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

Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods

Note by the Secretariat

The present note was prepared by the Secretariat, guided by the Bureau of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in consultation with United Nations entities, representatives of civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to facilitate the round-table discussion on the theme “Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods”. The note provides an overview of the current applicable international normative frameworks, including the obligations of States parties under the Convention, and sets out key measures to fulfil those obligations in order to further promote the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods and achieve inclusive development for all persons with disabilities. The Secretariat hereby transmits the note, as approved by the Bureau of the Conference, to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at its seventeenth session.

* [CRPD/CSP/2024/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. There are estimated to be over 1.3 billion persons with disabilities, representing approximately 16 per cent of the global population and constituting a significant group that can contribute to society and development.¹
2. The rights of persons with disabilities, including the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods, are well recognized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in some key internationally agreed development instruments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the pledge that no one will be left behind.
3. Over the years since the adoption of the Convention, despite many initiatives and efforts and the notable progress already made, the progress obtained thus far has been uneven and too slow. Many persons with disabilities still encounter discrimination, exclusion and physical, social, economic and cultural barriers that hinder their enjoyment of their rights. Too many of them do not have opportunities to realize their full potential to participate in and contribute economically to development. Ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities and empowering them to fully participate and gain access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods are imperatives for human rights and sustainable development.
4. As the midpoint in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has passed and preparations for the Summit of the Future are under way, the international community has an opportunity to pay special attention to the situation of the world's population of persons with disabilities and to ensure the realization of their rights. In this context, at the seventeenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, States and civil society will engage in a round table focused on the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. The participants in the round table will review the progress achieved, identify and address existing and emerging challenges, and explore strategies to further promote disability inclusion and the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods for persons with disabilities.
5. The present note provides a general background and relevant information aimed at facilitating the discussion at the round table. For the sake of clarity, the present note follows the approach taken by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which considers "decent work" to be employment that is productive and delivers a fair income, safe working conditions, social protection for both workers and their families, prospects for personal development and social integration, the freedom of expression, the freedom to organize and participate in labour unions, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all.² The term "livelihood" is understood broadly as the way in which an individual secures the necessities of life. It may involve work for a governmental body, a business or an organization, and it may be remunerated in cash or in kind, be performed alone or in a group, and be conducted at home or in the community. A livelihood is "sustainable" when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, when it maintains or enhances a person's capabilities and assets, and when it not only provides sustainable livelihood opportunities for the individual worker but also contributes net benefits to the livelihoods of others in both the short and the long terms.

¹ See www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1.

² See www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm.

II. International normative frameworks

6. The current international normative frameworks consisting of international instruments concerning human rights and development provide comprehensive guidance to address the issues in question, namely, the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods, and the promotion of such rights.

7. The Convention, adopted in 2006 and ratified by 191 States parties,³ is the most important legally binding instrument that addresses the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. The Convention establishes a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing provisions concerning those rights that can be realized through a variety of pathways, including through decent work in a formal or informal economy in the labour market, self-employment and the establishment and running of cooperatives or businesses, and by securing access to finance and social protection and assistance. Notably, under article 27 of the Convention, States parties recognize and are legally obliged to take measures to promote those rights, including the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. Pursuant to the Convention, States are required to take steps, including through legislation, to prohibit discrimination, to provide just and favourable conditions of work, to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, to promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the public and the private sectors, to ensure the provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace, to promote the acquisition of work experiences in the open labour market and to promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes. States parties must also ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others and that they are not held in slavery or in servitude and are protected from forced or compulsory labour.

8. To ensure opportunities for sustainable livelihoods for persons with disabilities, States parties to the Convention are required to take steps to promote opportunities for persons with disabilities for employment in the public and the private sectors, self-employment, entrepreneurship and the development of cooperatives and their own business, and to ensure their access to appropriate and affordable services and assistance. In article 27 (h) of the Convention, States parties are called upon to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures. Under article 4, States are required to take measures to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability by any person, organization or private enterprise. Under article 9, they are required to ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services that are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

9. In article 28 of the Convention, States parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. They also recognize the right of persons with disabilities to social protection and to the enjoyment of that right without discrimination on the basis of disability, and are required to take steps to safeguard and promote the realization of that right, including measures to ensure equal access by persons with disabilities to clean water services and to appropriate and affordable services, devices and other assistance for disability-related needs; to ensure access by persons with disabilities,

³ As at 26 March 2024.

in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection and poverty reduction programmes; to ensure access by persons with disabilities and their families living in poverty to assistance from the State, including adequate training, counselling, financial assistance and respite care; and to ensure access by persons with disabilities to public housing and to retirement benefits and programmes.

10. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States pledged to leave no one behind and emphasized the responsibilities of States to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind, including disability or other status. Sustainable Development Goal 8 reflects the long-standing commitment of the international community to achieving full and productive employment and decent work, as well as equal pay for work of equal value for all, including persons with disabilities.

11. Other international instruments, notably the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, also attach importance to the full and equal participation of women and men, including persons with disabilities, in the formal labour market.

12. ILO social security standards include several conventions and recommendations. In its recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection, ILO provides guidance to States on establishing and maintaining nationally defined social protection floors as a fundamental element of their national social security systems.⁴ Such social protection floors should guarantee, at the least, effective access to essential health care, education and nutrition security, as well as a basic level of income security throughout the life cycle, as defined at the national level. Some of the principles set out in the recommendation are of relevance for persons with disabilities, including the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and responsiveness to specific requirements, and of respect for the rights and dignity of people covered by the social security guarantees.

13. Education and training have a direct impact on employment opportunities. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda stipulates the need to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training (target 4.5 of Goal 4) and access to lifelong learning opportunities, including for persons with disabilities, to help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and participate fully in society. Promoting access for persons with disabilities to vocational rehabilitation, skills development and employment as means of improving their standard of living is also an underlying aim of some ILO standards relating to persons with disabilities, including recommendation No. 99 concerning vocational rehabilitation and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), and its accompanying recommendation No. 168.

III. Key issues and challenges in the realization of the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods

14. Over the years since the entry into force of the Convention, States parties in all regions have been making efforts and progress towards promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. One of the most notable developments has been the harmonization of national laws and policies with the Convention. In 2016, among the 193 States Members of the United Nations, over 60 per cent had included in their laws disability-specific provisions prohibiting discrimination and guaranteeing equal

⁴ ILO, *The Strategy of the International Labour Organization: Social Security for All – Building Social Protection Floors and Comprehensive Social Security Systems* (Geneva, 2012).

pay for work of equal value.⁵ The Constitutions of 22 countries explicitly guarantee the right to work or prohibit employment discrimination against persons with disabilities. Some countries have also developed national employment policies that include specific provisions for ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.⁶

15. In various countries worldwide, initiatives have been taken to promote inclusive employment and the right to decent work for persons with disabilities, including through campaigns to raise awareness among employers, targeted vocational training programmes, support for persons with disabilities in job searches and applications, incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities, technical and financial support for persons with disabilities who want to start a business, and efforts to engage persons with disabilities and the general public in policies and actions to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.

16. Encouragingly, there is increasing interest in the private sector in employing persons with disabilities. This is reflected in the establishment of national business and disability networks in countries such as Argentina, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Uruguay and of global organizations of businesses that make commitments to disability inclusion.⁷ The employment of persons with disabilities is beginning to receive more attention in corporate sustainability reporting. An example in that regard is the new European Union directive on corporate sustainability reporting.⁸ Trade unions have also increased their focus on the employment of persons with disabilities.

17. Despite the aforementioned initiatives, progress has been uneven and slow thus far globally. Persons with disabilities still encounter high levels of discrimination, with one in three reporting such experiences, twice the rate encountered by individuals without disabilities.⁹ Work and employment is still an area in which persons with disabilities experience discrimination, in particular women with disabilities, indigenous persons with disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with disabilities in vulnerable situations, including those living in poverty, who face discriminatory treatment and its consequences. Although almost all jobs in the labour market can be performed by someone with a disability and most persons with disabilities can be productive if environmental barriers are removed, persons with disabilities in both developing and developed countries continue to experience significant challenges in realizing their rights. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or to work in the informal sector and in more precarious employment, and they have limited access to social protection, decent working conditions and labour rights. The intersectionality of gender and disability places a double burden on young women with disabilities, who are more likely to be out of school and to have lower literacy rates than young women without disabilities or young men with disabilities. They are more likely to be out of school and not employed but rather engaged in unpaid care work, with significant health and economic disparities.

⁵ *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities, 2018* (United Nations publication, 2019).

⁶ ILO, "Inclusion of people with disabilities in national employment policies", September 2015.

⁷ For example, the Valuable 500.

⁸ Disability Hub Europe, "A strengthened future for sustainability corporate reporting, including new social aspects such as employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities", 10 November 2022.

⁹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition – Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet* (United Nations publication, 2023).

A. Greater likelihood of unemployment

18. According to an ILO report, a higher unemployment rate is observed among persons with disabilities than among those without disabilities in more than half of the countries with available data. The median unemployment rate for persons with disabilities stands at 7.6 per cent, compared with 6.0 per cent for persons without disabilities.¹⁰

B. High inactivity rates in the labour market

19. Persons with disabilities are more likely than persons without disabilities to be outside the labour force, meaning they are neither employed nor looking for a job. Globally, a persistent gap of over 30 points in inactivity rates between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities is observed in all regions.¹¹ The high inactivity rates indicate the persistent existence of barriers in the labour market, as most persons with disabilities do not have a job and are not looking for a job. Any period of unemployment, especially a prolonged one, has a significant impact on future labour market outcomes. Longer spells of unemployment inevitably lead many persons with disabilities into inactivity or force them to take up jobs in the informal economy. Such high inactivity rates in the labour market bear significant policy implications, as they could represent important pathways towards chronic poverty for persons with disabilities.

C. Low employment rate

20. Available data from 91 countries and territories across the world show that only 36 per cent of persons with disabilities of working age are in employment, while the rate for persons without disabilities is about 60 per cent.¹² ILO reported that the employment gap between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities is higher for older persons and that the gap between women and men with disabilities is also higher in that age group.¹³ Studies show that, in many societies, young persons with disabilities are dissuaded from pursuing employment and face discriminatory practices during the hiring process and in the workplace, including inaccessible workspaces.¹⁴

D. Higher risk of precarious situations

21. Even when persons with disabilities are employed, they may disproportionately face precarious situations compared with the general population. For example, in many countries, persons with disabilities are more likely to work in the informal sectors, which are generally characterized by a lack of security and benefits, and to be self-employed. Persons with disabilities are four times more likely than persons without disabilities to be engaged in the informal sector. Globally, 50 per cent of

¹⁰ ILO, “New ILO database highlights labour market challenges of persons with disabilities”, 13 June 2022.

¹¹ ILO, ILOSTAT database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

¹² *Disability and Development Report*.

¹³ ILO, ILOSTAT database.

¹⁴ Sally Lindsay and others, “Ableism and workplace discrimination among youth and young adults with disabilities: a systematic review”, *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 33, No. 1 (2023).

employed persons with disabilities compared with 41 per cent of employed persons without disabilities are self-employed.¹⁵

E. Tendency to earn less

22. Employees with disabilities tend to earn lower wages than their peers without disabilities. Studies show that, in some countries, the wage gaps between workers with disabilities and workers without disabilities could be as high as 49 per cent. Among the disability communities, those living in rural areas and women tend to earn the lowest salaries. In one country, women with disabilities earned 16 per cent less than men with disabilities, while in another country 61 per cent of persons with disabilities living in rural areas received less than the minimum salary in 2012, compared with 36 per cent in urban areas.¹⁶

F. Lack of reasonable accommodation

23. While many countries have laws with provisions on reasonable accommodation, their practical implementation tends to fall short. Technical and financial assistance for employers to provide reasonable accommodation and make their workplaces accessible is generally lacking. Data from eight countries show that an average of 30 per cent of persons with disabilities report that their workplaces are hindering to them or not accessible.¹⁷ In seven countries, 23 per cent of adults with disabilities need but do not have assistive products for work.¹⁸ Worldwide, in 2022, only 62 per cent of employment agencies were accessible for wheelchair users, 13 per cent were partially accessible and 25 per cent were completely inaccessible.¹⁹ Many persons with disabilities have no other choice but to pursue part-time employment because full-time employment does not allow them adequate time to prepare for work. Workers with disabilities often need to take more time and incur extra costs to travel to and from work, and are often unable to find or afford accessible transport and the related services that they need. When given the necessary accommodation, persons with disabilities can engage in full-time work. Due to all these obstacles, many persons with disabilities who are capable of working are not able to secure a job and remain an underutilized segment of the labour force.

G. Education and professional training

24. The importance of education and training for finding and retaining decent work and sustainable livelihoods is well understood. Education and training can help to make a difference: the percentage of persons with disabilities who are employed increases with their level of education. However, young persons with disabilities are strikingly overrepresented among the young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training. A study showed that, in 2021, young persons with disabilities were almost twice as likely to be neither in employment nor in education or training than young persons without disabilities.²⁰

¹⁵ ILO, ILOSTAT database.

¹⁶ *Disability and Development Report*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ ILO, ILOSTAT database.

¹⁹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from SINTEF and WHO.

²⁰ ILO, ILOSTAT database.

H. Access to financial services

25. Access to financial services, including access to credit, is critical and can help many persons with disabilities to move out of poverty and pursue a decent and sustainable livelihood. However, these much-needed services are not always accessible due to many factors, such as banking facilities that are not physically accessible or online services that are not virtually accessible. One of the biggest barriers to self-employment or group economic activities is a lack of start-up capital, sometimes in combination with a lack of entrepreneurial or small business management skills. Available data suggest that, in 2022, about one third of the banks in both developed and developing countries were not accessible or were only partially accessible for wheelchair users.²¹ Nearly one quarter of automatic teller machines in developed countries and half of those in developing countries were not accessible or were only partially accessible for wheelchair users. In terms of online banking, which has become an essential tool for financial services, among nine countries, only 17 per cent of persons with disabilities on average conduct financial transactions with a mobile phone, compared with 21 per cent of persons without disabilities.²² The lack of credit, together with limited work opportunities and higher costs, particularly for health care and assistive devices, remains a major constraint on livelihood development for persons with disabilities.

I. Social protection

26. Social protection systems, including disability-targeted benefits, can support individuals and their families in meeting their disability-related extra costs and the costs of common needs such as water, electricity, food, health care and housing. However, despite most countries now offering some kind of disability benefits, their coverage tends to be low. Those who need them the most, including many informal workers with disabilities, are often excluded. According to *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*, only 28 per cent of persons with significant disabilities globally and only 1 per cent in low-income countries have access to disability benefits.²³ In many countries, disability benefits, both non-contributory and contributory, are sometimes designed in such a way that persons with disabilities and their families need to decide whether to look for employment or to opt for the disability benefits. Even when the disability benefits are low, they often decide to not take the risk of entering the labour market.

27. This has a devastating impact on many persons with disabilities. A study in 37 countries showed that, in 2020, 83 per cent of parents or carers with disabilities lost over half of their income following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, compared with 66 per cent of those without disabilities.²⁴ Nevertheless, only 44 per cent of countries announced COVID-19-related social protection relief measures that targeted persons with disabilities.²⁵

28. The current global economic slowdown will likely force more workers with disabilities to accept lower quality and poorly paid jobs that lack job security and

²¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from Sozialhelden.

²² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, based on data from the Demographic and Health Survey.

²³ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*.

²⁴ Save the Children, *The Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Families with Disabilities* (London, 2020).

²⁵ ILO and United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “Social protection measures for persons with disabilities and their families in response to the COVID-19 crisis: an updated overview of trends, June 2021”.

social protection. The need for universal social protection and decent job opportunities will only grow as the transitions to green and digital economic systems accelerate and the demographic transition unfolds, and especially in times of crises.

J. Emerging challenges and opportunities for promoting inclusion and the right to decent work for persons with disabilities in the future of work

29. The world of work is currently undergoing significant changes due to emerging technologies, globalization and megatrends such as demographic change, including population ageing, migration and urbanization, and climate change, which could lead to transformation as well as uncertainty or disruption. Many of these changes could reshape job markets and livelihoods for billions of people. While they present promising opportunities for enhanced productivity and innovation, they also pose challenges for workers and jobseekers, including many of those with disabilities.

30. One such emerging challenge is ensuring accessible and inclusive environments as new technologies are introduced in recruitment processes (see [A/HRC/49/52](#)). For example, artificial intelligence is increasingly used in recruitment. Artificial intelligence systems are trained to identify which job candidates will be successful workers on the basis of a remote video interview. However, the systems are often not designed to include the perspectives and presence of persons with disabilities. The systems examine speech patterns, tone of voice, facial movements and other indicators, and make recommendations about who should be invited to a follow-up interview and who should not be offered the job. Because persons with disabilities are not sufficiently included in the training of these systems, the systems tend to discriminate against candidates with disabilities that significantly affect their facial expressions and voices, namely, disabilities such as deafness, blindness, speech disorders and surviving a stroke, and against candidates with disabilities who require reasonable accommodation.²⁶ These concerns extend also to the use of artificial intelligence in employee surveillance and performance management. Disability is rarely included in the agendas of debates on artificial intelligence, while those advocating for disability rights largely remain unaware of the potential impact of these emerging technologies. Developers of artificial intelligence human resources technology are often not required to prove that their products are safe and inclusive for jobseekers or employees with disabilities.

IV. Ways forward: a call for accelerated actions

31. More than halfway through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the commitments and initiatives undertaken by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society community have resulted in notable progress, especially in strengthening the policy framework to make it favourable to the advancement of the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. The challenge now is to scale up existing good practices and successes and to accelerate progress in implementing the Convention, as the progress towards the disability-inclusive achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in terms of the participation and outcomes of persons with disabilities in the labour market, has been rather slow and uneven. In addition, new challenges are arising due to the rapid transformation of technology such as artificial intelligence, as well as to demographic change and climate change.

²⁶ Meredith Whittaker and others, “Disability, bias, and AI”, report of the AI Now Institute, 20 November 2019.

32. Through the political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit of 2023, Member States reiterated their commitments to achieving sustainable development and shared prosperity for all by focusing policies and actions on the poorest and most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities.

33. Ahead of the Summit of the Future, the international community is at a critical juncture, with a vital opportunity to take a critical look at decent work as a key lever of transformation towards reducing poverty and inequalities, while promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

34. There is an urgent need to call for accelerated actions to address existing barriers and challenges, including those that have been limiting the prospects and opportunities for persons with disabilities to realize their rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. These include discrimination, stigma, negative attitudes, the lack of accessibility to and in workplaces and business places, limited access to high-quality educational and skills training, the lack of access to financial services and the limited availability of reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities.

35. Global experiences reveal that disability-inclusive development policies matter and can help to make a difference in realizing the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. Responsive interventions can be made at different levels, namely, at the system level (e.g., improving policy and legislation), the programme level (e.g., making reasonable accommodation) and/or the individual level (e.g., providing training in new skills).

36. Moving forward, a variety of policy toolkits could be used to further promote the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods for persons with disabilities. For instance, disability-responsive actions could be taken to bridge the digital divides that could exacerbate the existing inequalities among persons with disabilities. By providing persons with disabilities with equal access to technologies, including assistive devices, to digital literacy and skills, and to upskilling training, jobseekers and workers with disabilities will be empowered to become more resilient and able to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of work. With a suitable mix of legislative, financial, taxation and sector regulation, including incentive measures, employers will be encouraged and supported to hire and retain more workers with disabilities with the required skills. The potential of these policy tools and measures should be further explored to help to advance the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and empower them to take advantage of those new opportunities, better navigate career development, succeed in the open labour market and pursue sustainable livelihoods for both themselves and their families.

V. Guiding questions for consideration by the panel

37. The following questions are proposed for consideration at the round-table discussion:

(a) What public policy tools have proved to be effective in creating an open, inclusive and accessible labour market in line with the requirements of the Convention?

(b) How can employers be more active in ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in their workplaces?

(c) Please share one or two examples to illustrate how and why well-designed social protection policies support persons with disabilities in meeting their specific disability-related needs and costs, while also avoiding disincentives for people to seek jobs or return to work.

(d) What can be done by Governments, employers and organizations of persons with disabilities to ensure that the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods are exercised by all persons with disabilities, including those in the most marginalized situations, such as women with disabilities and persons with psychosocial disabilities?

(e) What can be done by Governments, international institutions, including the United Nations, organizations of persons with disabilities and the broader civil society community, including the private sector, to shape the future labour market to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities in the digital and green economies?

(f) What concrete measures and actions should be proposed at the forthcoming Summit of the Future to ensure and promote the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods in the future of employment?
