



International  
Labour  
Organization

# Inclusion of people with disabilities in national employment policies

## *I. Introduction*

One billion people, or in other words about 15 per cent of the world's population, have a disability and at least 785 million of them are of working age (15 - 59 years old). All across the globe, persons with disabilities experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than non-disabled persons. When employed, they are also more likely to have low paid jobs with poor career prospects than people without disabilities. Women with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market due to the fact that they frequently experience multiple discrimination based on their gender and their disability status. The lack of equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities forms one of the root causes of the poverty and exclusion of many members of this group.

Further, the higher rates of unemployment and labour market inactivity among people with disabilities as well as the reduced productivity of employed disabled persons due to barriers to education, skills training and transport lead to an [economic loss for countries worth up to 7 per cent of GDP](#).

The inclusion of people with disabilities in national employment policies (NEP) is explicitly mentioned in the provisions of the [ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(Disabled Persons\) Convention, 1983 \(No 159\)](#), and the right of disabled persons to work and employment has been reaffirmed by the widely ratified [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) of 2006.

This guidance note is designed to provide step-by-step support in effectively including women and men with disabilities in the development of NEP throughout the policy process. It is aligned with the ILO [Guide for the](#)

[formulation of national employment policies](#) which should be read in conjunction with this guide. Further, the [resource guide on gender issues in employment and labour market policies](#) gives guidance on how to effectively embed gender dimensions in NEP development.

## *II. Prerequisites for a policy process inclusive of people with disabilities*

### **1. Alignment with national disability inclusion processes**

There might already be explicit commitments to the employment of people with disabilities in the country. These commitments can, for instance, take the form of national disability inclusion strategies or plans that contain reference to employment issues. Also, already existing national employment plans might refer to women and men with disabilities. Ensure that the development of the NEP is in line with these commitments, so they can reinforce each other.

In case there is no explicit commitment to the employment of people with disabilities on the national level, more general references can be used as a way to include disabled persons in the NEP development, e.g. references to vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalized groups.

### **2. Building partnerships with the disability community**

In addition to employment-related ministries, employers' and workers' organizations and other development partners, disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) need to be consulted and included throughout the NEP development process.

DPOs are membership groups that may be engaged in a variety of advocacy, self-help, leadership and capacity building activities. DPOs can represent a specific disability group, such as blind or deaf people, or be cross-disability organizations or umbrella organizations comprising the different disability-specific organizations. It is crucial to remember that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group, so there might also be DPOs of women with disabilities or of indigenous persons with disabilities, for instance. DPOs will have a deep understanding of the core challenges affecting people with disabilities. Sometimes, DPOs, like other development partners, will benefit from some initial support to make best use of their expertise.

DPOs are different from organizations *for* disabled persons that are typically non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose leadership may or may not include people with disabilities and they are usually organized to provide services for disabled persons. While such NGOs can also be advisors, it is particularly important to ensure that DPOs are included in the group of development partners, as per the rallying motto of persons with disabilities worldwide: *'Nothing About Us Without Us'*.

### Box 1: Liberia's NEP and disability inclusion

Liberia's NEP of 2009 features a three-folded strategy for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market:

- *Development of legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability*

by reviewing laws and regulations governing employment, job retention and return to work in the public and private sectors. This will include providing for reasonable adjustment and accommodation of jobs as part of anti-discrimination policies. [...]

- *Promotion of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities*

by developing systems of assistance for persons obtaining, maintaining or returning to employment, including self-employment and establishment of businesses or cooperatives. This will include the monitoring of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in all employment services, and Labour Force Surveys.

- *Enhance access to opportunities and services*

most especially through improving access to vocational training programmes, placement services and lifelong training for persons with disabilities.

Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_143264/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_143264/lang--en/index.htm)

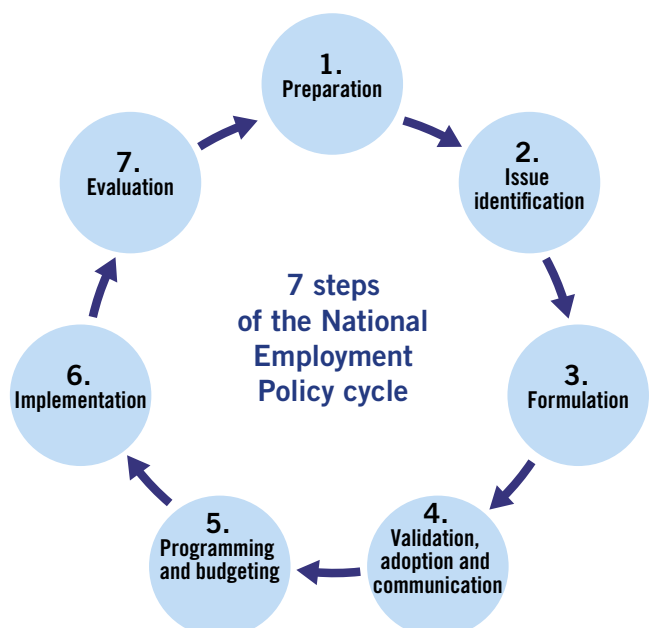
## III. Disability inclusion in each phase of NEP development

This section provides guidance on how disability issues should be included in each of the seven steps of an ideal employment policy cycle.

An employment policy is a set of policy measures that addresses both demand and supply side constraints in labour markets. A NEP is a concerted and coherent vision of a country's employment objectives and ways to achieve them. It thus refers to a set of multidimensional interventions that are envisaged in order to achieve specific quantitative and qualitative employment objectives and targets in a given country. It includes a plan of what to do, selected from among a set of alternatives and in light of given conditions, adopted on the basis of a common agreement reached by all interested parties. It is pursued by a government in order to address clearly identified challenges and opportunities. It is therefore, very important that equality and non-discrimination, including disability issues are fully integrated as part of the NEP policy cycle.

### 1. Preparation phase

One objective of the preparation phase is to define the NEP's development goal. This goal should explicitly address the challenges women and men with disabilities face to the enjoyment of equal employment opportunities. It should be kept in mind that women with disabilities may face further challenges, and these also need to be specifically identified and addressed. Disability inclusion needs to serve as one of the guiding principles for



policy-makers for all remaining phases. In addition to the Government, the social partners, academia and other partners, it is crucial to tap into the in-depth knowledge of DPOs on disability issues.

When setting the organizational framework, DPOs and NGOs for people with disabilities should be explicitly identified and meaningfully involved as stakeholders in the NEP development process. Like other stakeholders they might require some capacity building to more effectively contribute to the development of the NEP. It is crucial to ensure accessibility to people with disabilities throughout the process. This includes the accessibility of meetings, materials and online consultations.

Further, the specific roles and responsibilities of these organizations in the process should be clearly stated. Their views and contributions need to be taken into account by the steering committee and the national technical team.

## 2. Issue identification phase

When analysing the labour market and economic policies that have an impact on the labour market performance, existing and potential barriers for people with disabilities, especially those for women with disabilities, to access to and retention in the labour market deserve particular attention.

Statistics on the labour market situation of people with disabilities are often outdated, unreliable or not available at all. However, likely questions that need to be answered include:

- What are the main barriers people with disabilities face in accessing the labour market and how are these different for women and men, e.g. limited access to mainstream vocational education and training, mistaken assumptions about their capacity to work, inaccessible buildings, transport and information?
- What are the employment-related disparities between women and men with disabilities?
- To what degree does the legislative and institutional framework take people with disabilities into account?
- What is the share of people with disabilities who are active in the labour market, disaggregated by sex?
- Among employed persons with disabilities, what is the share of public and private sector employment, disaggregated by sex?
- What is the share of people with disabilities in the formal and the informal economy, disaggregated by sex?

- How many hours do people with disabilities work and how much do they earn for this work, disaggregated by sex?
- What is the level of vulnerable employment among people with disabilities, disaggregated by sex?
- Which programmes on the promotion of employment of people with disabilities already exist?
- What are the financial resources already allocated to disability inclusion in employment, if any?

### Box 2: Sri Lanka's NEP and disability inclusion

The National Human Resources and Employment Policy for Sri Lanka of 2012 lists several disability-related policy measures under its goal "Employment Opportunities for Vulnerable Groups, Disabled Persons and those in Underdeveloped Regions":

- A better database will be established to improve the availability and accessibility of data on persons with disabilities, and on vocational training facilities available for them and on their demand for jobs.
- An enabling physical environment will be created for persons with disabilities to access and participate in vocational training.
- Measures will be taken to improve institutional responsiveness to needs of persons with disabilities and to create a supportive environment in the workplace for them.
- Awareness training will be initiated among parents, persons with disabilities and their caregivers on the benefits of participation in training and employment for persons with disabilities.
- Special concessions will be worked out to those who employ persons with disabilities such as tax concessions, exemption from statutory payments, financial assistance to improve physical facilities for these persons, and any other incentives to motivate employers to engage persons with disabilities.
- Disability will be mainstreamed in development cooperation, and through this, in development practice. It will be treated as a cross sectoral concern. Disability issues will be more proactively and effectively addressed in mainstream poverty reduction, community development as well as income generation programmes.

Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/94271/110595/F-172791361/LKA94271.pdf>

Conducting research to answer these and other relevant questions is important. At the same time, consultations with DPOs and wider civil society will also yield valuable insights into the challenges women and men with disabilities face in the labour market.

It is important to keep in mind that definitions of disability and persons with disabilities vary among countries and within countries, depending on the contexts in which the definitions are used. For instance, in a specific country, an anti-discrimination law may define disability in a different way from a law on social assistance establishing disability benefits. In countries that have employment quota legislation, a mechanism is in place to define who is considered to have a disability under the quota system.

Independent of whether or not the NEP is being developed in a context in which a system is in place which would allow for the formal recognition of a person's disability, the collection of disability-disaggregated statistics always needs to comply with existing legal standards. This includes legislation on data protection, to ensure confidentiality and respect for the privacy of persons with disabilities. Further, ethical principles need to be adhered to the collection and use of statistics.

In any case, collecting data on disability, for example through conducting surveys as part of the NEP issue identification phase, requires some thought. Questions that ask directly about disability, such as “do you have a disability” or “are you disabled” may not lead to reliable, comprehensive results, as many people do not want to disclose their disabilities or identify themselves as having a disability. Instead, questions that inquire about disability in a functional way, for example by asking about difficulties/limitations in doing certain activities, can work better. One example of how to ask questions about disability was developed by the [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#). To address the specific challenges women with disabilities face in the labour market, statistics on disability issues also need to be disaggregated by sex.

#### **Box 3: Indicators on disability inclusion in Moldova's NEP**

Under its specific policy action “The promotion of equal opportunities and the prevention of discrimination on the labour market”, the National Employment Strategy of Moldova for 2007-2015 lists “The number of disabled people participating in training programs for employment” as one of the policy action's indicators.

### **3. Formulation phase**

It is essential to point out to policy-makers that people with disabilities experience higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, and vulnerable employment and that they are more likely to be discouraged to seek employment compared to non-disabled persons. Moreover, among people with disabilities, disabled women frequently experience even greater discrimination. Based on the previous identification of issues, this situation should be one of the issues specifically addressed in the NEP.

Thus, providing equal employment opportunities for women and men with disabilities and increasing the rate of employment among disabled persons should feature as an explicit objective in the NEP. This objective needs to be accompanied with appropriate indicators and targets. For instance, indicators could include “Percentage of employed and economically active persons with disabilities, disaggregated by sex” or “Percentage of mainstream

#### **Box 4: Examples of policy interventions for disability inclusion**

##### **Viet Nam: Disability inclusion support services**

Inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream programmes and services on vocational training, entrepreneurship development, employment and micro-finance. A case story from the ILO INCLUDE project for persons with disabilities.

[http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_161531/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_161531/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment)

##### **Thailand: Trade unions promoting disability inclusion in the workplace**

In Thailand, the push for greater recognition in the workplace of the rights of persons with disabilities has received a boost from four trade unions representing approximately 450,000 workers in different sectors. A case story from the ILO PEPDEL project for persons with disabilities.

[http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_161520/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_161520/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment)

##### **Ethiopia: Promoting entrepreneurship through inclusive business development services and business skills training**

Promoting entrepreneurship among women with disabilities. A case story from the ILO INCLUDE project for persons with disabilities.

[http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_161490/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_161490/lang-en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=employment)



vocational education and training centres catering to students and trainees with disabilities, disaggregated by sex”.

Policy areas that might need to be influenced include the expansion of anti-discrimination and equality provisions in labour and labour-related laws, disability-inclusive and sex-disaggregated labour statistics, employment services, vocational education and training, micro finance and self-employment, incentives and support for employers to recruit and retain employees with disabilities, as well as social protection schemes designed to bring people with disabilities into and keep them in employment. See the annex for ILO policy tools on disability inclusion in employment.

#### 4. Validation, adoption and communication phase

Once the NEP is drafted, it needs to be validated by the national stakeholders in a workshop or through existing consultative structures. As this validation process is intended to obtain a national consensus on the NEP, it is crucial to engage DPOs and NGOs working on disability issues and take their contributions into account, and also ensure the voice of women with disabilities is heard.

After adoption of the NEP, its contents need to be communicated to the actors who promote the implementation of the NEP as well as to its beneficiaries. DPOs and disability NGOs can play an instrumental role both in promoting the employment of women and men with disabilities as well as in reaching out to beneficiaries with disabilities to inform them about the NEP.

##### Box 5: Seychelles' NEP and disability inclusion

The specific strategy for vulnerable groups of the National Employment Policy and Strategies of 2014 of the Seychelles includes several references to people with disabilities:

- Considering providing specific employment incentives to people living with physical or mental disabilities, such as allowing retention of a portion of their invalidity benefit even after taking up employment;
- Promoting incentive schemes for employers who employ vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and pregnant women;
- Ensuring non-discrimination against people with disabilities in terms of wages.

Available at: <http://www.employment.gov.sc/phoca-download/nepolicy.pdf>

In addition to the mass media, information about the NEP should be specifically targeted to people with disabilities and shared through disability-specific information channels, such as those run by DPOs and NGOs providing services to persons with disabilities.

Ensure that information is provided in an accessible format. For example, visually impaired persons might need an audio or Braille version of the information, while persons with intellectual disabilities might need a simple language version.

Information and communication technologies have been instrumental in developing products and programmes that facilitate access to information for people with sensory disabilities. As more and more people have access to computers, providing materials on a CD or flash drive is an easy way to facilitate access to information for both visually and hearing impaired people.

If websites are used to inform about the NEP, they should comply with accessibility standards, i.e. with the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards, as laid out in the WAI Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

##### Box 6: Ethiopia's NEP and disability inclusion

The National Employment Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia of 2009 explicitly foresee initiatives for promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. They include:

- Improving and expanding training and other skill development services suited to the special needs of persons with disabilities
- Supporting people with disability to start their own business, for it is often difficult for them to penetrate the formal private sector
- Supporting and promoting associations of persons with disabilities so that they become better represented in different forums and their voices be heard
- Providing special active labour market services for persons with disabilities in a manner suitable to their conditions
- Providing better access to credit facilities
- Promoting and making the formal private sector community aware and sensitive to the causes of persons with disabilities

Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/89584/102962/F1789074138/ETH89584.pdf>

## 5. Programming and budgeting phase

An action plan meant to define the ways and means to implement the NEP needs to be drafted. As the action plan addresses issues of programming and budgeting, it is essential to specify the budget allocated for achieving the NEP's objective of equal employment opportunities for women and men with disabilities.

Disability-disaggregated indicators need to be included in the action plan to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of its implementation effectively take disability issues into account. At the same time, these indicators need to be disaggregated by sex.

Further, in addition to workers' and employers' organizations, it is important to define the roles and responsibilities of DPOs and disability NGOs for the implementation phase as well as for monitoring and evaluation. Like other implementing partners, they might need additional training as well as technical and financial means to perform their tasks effectively.

## 6. Implementation phase

As the NEP encompasses multiple policies and a wide range of actors, it is crucial that the inclusion of people with disabilities in the NEP is understood and internalized by all stakeholders. Their combined efforts can create synergies with regard to achieving equal employment opportunities for women and men with disabilities. This internalization process might need to involve training and sensitization of civil servants, employers' and workers' representatives and others on disability issues.

## 7. Evaluation phase

The last phase of the policy cycle assesses whether the NEP objectives, including equal employment opportunities for women and men with disabilities, have been achieved and whether changes to the policy are required.

The evaluation should also provide an answer to the question to which degree was the entire process inclusive of people with disabilities.

## IV. Resources

### *Policy tools for the inclusion of women and men with disabilities*

#### ▶ Achieving equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through legislation

- Guidelines, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. ILO, 2014  
Available at: <http://labordoc.ilo.org/record/461989?ln=en>
- Online guide for trainers. ILO, 2011  
Available at: <http://labordoc.ilo.org/record/389204?ln=en>

#### ▶ Moving towards disability inclusion. ILO, 2011 Available at: <http://labordoc.ilo.org/record/438899?ln=en>

#### ▶ ILO resource guide on disability. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/disability.htm>

### *Tools for the development of national employment policy*

#### ▶ Guide for the formulation of national employment policies. ILO, 2012 Available at: <http://labordoc.ilo.org/record/446806?ln=en>

#### ▶ Resource guide on gender issues in employment and labour market policies: working towards women's economic empowerment and gender equality. ILO, 2014 Available at: <http://labordoc.ilo.org/record/460205?ln=en>

## V. Checklist

<b>I. Prerequisites for a policy process inclusive of people with disabilities</b>	Yes	No	N/A
The NEP is aligned with national disability inclusion strategies and planning processes.			
DPOs are consulted and included throughout the NEP development process.			
<b>II. Disability inclusion in each phase of NEP development</b>	Yes	No	N/A
<b>1. Preparation</b>			
The inclusion of people with disabilities is part of guiding principles of the NEP development process.			
DPOs and NGOs for people with disabilities are recognized as stakeholders and their roles in the process are clarified.			
Accessibility of the policy process to people with disabilities is ensured, including the accessibility of meetings, materials and online consultations.			
<b>2. Issue identification</b>			
Analyses of the labour market and economic policies take the challenges faced by both women and men with disabilities into account.			
Commonly agreed definitions of disability and people with disabilities are used.			
<b>3. Formulation</b>			
Equal employment opportunities for women and men with disabilities and increasing their rate of employment are explicit objectives in the NEP.			
Indicators disaggregated by sex and disability status are developed.			
<b>4. Validation, adoption and communication</b>			
Input of DPOs and disability NGOs is taken into account for NEP validation.			
Information on the NEP is actively provided to the disability community, including through the use of disability-specific communication channels.			
Information on the NEP is accessible and available in alternative formats, e.g. audio or simple language.			
<b>5. Programming and budgeting</b>			
Budget is specifically allocated to disability inclusion in the NEP action plan.			
Disability-disaggregated and gender-sensitive indicators are used in the NEP action plan.			
Roles and responsibilities of DPOs and NGOs for NEP implementation are defined.			
<b>6. Implementation</b>			
Inclusion of people with disabilities as a NEP objective is internalized by all stakeholders.			
<b>7. Evaluation</b>			
NEP objectives on disability inclusion have been achieved and the NEP development process was inclusive of women and men with disabilities.			

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