the labour market for persons with disabilities. In its resolution [75/211](#) on entrepreneurship for sustainable development, the General Assembly encouraged Governments and all sectors of society to take measures to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for persons with disabilities through entrepreneurship, including by eliminating discrimination in access to financial resources, promoting access to inclusive education, skills development and vocational and entrepreneurial training and increasing awareness of the ability of persons with disabilities to innovate and contribute through entrepreneurship.

14. The United Nations has produced several policy documents and guidance to shape the world of work and to promote the economic empowerment and fulfilment of the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment. The United Nations system strategy on the future of work ([CEB/2019/1/Add.2](#)) guides the system-wide work of the Organization in assisting Member States in achieving decent jobs for all. In the strategy, a strong emphasis is placed on supporting vulnerable groups. For instance, it includes calls for efforts to remove barriers to new technologies in order to enable persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce and to promote accessible information and communications technology, including access to digital skills education. ILO and the United Nations Global Compact issued the "Guide for Business on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" to enable businesses to adapt their policies and practices in order to respect and support the rights and inclusion of

persons with disabilities as employees, suppliers, customers and members of community.<sup>5</sup>

### III. Key issues: challenges and opportunities in the world of work

#### A. Work and employment of persons with disabilities

15. The participation of persons with disabilities in work and employment remains consistently low across regions. Some of the major barriers that persons with disabilities face in gaining access to employment include attitudinal barriers, which lead to discriminatory practices in the labour market, from recruitment to pay, a lack of an inclusive and enabling environment and a lack of a support system, including social protection, which are essential to the carrying out of their duties by persons with disabilities in the workplace on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities are often subjected to a lack of the following: accessible transportation; local markets; favourable tariff policies; disability-accessible tools and appliances; a built environment, products and services; information and communications technology; and reasonable accommodation. For example, in eight developing countries, an average of 32 per cent of persons with disabilities reported that their workspace was hindering or inaccessible<sup>6</sup> notwithstanding the enshrining of their rights in articles 5, 9 and 27 of the Convention. Family members of persons with disabilities who have support responsibilities experience a similar lack of flexibility.

16. When employed, many persons with disabilities, in particular those from underrepresented groups or with significant support requirements, have low earnings, perform low-skilled work and/or find themselves in precarious working conditions. A case study from Bangladesh showed that persons with intellectual disabilities were often paid only 25 per cent of the wage of those without intellectual disabilities doing the same job and sometimes 50 per cent of the national minimum wage.<sup>7</sup> Persons with disabilities are also more likely to be employed in part-time jobs, working in the informal sector and self-employed.<sup>8</sup> Once hired, they may face disability-based violence and harassment in the workplace. Moreover, workers with disabilities face attitudinal barriers in the workplace, such as negative stereotyping and discrimination, including in relation to pay. For instance, employers and co-workers might mistakenly consider a request for reasonable accommodation to be an act of favouritism rather than a necessity for working on an equal basis with others.<sup>9</sup>

17. While an increasing number of companies are making good strides towards improving their disability inclusion efforts, many employers have unconscious bias and lack the awareness or confidence to include persons with disabilities in the

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Global Compact and ILO, “Guide for business on the rights of persons with disabilities: how business can respect and support the rights of persons with disabilities and benefit from inclusion”, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018*.

<sup>7</sup> Down Syndrome International and International Disability Alliance, “Case study on best practices in the inclusive employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in Bangladesh”, September 2021.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018*.

<sup>9</sup> ILO, “Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work”, Brief, No. 4 (Geneva, 2020).

workplace and to support them in their career development. This is particularly true for persons with disabilities from marginalized groups. In addition, there is a lack of targeted incentives and support for small and medium enterprises to hire and retain persons with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> Many businesses are still compartmentalizing their approach to hiring persons with disabilities and view disability inclusion as a compliance exercise, not as part of equal employment opportunities. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic on the economy further deters some employers from hiring persons with disabilities. For instance, in a study in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, it was found that 42 per cent of employers surveyed were discouraged from hiring persons with disabilities owing to concerns related to supporting them properly during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> For some persons with disabilities, such as those with intellectual disabilities, job losses during the pandemic erased the limited gains that had been made in obtaining access to some labour markets in the previous years.<sup>12</sup>

18. Persons with disabilities are overrepresented among workers in the informal sector. During the pandemic, businesses in that sector have been more susceptible to shocks, given that they are often micro-sized or small enterprises with few resources or financial reserves. Many have fared worse than formal enterprises because they have not been able to obtain financing or receive government support during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, persons with disabilities in the informal sector are highly exposed to employment losses. Many are not able to obtain access to social protection owing to information barriers, such as a lack of awareness of programmes, or other barriers that prevent them from enrolling notwithstanding that their right to social protection is enshrined in article 28 (adequate standard of living and social protection) of the Convention.

19. Persons with disabilities experience the labour market differently. For instance, women with disabilities have a higher unemployment rate than men with disabilities because they face additional workplace discrimination, as well as societal, family, and cultural pressure and non-cooperation, which discourages them from entering or remaining in the labour market. Young people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable of the world's youth and are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed owing to a lack of inclusive education or inadequate support for their transition from school to work<sup>14</sup> notwithstanding that their right to inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning is provided for in article 24 of the Convention. Moreover, persons over 60 years of age with a disability are less than half as likely to participate in employment compared with those without disability, and such a long period of unemployment may lead them to being ineligible to receive a pension (CRPD/CSP/2020/3, para. 40). Older persons with disabilities may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as age cut-offs for job applications or stringent health requirements. Persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities face further stigma upon entering the labour market, are

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<sup>10</sup> Fundación ONCE and ILO Global Business and Disability Network, "Making the future of work inclusive of people with disabilities", 21 November 2019.

<sup>11</sup> A total of 502 line managers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with responsibility for recruitment were interviewed. See Leonard Cheshire, "Locked out of the labour market: the impact of COVID-19 on disabled adults in accessing good work – now and into the future", 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Inclusion International, *A Global Agenda for Inclusive Recovery: Ensuring People with Intellectual Disabilities and Families are Included in a Post-COVID World*, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022*.

<sup>14</sup> Potentially up to 600 million jobs would need to be created by 2035 for young people entering the labour market. See Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda* (New York, 2020).

often placed in low value-added jobs and may be pressured into gaining access to segregated services, such as sheltered workshops, instead of the open labour market.

## B. Entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities

20. Employment is only one means by which persons with disabilities may gain access to the labour market. Other means include self-employment and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship has gained popularity over time. In 2019, the share of entrepreneurs in the labour market grew in 36 out of 52 surveyed countries (A/75/257, para. 5). While the pandemic has slowed entry into entrepreneurship in general, the trend varies by region. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor,<sup>15</sup> an international initiative through which the entrepreneurship activities of adults from 18 to 64 years of age are measured, found that total early-stage entrepreneurial activity is highest, yet variable, in the Middle East and Africa, consistently high in Latin America and the Caribbean and lowest in Europe and North America. Early evidence further suggests that, since the arrival of the pandemic, people who are self-employed have had reduced work hours.<sup>16</sup>

21. There is, however, a dearth of research on the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities, which is alarming, given that the lack of research and data has a direct consequence for policymaking and consequently for the lives of persons with disabilities. In several studies on inclusive entrepreneurship,<sup>17</sup> while there was mention of women, young people and older persons, there was no mention of persons with disabilities. For example, in a 2021 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 and the effectiveness of the policy response on entrepreneurship across disadvantaged or underrepresented groups, persons with disabilities were not included. In that report, it was recognized that less attention was being paid to persons with disabilities within the inclusive entrepreneurship policy in the European Union.<sup>18</sup> Inevitably, it is highly plausible that persons with disabilities have been largely excluded in the targeted emergency policy responses introduced by governments during the crisis.

22. Entrepreneurship has the potential to provide ample opportunities to persons with disabilities. It enables them to gain economic empowerment and participate fully and effectively in society. Entrepreneurship may allow persons with disabilities to have more flexibility, autonomy and independence in managing their time, working schedule and personal circumstances. Importantly, entrepreneurship activities foster skills that increase self-confidence, self-respect and autonomy. For instance, in one study, it was found that entrepreneurs with disabilities assessed themselves as having more social awareness and relationship management skills than non-entrepreneurs with disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

23. Entering into entrepreneurship is not without considerable barriers for persons with disabilities, however. While many might aspire to become an entrepreneur,

<sup>15</sup> Interviews were conducted in 2020 to 2021 with 140,000 people from 46 countries. See Niels Bosma and others, *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2020/2021 Global Report* (London, Global Entrepreneurship Research Association, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European Commission, *The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> OECD describes inclusive entrepreneurship policy as being aimed at opening up opportunities in entrepreneurship to everyone with an idea for a sustainable business, regardless of their background and characteristics. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Pilar Ortiz García and Ángel José Olaz Capitán, “Entrepreneurship for people with disabilities: from skills to social value”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12 (7 July 2021).

persons with disabilities often do not have the same opportunity to start a business. Barriers include, inter alia, a lack of access to finance for start-up capital, unfavourable market policies, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, a small or ineffective network and institutional barriers, such as a lack of childcare and discriminatory attitudes. Other barriers include training that is not tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, business support services that are not accessible and the “benefits trap” – the fear of losing social security benefits by earning income<sup>20</sup> – notwithstanding that the obligation of States parties to promote opportunities for the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities is notably recognized in article 27 of the Convention.

24. Entrepreneurship is an important means by which to attain economic empowerment. It enables persons with disabilities to build a business or an enterprise that is fully aligned with their interests and to become active contributors to society, which in turns increases their autonomy, achievement and personal satisfaction.

### **C. The changing world of work: digital transformation, new forms of work and green jobs**

25. The technological revolution<sup>21</sup> is rapidly changing the labour market, and the pandemic has accelerated the transition to the digital economy. This is evident in the expansion of virtual transactions (e-commerce, e-health and online banking), as well as in the increased number of workers entering into telework. On the one hand, working remotely from home could provide more opportunity and flexibility to persons with disabilities who require, for example, frequent breaks or easy access to medical equipment or therapeutics at home.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, gaining access to support from colleagues when needed can be more difficult while teleworking, and there is a greater risk of social isolation and an increase in stress levels as the boundary between work and life is blurred.

26. Technology can either be used as an enabler, to foster inclusion and diversity, or to create further labour market exclusion and a digital divide for persons with disabilities. For example, artificial intelligence is being applied increasingly in the recruitment process, including to screen job applicants, schedule interviews and provide onboarding and on-the-job training.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, there is a risk that artificial intelligence may introduce systematic bias and inadvertently discriminate against applications from individuals with disabilities because of their physical appearance, speech or other behaviours. On the other hand, numerous artificial intelligence applications, including machine learning, are being developed to reduce barriers to persons with disabilities to enter and remain in the workplace and effectively perform their functions. Examples of such applications include predictive

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<sup>20</sup> OECD and European Commission, *Policy Brief on Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities: Entrepreneurial Activities in Europe*, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> This includes digital connectivity, artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, blockchain, three-dimensional printing and big data analytics.

<sup>22</sup> Lisa A. Schur, Mason Ameri and Douglas Kruse, “Telework after COVID: a “silver lining” for workers with disabilities?”, *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 30, No. 4 (December 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion, “Use of artificial intelligence to facilitate employment opportunities for people with disabilities”, 2019.

text, voice and visual recognition to allow persons with mobility or speech impairment to operate a computer and speech-to-text transcription for deaf persons.<sup>24</sup>

27. Digital accessibility governance is indisputably on the rise, albeit far from being systematic. Persons with disabilities still face significant barriers to gaining access to digital tools, as well as to affording assistive technologies in order to obtain access to the tools in the first place, although their right to gain access to assistive technologies at an affordable cost is provided for in article 20 (personal mobility) of the Convention. The barriers prevent many persons with disabilities from entering the labour market as online workers. Available data further suggest that, although it is provided for in article 9 of the Convention, households that include persons with disabilities have less Internet access than households without persons with disabilities and are more likely to have difficulty affording information and communications technology.<sup>25</sup>

28. Companies interviewed by the ILO Global Business and Disability Network have reported that, although they have official documentation on accessibility, their approach to accessibility is disorganized, with relatively few in-house expert resources.<sup>26</sup>

29. Given that, according to some estimates, 90 per cent of jobs in the future will require digital skills,<sup>27</sup> digital inclusion and accessible information and communications technology, it is imperative that no one be left behind, a central promise of the 2030 Agenda. The participation of persons with disabilities is a precondition for a truly inclusive digital society. That includes, for example, involving persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the hiring process, digital employment initiatives, digital accessibility projects and efforts to close technology gaps.

30. The rise of new forms of work, characterized by the use of digital or online labour platforms, presents another paradigm of work. ILO classifies the two types of services provided by online platforms as digital web-based services, such as those with task descriptions and reviews, and location-based applications, such as transport and delivery. Workers on those platforms can be categorized as self-employed, small-business owners, entrepreneurs or independent contractors. For persons with disabilities, this new form of work may be appealing for its lack of structural and attitudinal barriers that exist in traditional employment settings. Provided that the online platform is accessible, in compliance with article 9 of the Convention, platform work can provide a secondary source of income for persons with disabilities.<sup>28</sup> Accessible and inclusive platforms also enable businesses to attract a wider pool of qualified talent: that of persons with disabilities.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also Selin Nugent and others, “Recruitment AI has a disability problem: questions employers should be asking to ensure fairness in recruitment”, disability and artificial intelligence white paper (Institute for Ethical Artificial Intelligence, 2020); and ILO, “How do you lip read a robot? Recruitment AI has a disability problem”, webinar, February 2021.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018*.

<sup>26</sup> ILO Global Business and Disability Network, “Leave no one offline: a primer on engaging your company on digital accessibility”, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> CEB/2019/1/Add.2, para. 4.

<sup>28</sup> That is not to say that there are no barriers to entry to platform work for persons with disabilities. Platform work may require initial financial investments or skills, such as administrative or computer literacy skills, that many persons with disabilities may not have. Some persons with disabilities may not be equipped to manage multiple jobs at the same time. See Fundación ONCE and ILO Global Business and Disability Network, “An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities”, 2021.

31. The ability to control one's own work schedule through platform work or other means can be empowering. For persons with disabilities, including those with invisible disabilities, the ability to independently control their work schedule may lessen the impact of stress and fatigue caused by physical conditions such as immunodeficiency or back impairments. Moreover, platform workers with disabilities are exempt from disclosing information that would otherwise be required in traditional employment, which often is a source of stigmatization and discrimination at the stage at which employment is offered.<sup>29</sup>

32. Despite the appeal of this new form of work for persons with disabilities, platform work remains a more precarious form of employment. The current regulatory framework in many countries is not yet equipped to protect platform workers, leaving many aspects of work, such as working hours and occupational health and safety, unregulated. Platform workers are not eligible for sick leave, maternity/paternity leave or retirement benefits, which are available through traditional forms of employment. Although the right to work and employment is already enshrined in article 27 of the Convention, and it notably applies to all forms of employment, the labour regulations of many countries have not yet been adapted to protect platform workers with disabilities.

33. The world of work is inherently linked to the state of environment. According to ILO, 40 per cent of the global labour force, including the agricultural sector, relies significantly on the environment. The transition to a green economy, through mitigation and adaptation, would therefore have a significant impact on the workforce. For instance, ILO estimates that the transition to a low-carbon and circular economy by 2030 could potentially result in the creation of more than 100 million jobs, but close to 80 million jobs could be lost.<sup>30</sup> Persons with disabilities are one of the most affected groups, given that many rely on precarious forms of employment.

34. The transition to greening the economy is inevitable, and the time is ripe to create a just world for all. A just transition, as envisioned in the Paris Agreement on climate change, refers to equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to benefit from the creation of green jobs, such as jobs in renewable energy and organic agriculture, adaptation projects to restore ecosystems or sustainable tourism, among others. Such a transition is only possible when the voice, agency and empowerment of persons with disabilities are included in the design and implementation of climate action towards an inclusive green economy. Examples include the promotion of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples with disabilities in climate adaptation<sup>31</sup> and the promotion of the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities in new production processes and technology development, such as energy efficiency or other low-carbon markets.

#### **IV. The way forward: policy recommendations**

35. Public policies need to be adapted to and accommodate the changes in the world of work. In June 2021, Governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations committed themselves to the global call to action for a human-centred approach to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. A human-centred approach to the

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Harpur and Peter Blanck, "Gig workers with disabilities: opportunities, challenges, and regulatory response", *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 30, No. 4 (December 2020).

<sup>30</sup> ILO, *Skills for a Greener Future: A Global View* (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> See ILO, *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change: Emerging Research on Traditional Knowledge and Livelihoods* (Geneva, 2019).

world of work is only attainable when employment and social protection policies and practices are disability-inclusive.

36. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”, committed United Nations entities to supporting Member States in, inter alia, integrating informal workers into formal economies, promoting lifelong learning and reskilling and promoting green and digital economy job creation, with equal access for all. The Secretary-General launched the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for a Just Transition in the digital, green and care economies in September 2021. The Global Accelerator will be aimed at creating at least 400 million decent jobs, primarily in the green and care economies, and at extending social protection floors to those not covered by any social protection measures. The same commitment of United Nations entities to the inclusion of persons with disabilities is reflected in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The strategies are mutually reinforcing to create an inclusive world of work for persons with disabilities.

## **A. Work and employment of persons with disabilities**

37. Many countries already have certain measures in place to promote the realization of the right to work and employment for persons with disabilities. They include ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to employment services or skills development, enacting an employment quota in the legislation, passing laws that prohibit discrimination and promoting the availability of data disaggregated by disability. For example, the Netherlands pays for interpretation services for persons with auditory disabilities for job interviews or work-related trips. Several countries are using the Washington Group on Disability Statistics set of questions on disability in their census and other household surveys, including labour force surveys, to obtain data disaggregated by disability. Ecuador has introduced an employment index of persons with disabilities to measure their inclusion in the formal labour market.

38. States parties are called upon to adopt positive measures to increase the employment of persons with disabilities,<sup>32</sup> including both promoting the entry of persons with disabilities into the labour market and retaining them. Setting employment quotas is one way to promote such entry in both the public and the private sectors.

39. Specific measures are needed, however, to create an enabling environment that is open, inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities. First, as called for in article 5 of the Convention, States parties should prohibit all discrimination, including by providing reasonable accommodation. The commitment is further strengthened in the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the accompanying recommendation (No. 206) to combat violence and harassment in the world of work, adopted during the centenary session of the International Labour Conference, in June 2019. In that Convention, the responsibility of Governments, workers’ organizations and employers’ organizations to promote zero tolerance for violence and harassment at work is recognized, taking into account the specific circumstances and vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities. In practice, this means a discrimination-free recruitment process, equal opportunity for career progression and a stigma-free and accessible working environment for both persons with disabilities and their family members and caregivers, who also face barriers and may need to gain access to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. For example, in Norway, the Civil Service Act (pertaining to employees of the central government) provides that, if there are qualified job applicants who have a disability, they must at least be called in for

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<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Council resolution [22/3](#).

an interview. As much as possible, the public sector must lead by example in promoting work and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

40. Second, an inclusive digital world is only attainable by closing the current digital divide. Under article 9 of the Convention, States parties are required to take measures to promote the access of persons with disabilities to new information and communications technology and systems, including the Internet. Accessibility, including of digital tools, is the cornerstone of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the digital world. Legislation has a critical role to play in bringing accessibility requirements to the centre of designing digital products, services and infrastructure. Moreover, if the universal design approach is taken at the development stage for products, programmes and services relating to work and employment, no subsequent adaptation or specialized design should be necessary later. Organizations operating through digital platforms need to be proactive with regard to disability inclusion by ensuring that their technologies and services are accessible and universally designed.

41. Creating an enabling digital environment requires the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. Their participation at the design stage would result in better products and services and inspire innovation in the digital world. Such participation also allows persons with disabilities to have active empowering roles in the world of work. Policymakers may consider introducing specific measures to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in the design of accessible digital tools and assistive technologies, for example, as accessibility experts.

42. Third, the transition to digital and green economies requires persons with disabilities, in particular those at risk of losing their jobs as a result of the changing world of work, to upskill and reskill. As noted in the global call to action for a human-centred approach to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, governments and employers' organizations have the obligation to strengthen public and private investment in skills development and lifelong learning, including through apprenticeship, career guidance, upskilling and reskilling, and other active labour market policies, to reduce skills mismatches and gaps. The efforts must be disability-inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. An example of such efforts is ensuring that an online learning platform is accessible and that alternative modes, means and formats of communication are provided, as called for in article 24 of the Convention. Further measures are needed to promote the participation of women with disabilities, including in digital and science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes and incentives.

43. For young people with disabilities, obtaining work and employment, including online work, can build a strong sense of self-worth and empowerment. It is important that targeted measures exist to support young people with disabilities in the world of work. For instance, nearly 30 per cent of structural funds of the European Union made available to Austria from 2014 to 2020 was primarily reserved for young persons with disabilities. Targeted measures can also be introduced for older persons with disabilities by, for instance, removing barriers to access to decent work, prohibiting age-based discrimination and enabling access to lifelong learning systems. In the first priority of the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, the importance of policies to extend employability, such as vocational rehabilitation for older persons with disabilities, is stipulated ([A/CONF.197/9](#), para. 24).

44. Regulations need to address new forms of work and their impact on persons with disabilities. The expansion of work opportunities generated by teleworking, platform work and the transition to green jobs needs to be balanced with adequate worker protection. One means of arriving at that point is through social dialogues between

governments, employers' organizations and persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.<sup>33</sup> For instance, to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon and circular economy market, the following measures may be considered: (a) include persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in formulating national plans and strategies for a just transition; (b) ensure that employment services, such as those that offer green jobs, are accessible to persons with disabilities; and (c) ensure that labour market data, including on new and emerging green jobs, are disaggregated by disability.<sup>34</sup>

45. Another important tool to ensure the protection of the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment is inclusive social protection systems. For instance, the emergency measures put in place in response to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, such as cash transfers and unemployment benefits, have protected many persons with disabilities, especially those working in the informal sector. Although the right of persons with disabilities to social protection programmes, in particular women and girls and older persons with disabilities, is provided for in article 28 of the Convention, globally, only 24 per cent of persons with disabilities have access to disability benefits.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the role of social protection schemes is paramount to guarantee income security in case of future shocks. For example, adequate social protection can help to minimize the impact of climate threats on persons with disabilities. It also creates an enabling environment in which they can invest in their own productive capacity, thereby increasing their potential for innovation and entrepreneurship. However, the goal of social protection systems can only be achieved if the process through which to apply for and gain access to them is designed to be fully accessible to all.

## B. Promoting entrepreneurship

46. Entrepreneurship is recognized as an important driver with regard to creating jobs, contributing to economic growth and innovation, reducing inequalities and promoting social cohesion. The General Assembly, in its resolution [75/211](#), noted the crucial role that entrepreneurship could play in supporting participation in the labour market for persons with disabilities. While many Member States have begun to adopt comprehensive and integrated entrepreneurship policies ([A/75/257](#)), public policies aimed at promoting the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities remain sparse notwithstanding the obligation of States parties under article 27 (f) (promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business) of the Convention. China, for example, has taken preferential administrative, fiscal, taxation and financial measures to support the self-employment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities. Ukraine provides financial support to entrepreneurs with disabilities, and the right of persons with disabilities to entrepreneurship is enshrined in its legislation.

47. Tailoring measures to support the entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities is one of the most effective ways to facilitate the entry of that group into the labour market and retain entrepreneurs with disabilities therein because persons with disabilities often face attitudinal barriers and greater obstacles to business creation.

<sup>33</sup> This includes strengthening the capacity of public administration, employers' organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities to participate in such dialogues, as well as developing national strategies.

<sup>34</sup> ILO, "Persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy", Policy Brief (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018*.

Moreover, entrepreneurship-related policies, regulations and market access need to be gender-responsive. Governments and other stakeholders may wish to also provide tailored entrepreneurship support to young people with disabilities to facilitate their entry into the digital economy, such as through incubator business development learning modules that are accessible to young people with disabilities. Member States may also consider integrating youth entrepreneurship strategies into their national policies.

48. In order for entrepreneurship to blossom, it is important that there be an effective ecosystem to support the aspiration. First, policymakers and all sectors of society need to facilitate the development of entrepreneurship skill sets for persons with disabilities through formal and informal education, as well as to ensure that the educational environment is accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Ideally, entrepreneurship education should include hard and soft skills, both of which are critical to encourage an entrepreneurship mindset. The skills include emotional intelligence, business acumen, digital and technology aptitude, data and digital literacy, innovation and self-empowerment.

49. Skills gaps are found to be greater among entrepreneurs from disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities. For that reason, additional support, such as career guidance, coaching and a behavioural approach programme such as the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (Empretec) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, could further help to close such gaps. The efforts would contribute to advancing the implementation of Goal 4, in particular target 4.4 (increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship).

50. Second, access to financial support and finance is a key enabler for entrepreneurs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 47 to 55 per cent of entrepreneurs and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises reported having had difficulties in gaining access to information on policy packages or emergency measures introduced by the government (*ibid.*, para. 18). The rate is likely to be higher for entrepreneurs with disabilities, given that existing financial supports are often not accessible to them. Member States must therefore strengthen the capacity of national financial institutions to reach out to those who have no or little access to financial services and expand alternative sources of funding for start-ups.<sup>36</sup> Information on financing, including microfinancing and digital finance solutions, must be available in an accessible format so that persons with disabilities are aware of the available support. For example, in Kenya, a watch that displays short message service (SMS) messaging in Braille was introduced, enabling persons with visual impairments to conduct financial transactions using M-Pesa (a mobile phone-based money transfer service) through a mobile application.<sup>37</sup>

51. Third, as successful entrepreneurs with disabilities may attest, talent, hard work and resilience against all odds make up only one side of the coin. Having a supportive network, role models and mentors is another critical ingredient of success that encourages both entry into entrepreneurship and remaining on the journey that follows. Collaboration and cooperation with other entrepreneurs, civil society, academia and the public and private sectors is crucial for entrepreneurship to prosper. Having a connection to peers and access to a supportive network enables persons with disabilities to exchange knowledge and increase their self-confidence, motivation and sense of belonging by contributing to the community.

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<sup>36</sup> General Assembly resolution [75/211](#), para. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Solutions for Youth Employment and World Bank, “Digital jobs for youth with disabilities”, Thematic Note, issue No. 2 (February 2021).

## C. Networked approach

52. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”, acknowledged the importance of strategic engagement with all actors. The world of work is closely interlinked, and each actor in society can actively contribute to the economic empowerment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities. Although private governance (such as corporate codes of conduct) and public governance may reinforce each other through their coexistence, they may lessen each other’s overall effectiveness. The private sector therefore has a pivotal role to play in promoting a disability-inclusive workplace. Also in “Our Common Agenda”, the Secretary-General called for a broader range of businesses to participate in the implementation of the Goals, including through business models that respect human rights.<sup>38</sup>

53. A number of good business practices are intentionally inclusive of persons with disabilities. For instance, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, comprising more than 30 multinational enterprises and more than 30 national business and disability networks,<sup>39</sup> is spearheading business conversations and peer exchanges on disability inclusion. It provides employer-led, country-level platforms to companies through which to improve their disability employment policies and practices, including in the online world. Furthermore, Valuable 500 companies have made a commitment to going beyond corporate social responsibility to ensure disability inclusion as customers and employees. Companies that demonstrate inclusivity in the workforce gain a good reputation and increase their overall workforce engagement, loyalty and satisfaction.<sup>40</sup> For example, in today’s digital world, digital accessibility needs to be a pillar of companies’ digital transformation strategy and extend beyond web and mobile accessibility to other emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, extended reality and blockchain. Companies may encourage their suppliers to demonstrate the same disability-inclusive commitment.

54. Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations play a key role in the process. They need to be part of the technology team, the hiring team and the just transition team – to play an active role in the process of thinking about design to have their voices and stories heard.

## V. Questions for consideration

55. The following questions are presented for consideration at the round-table discussion:

(a) What legal, policy and practical measures already exist and what are the obstacles to be overcome for their operationalization? What other measures can be taken to promote the economic empowerment and right of persons with disabilities to gain access to and thrive in an open, inclusive and accessible labour market?

(b) What steps can be taken to ensure that measures aimed at employment and economic empowerment benefit the most marginalized persons?

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/business/pages/businessindex.aspx>; and United Nations Global Compact Strategy 2021–2023, available at [https://ungc-communications-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/about\\_the\\_gc/UN-GLOBAL-COMPACT-STRATEGY-2021-2023.pdf](https://ungc-communications-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/about_the_gc/UN-GLOBAL-COMPACT-STRATEGY-2021-2023.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Since February 2022.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Global Compact and ILO, “Guide for business on the rights of persons with disabilities” (2017). See also the charter of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, available at [www.businessanddisability.org/charter/](http://www.businessanddisability.org/charter/).

(c) What proactive and innovative measures can Governments, private sector employers and workers' organizations, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, and other stakeholders adopt to shape future employment policies that are inclusive of persons with disabilities, including in digital and green economies?

(d) What practical, incremental and targeted measures are required to improve social security and the protection of workers with disabilities in today's world of work, including platform work, and to ensure a just transition? How can better data, evidence-based policy analysis and social dialogue help to adapt and accommodate changes in the world of work for persons with disabilities?

(e) What are some of the emerging best practices of targeted and mainstreamed measures to foster the inclusive entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities, including social entrepreneurship, in digital and green economies? What measures can States parties and other stakeholders introduce to create an enabling entrepreneurship ecosystem for persons with disabilities, including women, young people, older people and indigenous peoples, at the early stages of entrepreneurship and beyond?

(f) What are some of the structural changes and changes to mindsets urgently needed to strengthen the collective voices and autonomy of persons with disabilities at work and beyond?

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