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Economic and
Social Affairs



Disability and Development Report 2024

Accelerating the realization
of the Sustainable Development
Goals by, for and with persons
with disabilities

Advance Unedited Version



Photo Credit: UNDP Afghanistan

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals
by, for and with persons with disabilities



United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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Promoting full and productive employment and decent work (Goal 8)

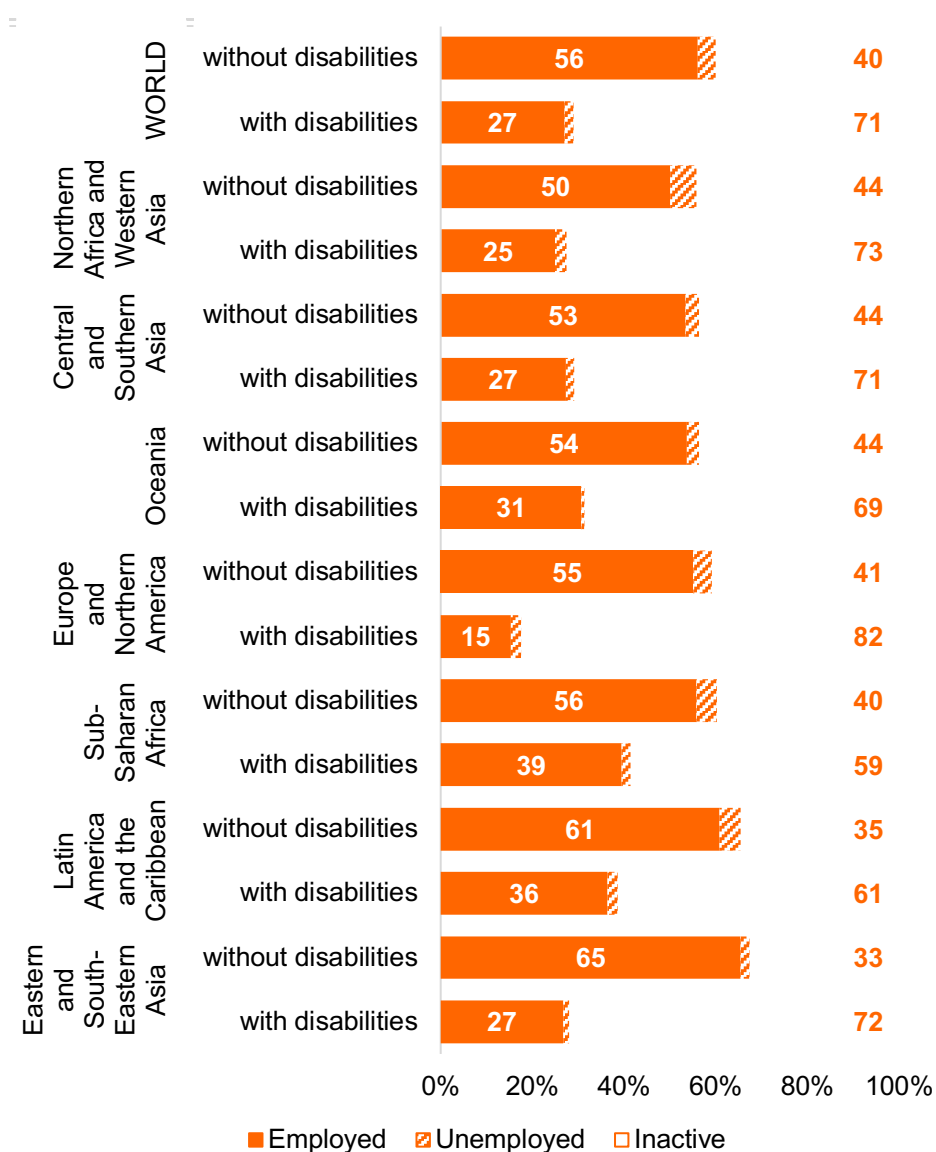
This chapter discusses the current situation and progress made so far for persons with disabilities vis-à-vis Goal 8 and reflects on new opportunities and ongoing challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the labour market, including in the transition to green and digital economies. Goal 8 calls for promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 8 explicitly refers to persons with disabilities in its target 8.5 which aims to, by 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. The right to work is explicitly enshrined in article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which focuses on work and employment. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its General Comment Number 8 provides guidance to States Parties and other stakeholders on Article 27 of the Convention.

Current situation and progress so far

As many persons with disabilities of working age are often not registered as job seekers, they are usually not reflected in the unemployment rates. Consequently, the best way of assessing the labour market participation of persons with disabilities is by measuring the percentage of the working age population who is employed and comparing these measures between persons with and without disabilities. Globally, the percentages of the working age population who are employed currently stand at 27 per cent for persons with disabilities and 56 per cent for persons without disabilities (Figure 123) - not very different from 5 years ago. The level of economic development has a significant impact, with the largest gap being found in the high-income regions of Europe and North America (40 points) and the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa (16 points).

Persons with disabilities are more likely to be outside the labour force, i.e., they are not employed nor looking for a job, than persons without disabilities. Gaps between persons with and without disabilities in inactivity rates – i.e., percentage of persons outside the labour force – are wide: an overall gap of 30 points in the inactivity rates between persons with and without disabilities, with significant gaps present in every region (Figure 123). The inactivity among persons with disabilities is much higher than unemployment in all regions, with Europe and Northern America witnessing the largest inactivity figures. This indicates that many barriers persist for persons with disabilities in the labour market as a majority of persons with disabilities in all regions does not have a job and is not encouraged to look for a job. From a policy perspective, the low percentage of persons with disabilities employed, particularly in high-income countries, presents significant challenges. These challenges include reducing inactivity, which is a lot more challenging than reducing unemployment, as it entails combating stigma and negative attitudes among employers and the general population, as well as providing accessible and inclusive workplaces.

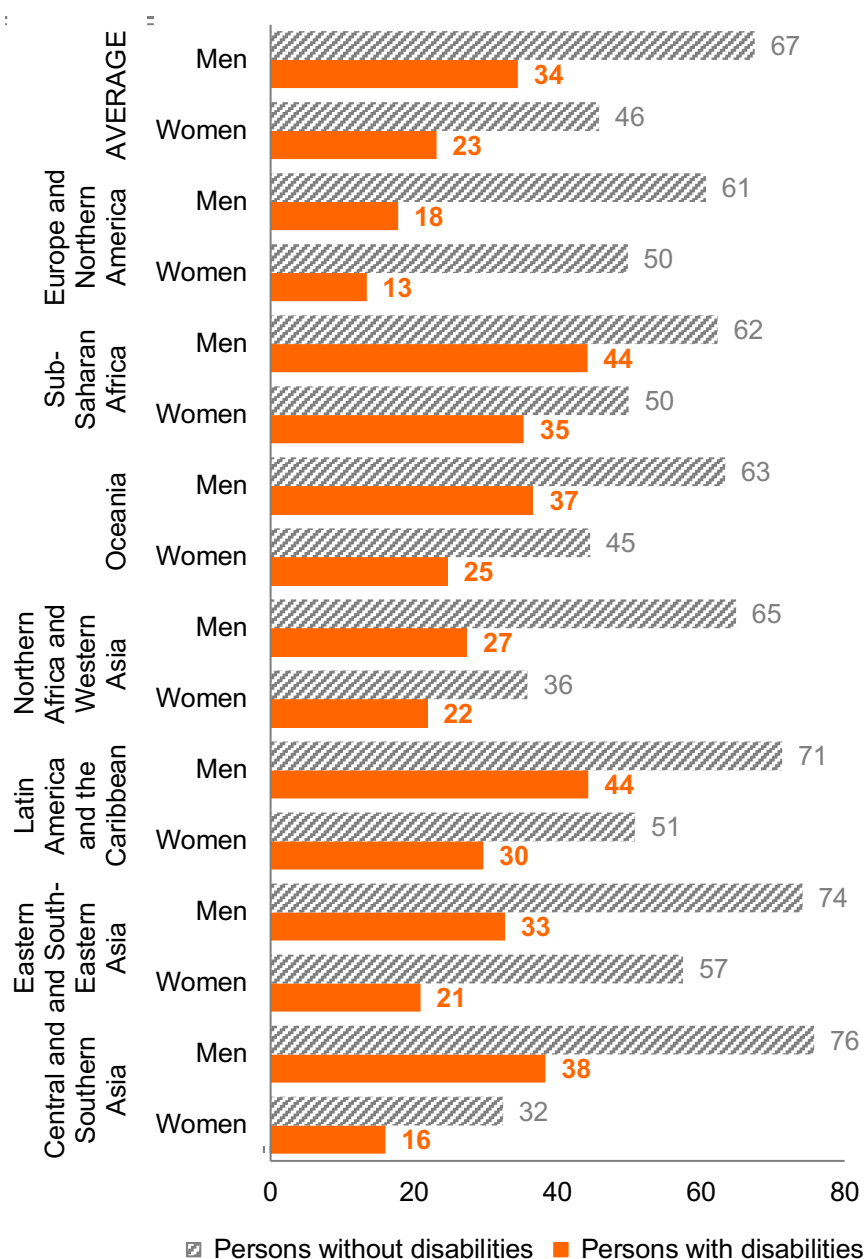
Figure 123. Percentage of the population aged 15 years and over by labour force status (employed, unemployed and outside the labour force), by disability status, for the world and in 7 regions, in 2021 or latest year available.



Note: Persons outside the labour force, also referred to as inactive persons, refer to persons who are not employed nor looking for a job. Regional and global estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of country data. Estimates based on data from 90 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

Figure 124. Employment to population ratios for persons aged 15 years and over, by disability status and sex, in 7 regions, in 2021 or latest year available.



Note: Estimates based on data from 90 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

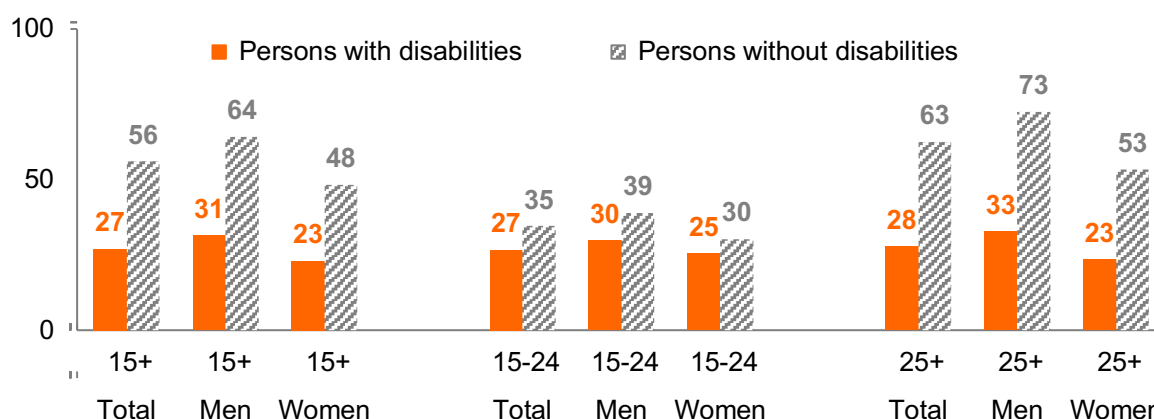
Persons with disabilities experience additional barriers and discrimination depending on their gender, age and type of disability. Women with disabilities face more barriers than men with disabilities, with employment to population ratios lower for women with disabilities than for men with disabilities, with 23

per cent of women with disabilities and 34 per cent of men with disabilities employed (Figure 124). In all regions, women with disabilities are the least likely to be employed, with their employment to population ratios substantially lower than for men with disabilities, women without disabilities and men without disabilities. The gap between women with disabilities and men without disabilities is largest in Central and Southern Asia and in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. The employment to population ratio of women with disabilities is lowest in Europe and Northern America and in Central and Southern Asia.

The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities is higher for older people and the gap between women and men with disabilities is also higher in this age group (Figure 125). Persons with psychosocial or mental disabilities are further left behind than other persons with disabilities in the labour market in many countries (Figure 126).

In terms of unemployment rates (SDG indicator 8.5.2), in Europe and North America, the rate for persons with disabilities is much higher than that of persons without disabilities and slightly higher in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Northern Africa, but the reverse is true in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania (Figure 127). But these statistics are misleading as many persons with disabilities are not counted in the unemployment rates because they are discouraged to look for a job due to stigma and negative attitudes.

Figure 125. Employment to population ratios for persons aged 15 years and over, by disability status, age group and sex, global estimates, in 2021 or most recent year with data available.



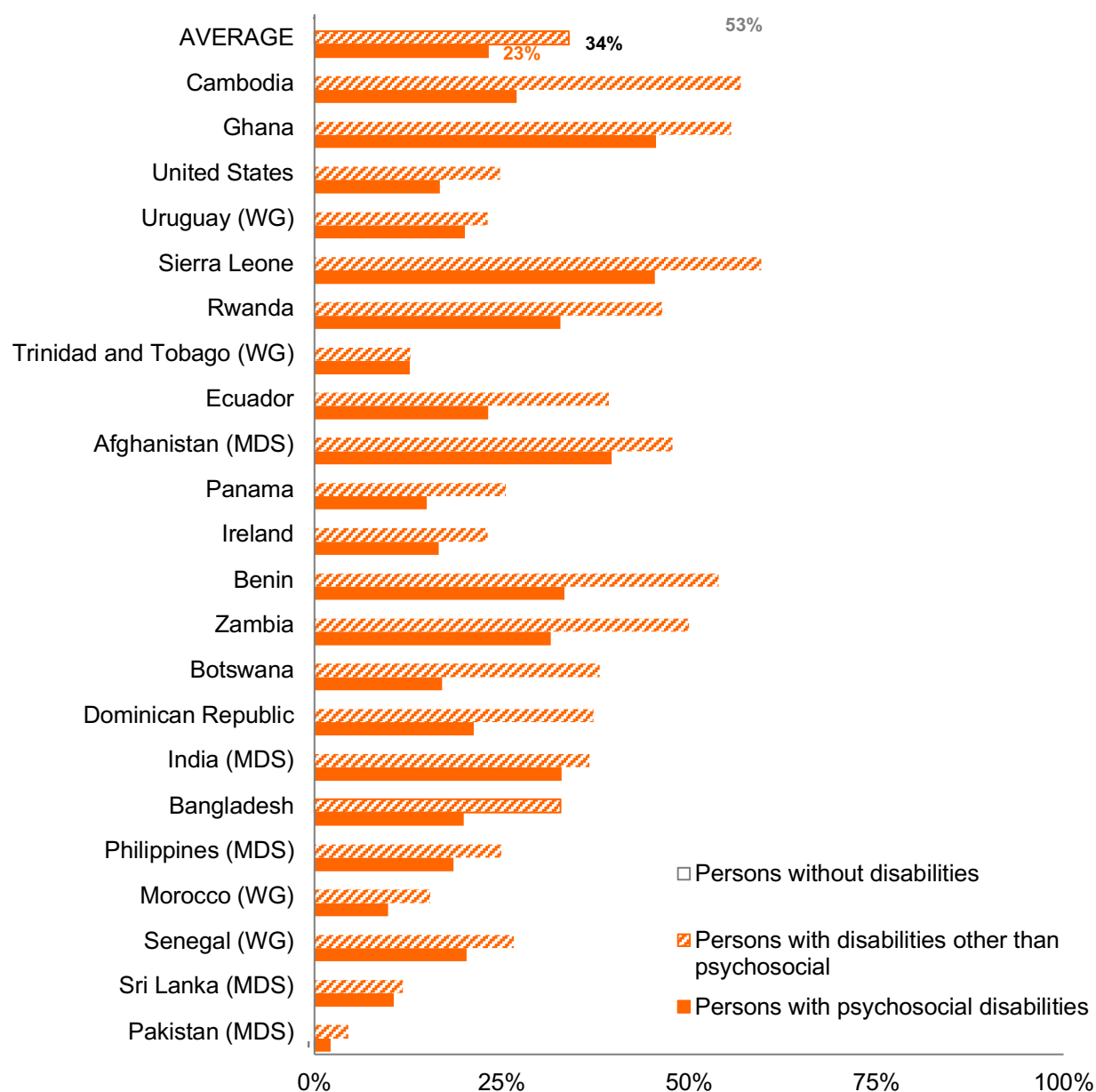
Note: Global estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of country level data. Estimates based on data from 90 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

In many countries, laws regulating labour still lack protections against discrimination on the grounds of disability, including in recruitment (see chapter on Goal 10). An emerging challenge in this area, is securing accessible and inclusive environments as new technologies are introduced in recruitment processes.³²⁰ Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used for recruiting candidates for a job. These

AI systems are trained to identify which job candidates will be successful workers, based on a remote video interview.

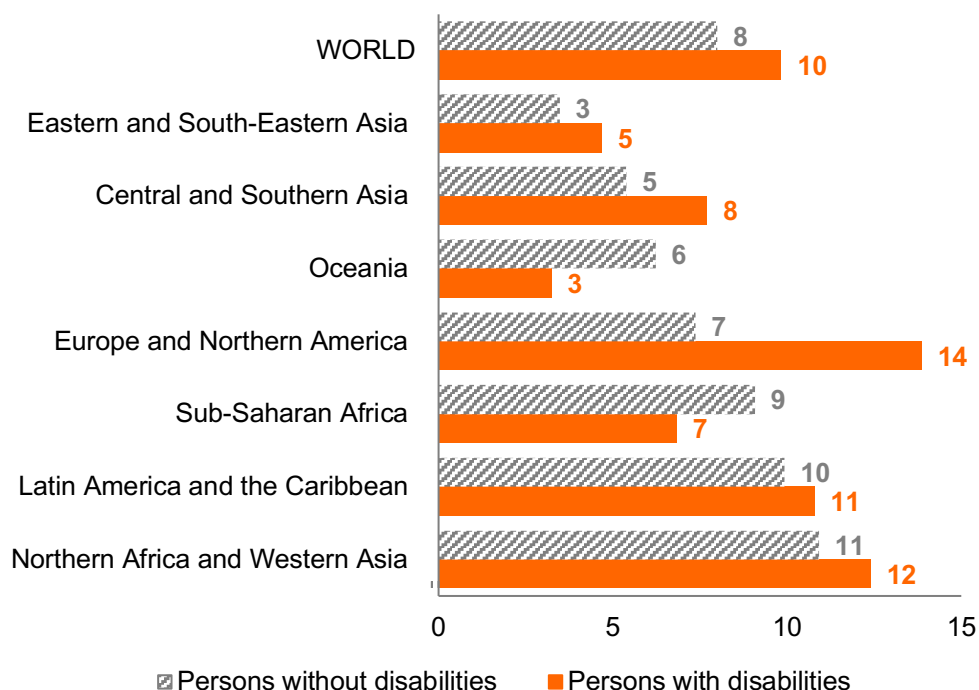
Figure 126. Percentage of persons aged 15 and over who are employed, by psychosocial disability and disability status, in 22 countries, in 2019 or latest year available.



Note: For Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka, 'persons with disabilities other than psychosocial' reflects all persons with disabilities. (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey.

Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from IPUMS⁸) and WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).

Figure 127. Unemployment rates for persons aged 15 and over, by disability status, for the world and in 7 regions, in 2021 or most recent year with data available.



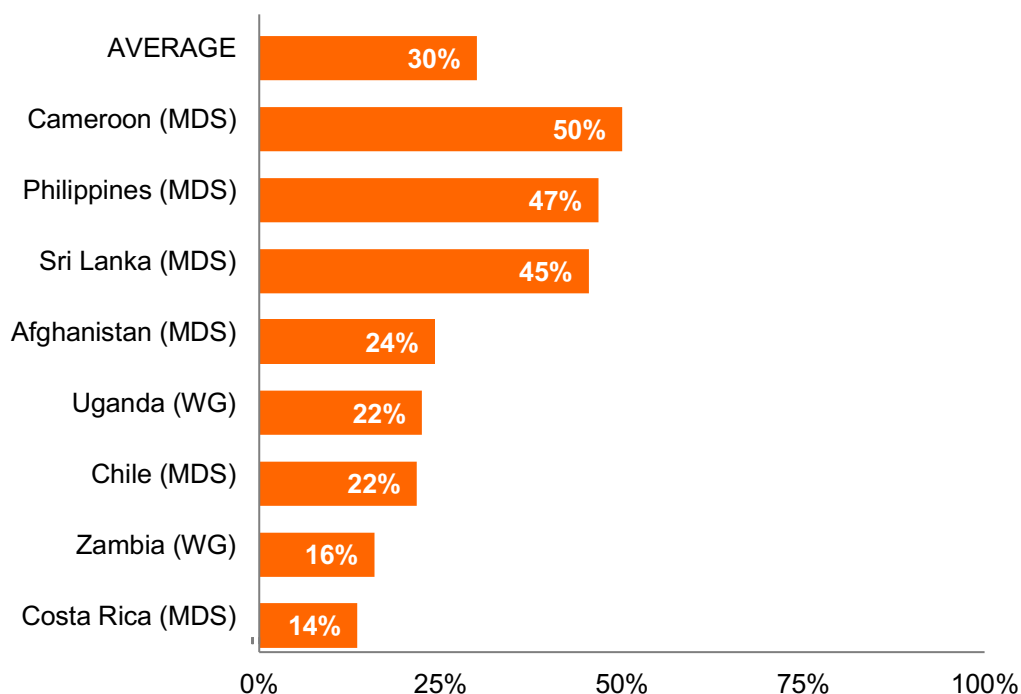
Note: Regional and global estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of 97 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

But these AI systems are often not designed to include the perspectives and presence of persons with disabilities. These systems examine speech patterns, tone of voice, facial movements, and other indicators, and make recommendations about who should be scheduled for a follow-up interview and who should not get the job. As persons with disabilities are not sufficiently included in training these systems, the systems tend to discriminate against many persons with disabilities, whose impairments significantly affect facial expression and voice: disabilities such as deafness, blindness, speech disorders and surviving a stroke; or candidates with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations.³²¹

These concerns extend to the use of AI in employee surveillance and performance management. The AI debates rarely bring disability into their agenda, while those advocating for disability rights remain to a large extent unaware of the potential impact of these emerging technologies. Developers of AI human resources technology are still often not required to prove that their products are safe and inclusive for job seekers or employees with disabilities.

Figure 128. Percentage of persons with disabilities who reported that their workplace is hindering or not accessible, in 8 countries, in 2015-2019.

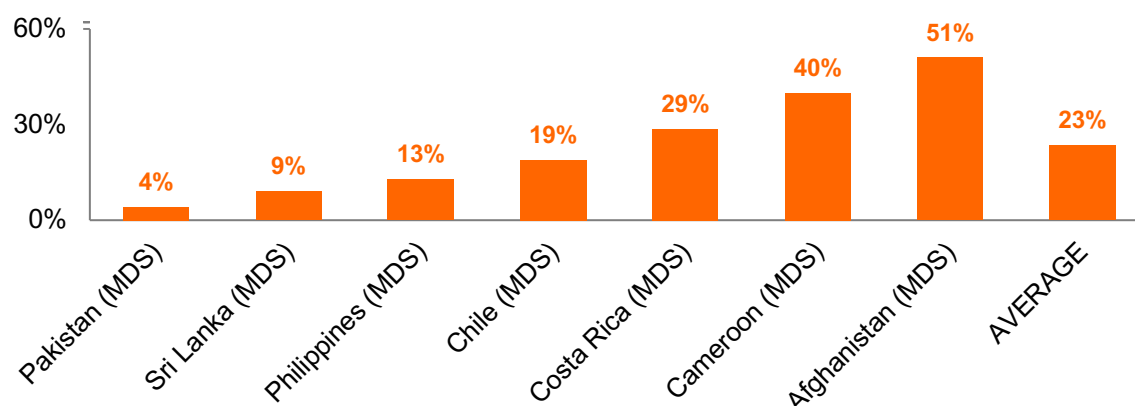


Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey. (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. Data from Cameroon and Pakistan were collected in selected regions of these countries and are not nationally representative.

Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF⁹) and WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).

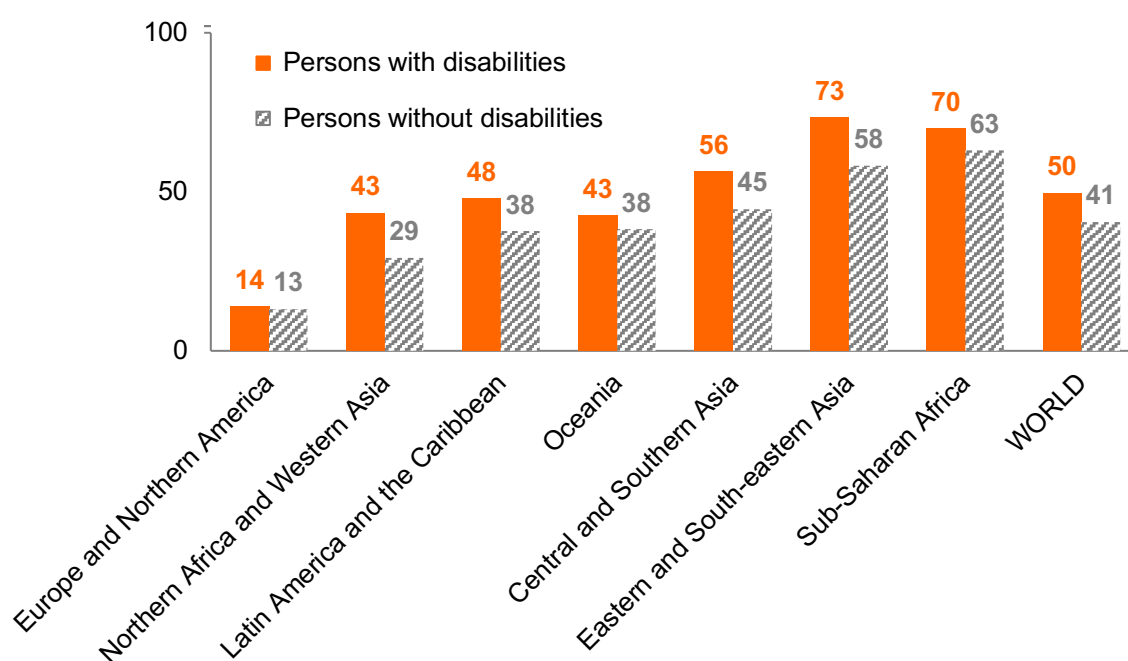
While legislation in many countries includes the provision of reasonable accommodation,³²² its practical implementation tends to fall short. Technical assistance and (when there are cost implications) financial assistance to employers to provide reasonable accommodation and making the workplaces accessible is generally lacking. In eight developing countries, an average of 30 per cent of persons with disabilities reported that their workplace is hindering or not accessible (Figure 128). Worldwide, as of 2022, only 62 per cent of employment agencies and co-working spaces were accessible for users of wheelchairs, 13 per cent were partially accessible and 25 per cent were not accessible at all (Figure 139). Assistive technology can be costly and is often not available. In 7 countries, 23 per cent of adults with disabilities need but do not have assistive products for work, from 4 per cent in Pakistan to 51 per cent in Afghanistan (Figure 129). Due to these obstacles, many persons with disabilities who are capable of working are not able to secure a job and remain an underutilized segment in the labour force.

Figure 129. Percentage of persons with disabilities who need but do not have assistive products at work, in 7 countries, in 2015-2019.



Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey. Data from Cameroon and Pakistan were collected in selected regions of these countries and are not nationally representative.
Source: WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).

Figure 130. Percentage of employed persons who are self-employed, by disability status, for the world and in 7 regions, in 2021 or latest year available.

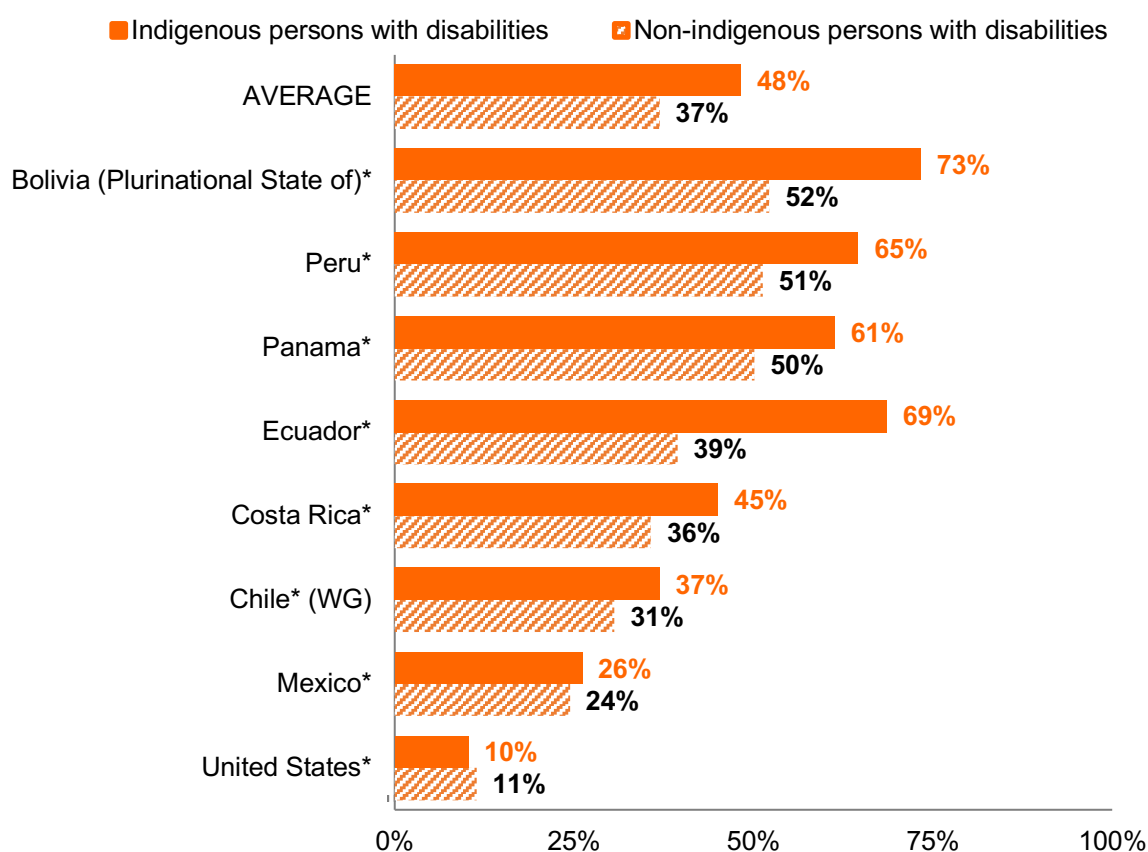


Note: Regional and global estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of country data. Estimates based on data from 90 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

Persons with disabilities are overrepresented in self-employment and more likely to be working in informal employment. Globally, 50 percent of employed persons with disabilities compared to 41 per cent of employed persons without disabilities are self-employed (Figure 130). Indigenous persons with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed than non-indigenous persons with disabilities: among the employed population in eight countries in the Americas, 48 per cent of indigenous persons with disabilities are self-employed but only 37 per cent non-indigenous persons with disabilities are self-employed (Figure 131).

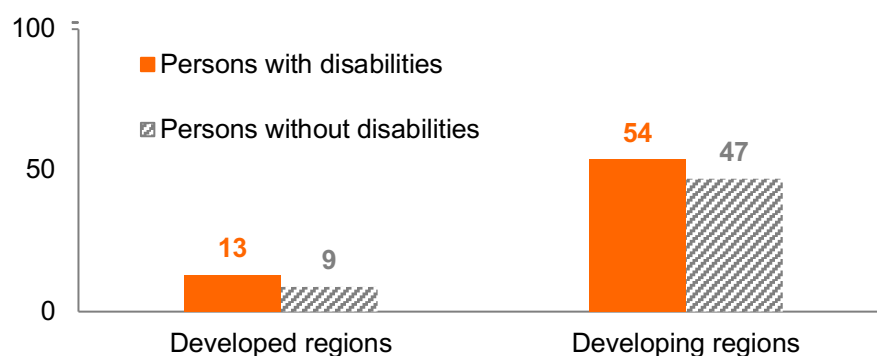
Figure 131. Percentage of employed persons with disabilities aged 15 and over who are self-employed, for indigenous and not indigenous people, in 8 countries, in 2021 or latest year available.



Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. Data for non-indigenous people for Panama and Peru refers to not indigenous and not Afro-descendants.

Source: ECLAC¹³ (on the basis of data from national household surveys) and UNDESA (on the basis of data from IPUMS).

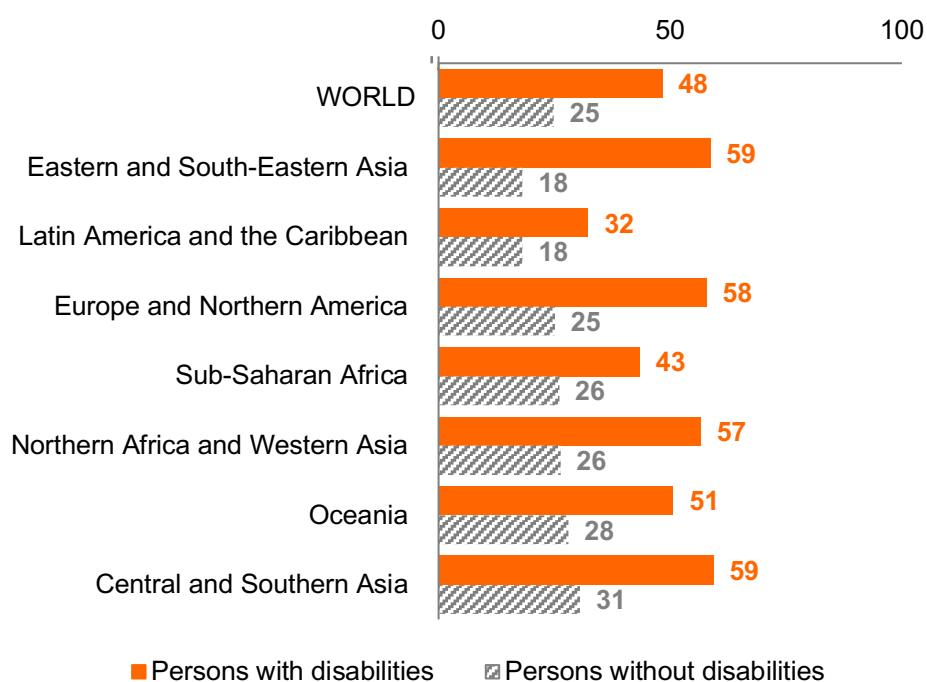
Figure 132. Percentage of employed persons who work in the informal sector, by disability status, in developed and developing regions, in 2021 or latest year available.



Note: Regional estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of 27 developed countries and 43 developing countries with data for 2021 or most recent year after 2015.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

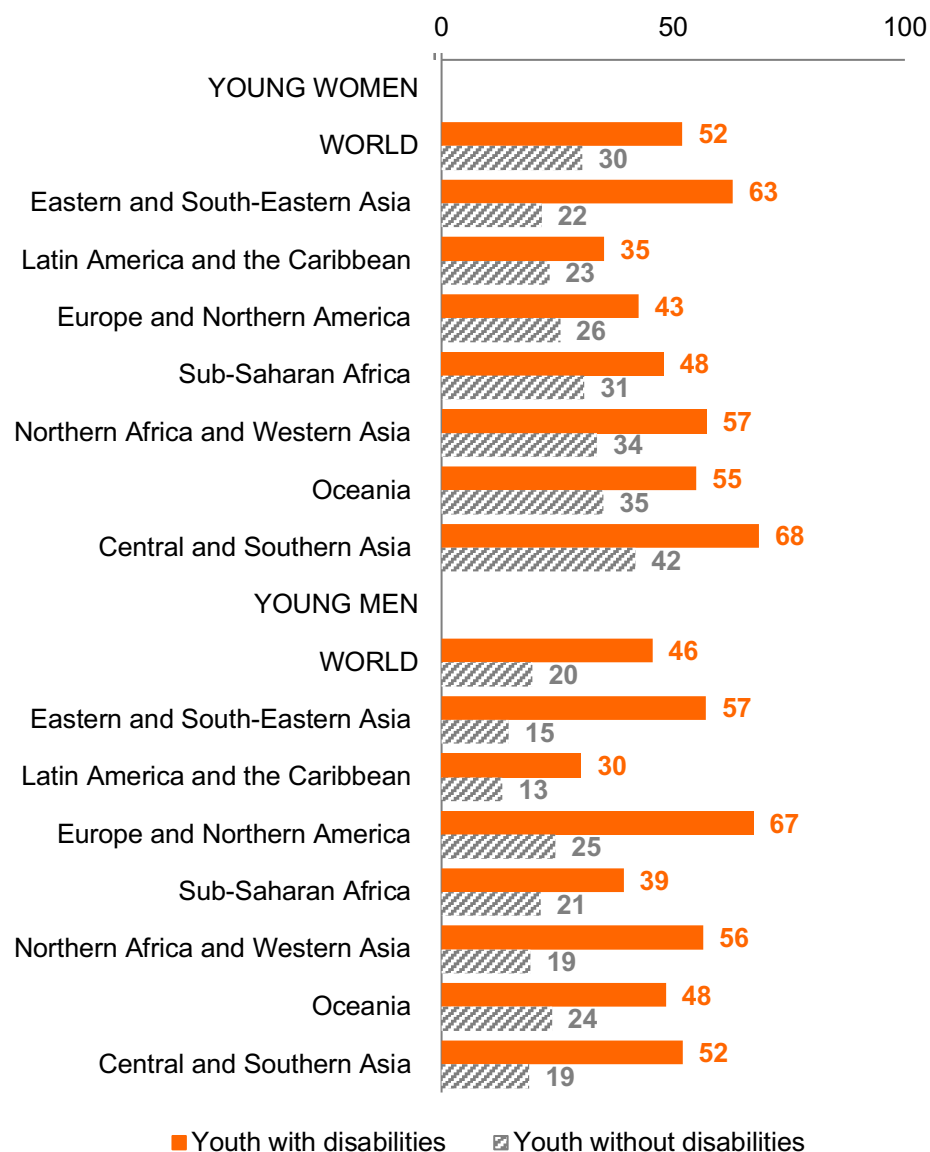
Figure 133. Percentage of youth aged 15 to 24 not in employment, education or training (NEET), by disability status, for the world and in 7 regions, in 2021 or most recent year with data.



Note: Regional estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of country data. Estimates based on data from 61 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

Figure 134. Percentage of youth aged 15 to 24 not in employment, education or training (NEET), by disability status and sex, in 7 regions, in 2021 or latest year available.



Note: Estimates based on data from 61 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

There is a significant overlap between self-employment and informal employment, especially in regions with a high level of informal employment such as sub-Saharan Africa, as most persons working in the informal economy run micro businesses, often on their own or with a family member as the only workers.

While the size of the informal economy varies enormously between developed and developing regions, with informal employment being much more common in developing regions, there is a similar gap between persons with and without disabilities in informal work in both developed and developing regions

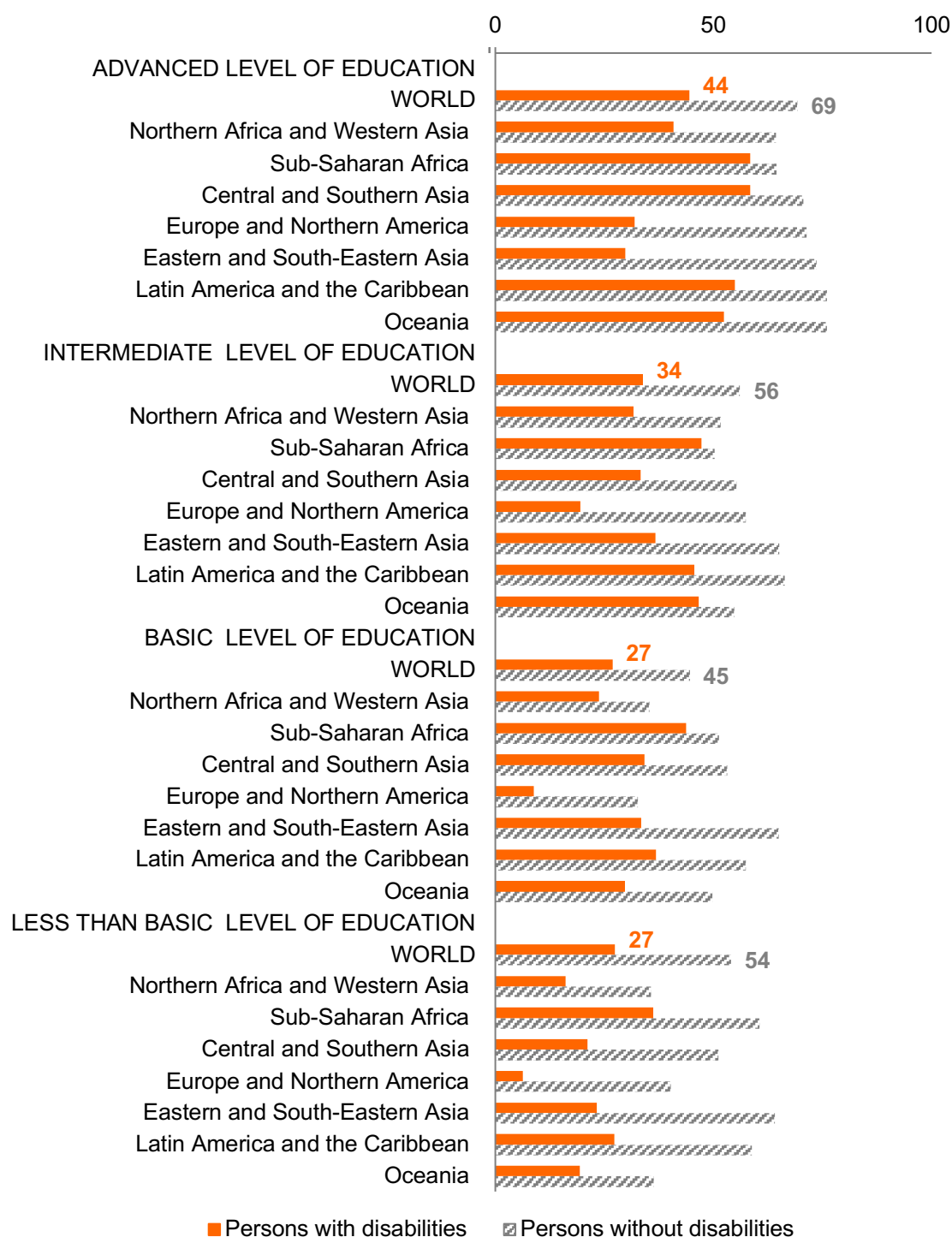
(Figure 132). Most employed persons with disabilities living in developing countries, 54 per cent, work in the informal economy; while 13 per cent of employed persons with disabilities living in developed countries work in the informal economy.

Youth with disabilities are strikingly overrepresented among the youth who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2021, youth with disabilities were almost twice as likely to be NEET than youth without disabilities - close to 50 per cent of youth with disabilities compared to 25 per cent of youth without disabilities, with the gap being most extreme in Central and Southern Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (Figure 133). Overall young women with disabilities have higher rates of NEET, albeit in some regions, in particular Europe and Northern America, the figures are worse for young men with disabilities (Figure 134). Young women with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be NEET than young women without disabilities - 52 per cent of young women with disabilities compared to 30 per cent of young women without disabilities, with the gap being most extreme in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

Among persons with disabilities, education and training are important for securing employment, but not enough. On one hand, education makes a difference, as the percentages of persons with disabilities who are employed increases with the level of education; on the other hand, lower levels of education among persons with disabilities do not fully explain the gaps in access to employment, as the employment gaps between persons with and without disabilities persist at higher levels of education (Figure 135). While having a higher level of education increases the opportunities of finding a job for all workers, workers with disabilities retain their disadvantage at all levels of education.

Since 2015, there has been a significant increase in the interest among the private sector in employing persons with disabilities. This is reflected in the establishment of national business and disability networks in different countries (e.g., Argentina, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Uruguay) as well as the establishment of global organizations of businesses that make commitments to concrete actions for disability inclusion.³²³ The employment of persons with disabilities is also starting to get more attention in corporate sustainability reporting. An example of this is the new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive in the EU.³²⁴ There is also an increased focus by trade unions to the employment of persons with disabilities. This ought, over time, contribute to more persons with disabilities entering the labour market, and to better working conditions for those already working.³²⁵ However, disability inclusion still remains largely invisible in the environment, social and governance frameworks used by investors to assess how businesses are performing,³²⁶ despite quantified benefits of disability inclusion in the workforce, in terms of business growth and innovation.^{327,328} These frameworks typically include measures such as investments in employees, but no disability parameters are typically included.

Figure 135. Employment to population ratios, by level of education, by disability status, for the world and in 7 regions, in 2021 or most recent year with data available.



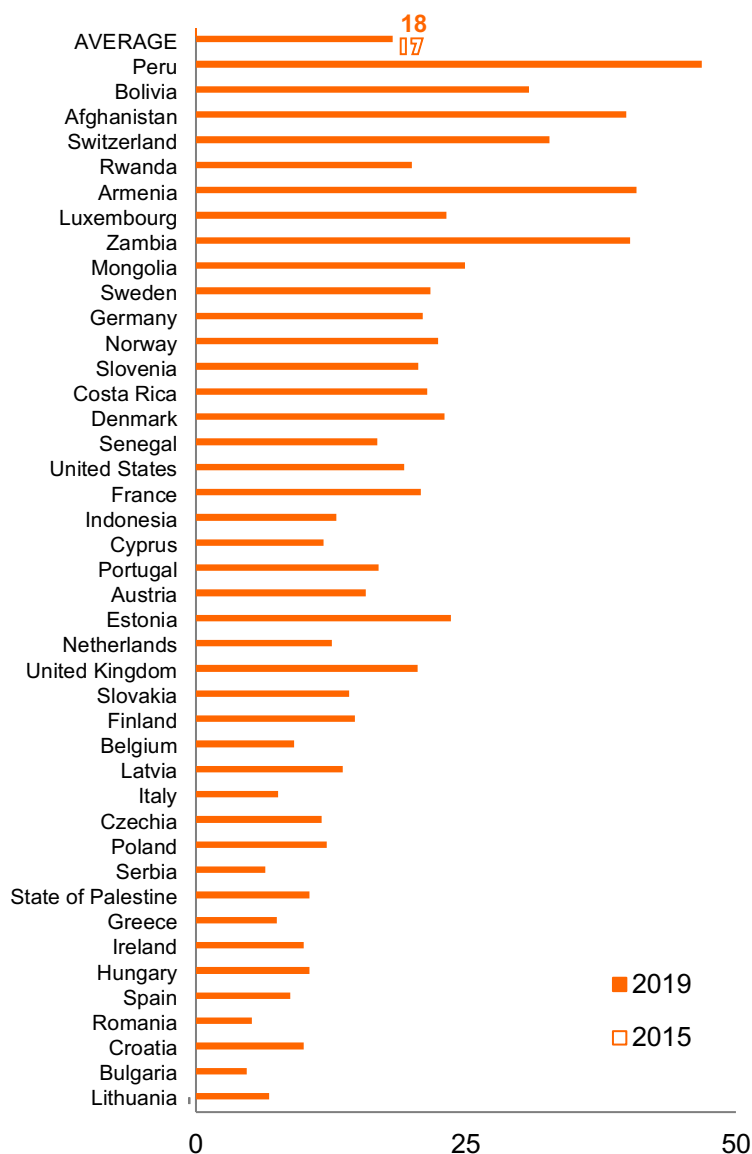
Note: Regional estimates calculated as arithmetic averages of country data. World estimates are averaged of regional data. Estimates based on data from 90 countries.

Source: ILO.³¹⁹

Table 3. Examples of initiatives taken by countries to promote inclusive employment, 2016-2022.

Initiatives taken by countries to promote employment of persons with disabilities	Examples of countries where the initiative has been implemented
Matchmaking services that connect persons with disabilities and employers	Austria ³²⁹ ; Cambodia ³³⁰ ; Canada ³³¹ ; Chile ³³² ; Denmark ³³³ ; Egypt ³³⁴ ; Israel ³³⁵ ; Malaysia ³³⁶ ; Mexico ³³⁷ ; Peru ³³⁸ ; South Africa ³³⁹ ; Tanzania ³⁴⁰
Inclusive and accessible job search platforms for persons with disabilities	Australia ³⁴¹ ; Bulgaria ³⁴² ; Finland ³⁴³ ; China, Hong Kong S.A.R. ³⁴⁴ ; India ³⁴⁵
Providing job coaches to persons with disabilities looking for a job to support them with job applications	Austria ³⁴⁶ ; Cambodia ³⁴⁷ ; Chile ³⁴⁸ ; Finland ³⁴⁹ ; Ireland ³⁵⁰ ; Israel ³⁵¹ ; Paraguay ³⁵²
Transforming sheltered workshops into gainful employment of persons with disabilities	Austria ³⁵³ and United States of America ³⁵⁴
Promoting employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector	Canada ³⁵⁵ Spain ³⁵⁶
Work placement programs for persons with intellectual disabilities	Brazil ³⁵⁷ ; Chile ³⁵⁸ ; Egypt ³⁵⁹ ; Romania ³⁶⁰
Individualized support for persons with autism in the labour market, including in recruitment, job coaching and career development	Belgium ³⁶¹ ; Israel ³⁶² ; United States ³⁶³
Creating workplace simulations for persons with disabilities	Italy ³⁶⁴
Supporting employment for persons with psychosocial disabilities, through internships and training programs	Israel ³⁶⁵ and Spain ³⁶⁶
Vocational training programs for persons with and without disabilities together, using Universal Design principles in curriculum and online platforms	Philippines ³⁶⁷
Providing training and financial support for persons with disabilities to establish their own micro-enterprises or self-employment	Afghanistan ³⁶⁸ ; Bangladesh ^{369;370} ; Ecuador ³⁷¹
Creation of accessible online tool, open to all, for national dialogues on employment and disability issues and policies	United States ³⁷²
Disability awareness training to remove barriers to inclusive employment	Turkey ³⁷³ ; Uganda ³⁷⁴
Creating self-assessment tools for companies to assess their readiness to hire persons with disabilities	India ³⁷⁵
Incentive employment programs for the private sector, including subsidies and technical support to identify candidates with disabilities that meet the job description	Colombia ³⁷⁶ ; Egypt ³⁷⁷ ; India ³⁷⁸ ; Saudi Arabia ³⁷⁹ ; Spain ³⁸⁰
Businesses investing in training and creating job positions for persons with disabilities, including in hospitality, information technology and pharmacy industries	Austria ³⁸¹ ; Germany ³⁸² ; Hungary ³⁸³ ; India ³⁸⁴ ; Jamaica ³⁸⁵ ; Kazakhstan ³⁸⁶ ; Moldova ³⁸⁷ ; South Africa ³⁸⁸

Figure 136. Progress in percentage of persons with disabilities employed, in 42 countries or areas, from 2015 to 2019.



Note: Percentage of persons employed refers to employment to population ratios; 2019 data point for Afghanistan reflects data from 2021; 2015 data points refer to a different year for Afghanistan (2017), Indonesia (2016), State of Palestine (2018) and Zambia (2018).

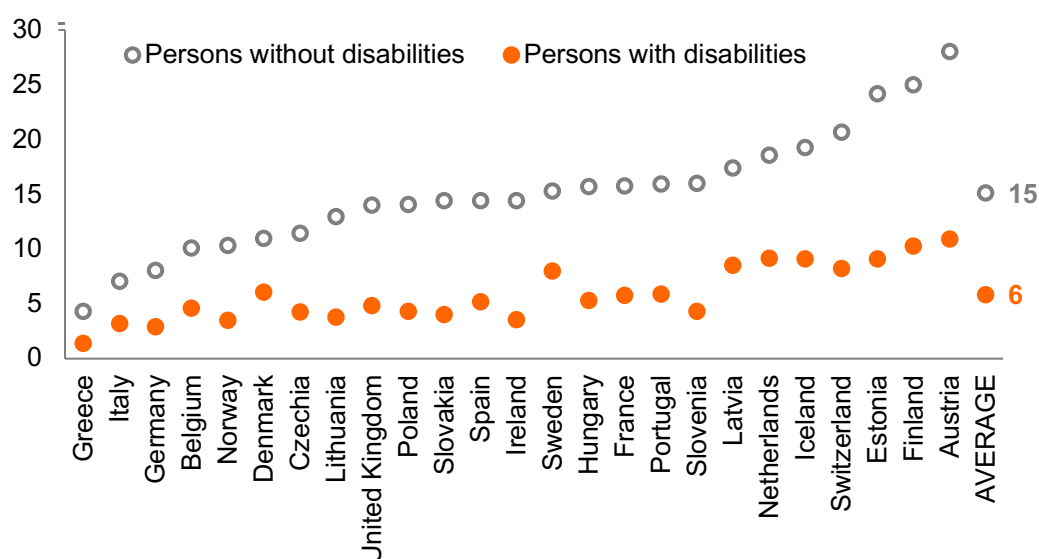
Source: ILO.³¹⁹

In various countries worldwide, initiatives have been taken to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, including employment quotas,³² awareness campaigns among employers, vocational training programs for persons with disabilities, support in job searches and applications, providing incentives and support to employers to hire persons with disabilities, providing technical and financial support to persons

with disabilities who want to start their own business and engaging with persons with disabilities and the general public on policies to promote employment of persons with disabilities (Table 3). However, in many countries, vocational training (TVET) institutions still provide skills not in line with labour market demands and promote exclusion rather than inclusion. In particular, there are still many disability-specific segregated institutions providing skills that are not demanded; and the mainstream institutions are often not accessible and inclusive to trainees with disabilities.

Despite these initiatives, overall, progress in employment of persons with disabilities has remained stagnant since 2015. Before the pandemic, from 2015 to 2019, gains in employment for persons with disabilities were small (Figure 136). Among 42 countries or areas, the percentage of persons with disabilities employed increased from 17 per cent in 2015 to 18 per cent in 2019. Results at country level are mixed. Some countries managed to successfully increase the percentage of persons with disabilities employed during this period. In two countries, Armenia and Zambia, this percentage increased more than 10 percentage points from 2015 to 2019; in Estonia 9 percentage points and in the United Kingdom 7 percentage points. But in other countries the percentage of persons with disabilities employed decreased. Rwanda showed the highest decrease, 10 percentage points, followed by Bolivia, with 8 percentage points.

Figure 137. Percentage of persons who were employed at the time of the survey, among all persons not employed in the previous year, by disability status, in 25 countries, average over 2016-2019.



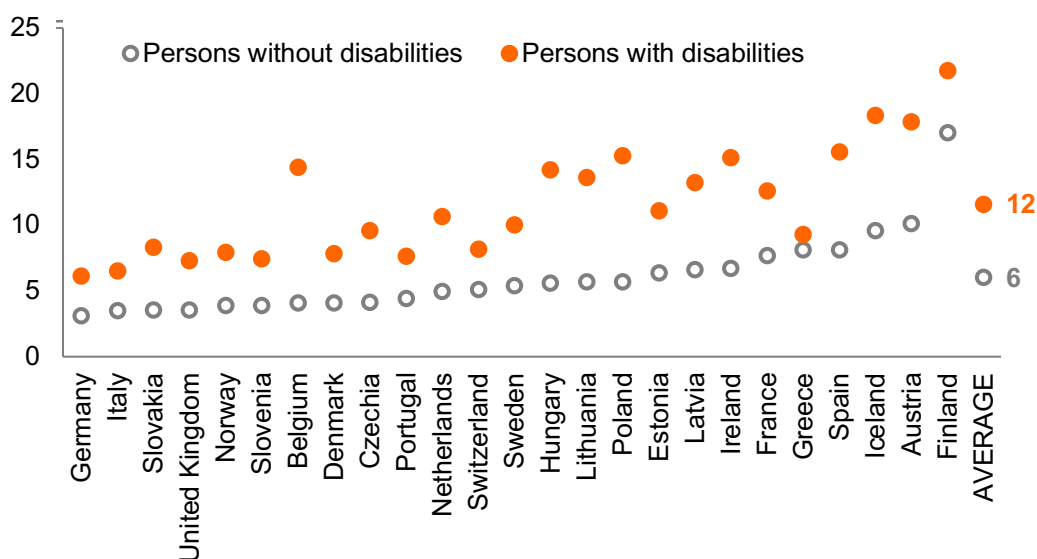
Source: OECD (2022).³⁸⁹

Moreover, job entry and job exit rates are much less favourable for persons with disabilities than others. Persons with disabilities tend to be the last to enter the labour market when the economic situation

improves (Figure 137). If they are unemployed, they are more likely to remain unemployed in the future, than unemployed persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities are the first to lose their jobs when the economic situation deteriorates (Figure 138). Employed persons with disabilities are more likely to become unemployed in the future than employed persons without disabilities.

Many businesses have made progress in making workplaces more inclusive of persons with disabilities, but gaps remain. In May 2022, a survey undertaken around the world among 111 private sector companies committed to disability inclusion indicated that 68 per cent of them had implemented changes in business operations and services, of which 70 per cent were considered to have been inclusive of persons with disabilities.³⁹⁰ But many businesses continue to struggle to provide digital accessibility in the workplace: 32 per cent of these companies reported a need for more capacity building in providing workplace adjustments for inclusive remote work.³⁹¹ Regarding accessible employment agencies for persons with disabilities, there has been some progress since 2018. The percentage of employment agencies that are accessible for wheelchair users increased from 56 per cent in 2018 to 62 per cent in 2022 (Figure 139).

Figure 138. Percentage of persons who were unemployed or outside the labour force at the time of the survey, among all persons employed in the previous year, by disability status, in 25 countries, average over 2016-2019.



Note: Persons outside the labour force, also referred to as inactive persons, refer to persons who are not employed nor looking for a job.

Source: OECD (2022).³⁸⁹

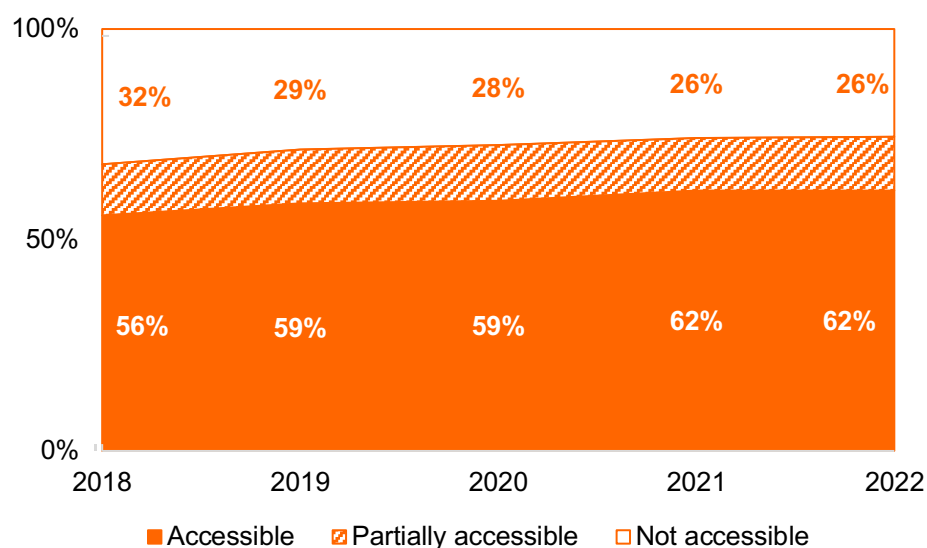
New and emerging challenges are expected to impact the labour market for persons with disabilities: the

green economy,³⁹² the digital economy and remote working. All are likely to generate many jobs in the coming years, therefore providing important job opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, if not managed with disability inclusion in mind, they could turn into lost opportunities. As of now, there is an increasing attention to disability inclusion in the context of the green jobs agenda. But these efforts remain insufficient. Persons with disabilities are not always included in the measures taken by countries to transition towards greener, resilient and climate-neutral economies and societies and that impact employment. Moreover, statistics on persons working in the green sector disaggregated by disability are particularly lacking, and it remains almost impossible to understand the participation of persons with disabilities in the green sector and the barriers they face.

Regarding the digital economy, the unmet demand for information technology (IT) professionals in many countries provides a great opportunity for persons with disabilities to enter or re-enter the labour force. Ensuring that persons with disabilities have the capacity to take advantage of these opportunities will however require a concerted effort from all stakeholders.³⁹³ The main challenge is to ensure that mainstream online and in-person training in IT and digitisation skills are inclusive of persons with disabilities. It is also important to ensure that, during the training phase, companies commit to providing job opportunities for the trainees with disabilities graduating from these trainings. Workplace based learning, either as part of the training or immediately after its completion, can play a key role in ensuring that the training leads to actual employment. While some targeted interventions are already promoting digital skills and jobs for persons with disabilities,³⁹⁴ there is a lack of data to fully understand the participation of persons with disabilities in the digital economy and the barriers they encounter.

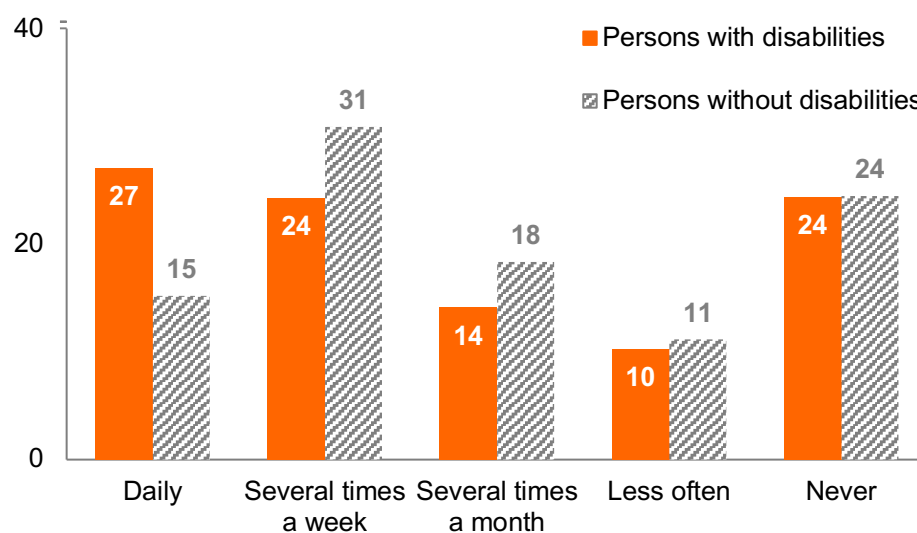
Given the trends already underway, it is likely that remote work will continue to grow in the future. Many persons with disabilities prefer to work remotely. As of March 2021, in the European Union, persons with disabilities were more likely to prefer to work from home than persons without disabilities: 27 per cent of persons with disabilities versus 15 per cent of persons without disabilities prefer to work from home daily (Figure 140). Yet, persons with disabilities were less likely to have a job amenable to performed remotely: 34 per cent of jobs held by persons with disabilities in European countries can be done remotely compared to 39 per cent of jobs held by persons without disabilities (Figure 141). Also, while remote work is a good option for many persons with disabilities, it is unsuited for others. Apart from the fact that many persons with disabilities work in jobs that cannot be done remotely, when remote work is done on a full-time basis, it can lead to isolation and social exclusion. The support required for persons with intellectual disabilities through job coaches is often available at the workplace but would not be available when they are working from home.

Figure 139. Percentage of employment agencies that are accessible for wheelchair users, worldwide, yearly from 2018 to 2022.



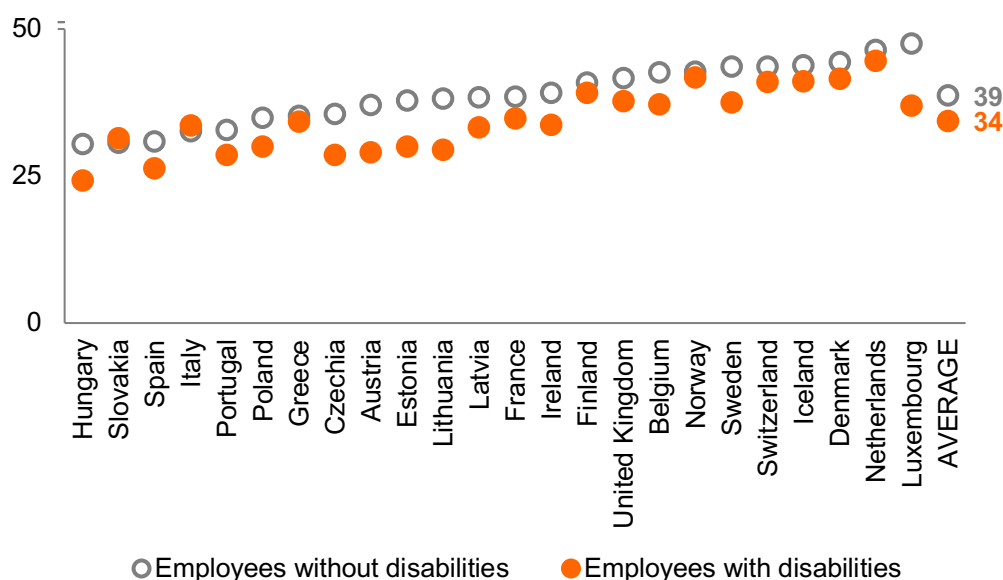
Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from Sozialhelden¹⁰).

Figure 140. Percentage of persons who prefer to work from home, by disability status, in the European Union, in March 2021.



Source: ILO (on the basis of data from EUROFOUND Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey).

Figure 141. Percentage of jobs held by employees aged 15 to 69 that can be performed remotely, by disability status of the employee, in 24 countries, in 2019.



Note: Jobs are considered to be able to be performed remotely on the basis of the types of tasks performed in different occupations. Data from Iceland, Ireland and Italy date from 2018 and data from the United Kingdom dates from 2016. The average is an unweighted average of the countries shown.
Source: OECD³⁹⁵ (on the basis of data from EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)).

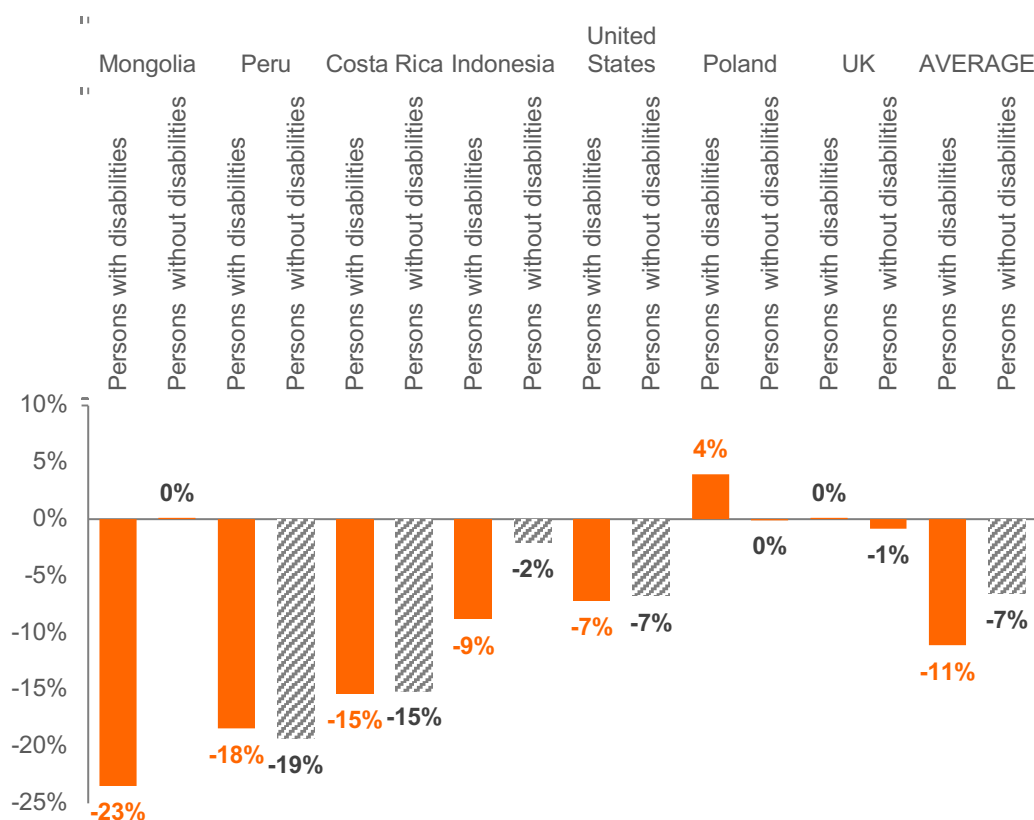
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis had a profound impact on the employment of persons with disabilities as many who were employed before the pandemic lost their jobs. Due to the over-representation of workers with disabilities in the informal economy (Figure 132), the impacts of the pandemic on the informal economy were felt heavily among persons with disabilities. For many people working in the informal economy, lockdowns meant stopping their economic activities and losing their jobs. Moreover, for persons with hearing impairments who rely on lip-reading, face masks hindered speech comprehension at work: 31 per cent of persons with disabilities who had a job in 2021 said that they encountered barriers trying to communicate with others at work because of face masks.³⁹⁶ Although transparent face masks exist and can eliminate this barrier, they were not produced and disseminated in scale during the COVID-19 pandemic. A major challenge has been the lack of research on their efficacy in preventing the transmission of disease.³⁹⁷

Among 7 countries, on average, the percentage of persons employed decreased by 11 per cent for persons with disabilities and 7 per cent for persons without disabilities, from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 142). In Indonesia and Mongolia, for instance, persons with disabilities were particularly affected. In the European

Union, this impact was particularly high on young persons with disabilities and on those with only primary school education (Figure 143). Among persons with tertiary education, persons with disabilities lost jobs at much higher rates than persons without disabilities. The negative impact was also greater on women with disabilities than on men with disabilities.

Figure 142. Percentage loss in the percentage of persons employed (employment to population ratios) from 2019 to 2020, in 7 countries, by disability status.



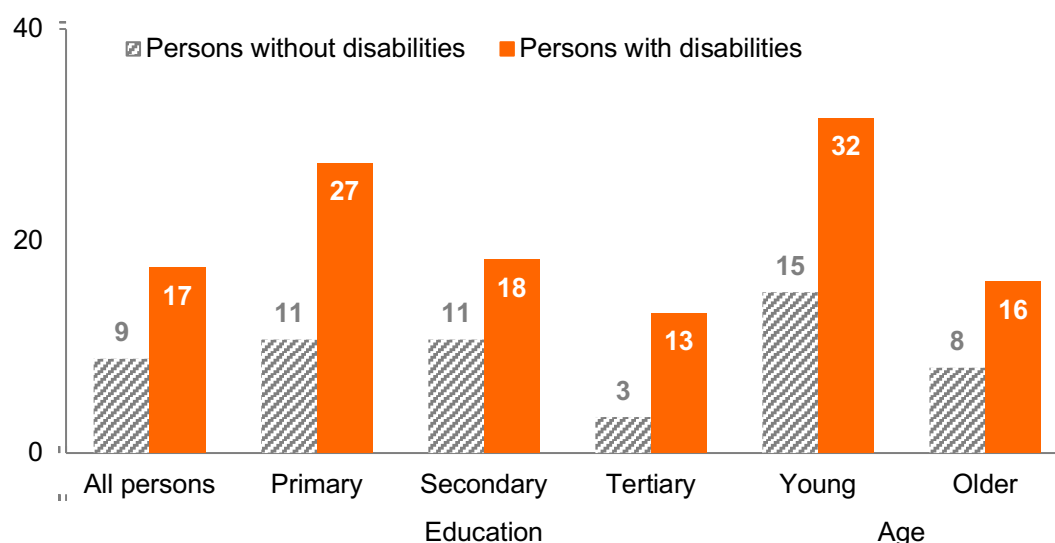
Source: ILO.³¹⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated an already evident trend toward more people working remotely and, consequently, a higher emphasis on digital skills. The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the process of digitization of the economy and the world-of-work. This could present an opportunity for persons with disabilities: in recovering and building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, digital labour platforms can offer income-generating opportunities to workers and their flexible work arrangements may be more convenient for many persons with disabilities.³⁹⁸ But the shift to remote work can also deepen inequalities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 49 per cent of workers with disabilities faced barriers working online or by telephone (see chapter on target 9.c).

There has also been a marked shift towards self-employment, with more people aspiring to run their own

business. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant shock to labour markets, with many companies pausing recruitment and/or restructuring existing workforces. This may help explain the shift toward a greater focus on self-employment. However, the pandemic also seems to have been a catalyst for persons with disabilities to focus more on self-employment as a route to self-determination and address the barriers and vulnerabilities they face in formal, waged employment.

Figure 143. Percentage of persons who were employed before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployed in March 2021, by disability status, level of education and age, in the European Union.



Note: Employment status before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic refers to year 2019.

Source: ILO (on the basis of data from EUROFOUND Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey).

Summary of findings and the way forward

Persons with disabilities, and in particular women with disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and those with lower levels of education, face higher rates of unemployment and inactivity. The situation is also stark for young persons with disabilities: they are twice as likely as youth without disabilities to be neither in employment, education or training. Persons with disabilities in general face lower wages (see chapter on Goal 1), and overrepresentation in the informal economy and in self-employment, with indigenous persons with disabilities more likely to be self-employed than non-indigenous persons with disabilities. Globally, the percentage of persons with disabilities in employment would have to increase at least 2 percentage points per year till 2030 in order to close the gap between persons with and without disabilities.

In recent years, more countries have adopted labour laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. However, despite this positive trend, current rates of expansion are too slow to ensure that persons with disabilities in all countries are legally protected against discrimination in the workplace by 2030. To ensure protection in all countries by 2030, countries should adopt provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in hiring, terminations, promotions and training at a rate twice as fast as current trends (see chapter on Goal 10). For indirect discrimination in the workplace, legal provisions are particularly lacking. These provisions will need to be adopted at a rate 8 times faster than current rates of progress to guarantee that all persons with disabilities are legally protected against indirect discrimination in the workplace by 2030. Efforts to expand legal protections against discrimination of persons with disabilities are particularly needed in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa.

Many countries have laws to support accessible working places. But many working places are not accessible and lack reasonable accommodation measures as well as access to assistive technologies. Accessibility of employment agencies to wheelchair users has been increasing reaching 62 per cent in 2022, up from 56 per cent in 2018. Gains in accessibility of employment agencies have been slow. Progress in accessibility for these spaces should be 2 times faster in order to achieve universal accessible employment agencies by 2030.

Moreover, the employment of persons with disabilities was particularly adversely affected by the pandemic. In some countries, they lost jobs at a much higher rate than persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities were less likely to have jobs that were amenable to remote working and more likely to work in the informal sector. As lockdowns hit, they were the first to lose their jobs.

Challenges also remain in offering job opportunities for persons with disabilities in the green and digital economy, and data remain insufficient to provide a sound assessment of the participation of persons with disabilities in these sectors and the barriers they face.

On a positive note, there has been significant progress in the availability of statistics pertaining to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities in recent years, allowing global and regional estimates for various employment indicators, a major improvement compared to 5 years ago.

To address the current employment gaps and realize Goal 8 for persons with disabilities, the following steps could contribute to address persistent and emerging challenges:

1) Adopt national legislation that protects persons with disabilities against discrimination on the basis of disability in all matters of employment. National legislations more commonly protect against recruitment, but discrimination does not end upon getting a job. Protections in career development opportunities are as important as protections to ensure equal access to the labour market. Employers should be encouraged to develop disability inclusive human resource policies consistent with these legislation and that mention the right to reasonable accommodation and career development/promotion.

2) Promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in green jobs and in the digital economy. In particular, (i) ensure that legislation and policies dealing with remote working and digital platforms address the specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities and prohibit any discriminatory and harmful uses or impacts of artificial intelligence in relation to persons with disabilities; (ii) ensure persons with disabilities and their representative organizations take part in the relevant bodies that address the digital and green economies; (iii) promote the effective inclusion of persons with disabilities, and youth with disabilities, in all mainstream digital and green job creation and skills development initiatives, including those resulting from measures addressing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection launched by the UN Secretary General's One Common Agenda; (iv) include persons with disabilities in the Climate Action for Jobs initiative, the Green Jobs for Youth initiative launched at COP27 and in the national just transition plans; (v) foster reskilling and upskilling of persons with disabilities affected by technological changes and therefore at risk of losing their jobs; and (vi) ensure that data on employment in the digital and in the green economy is disaggregated by disability.

3) Improve the situation of persons with disabilities working in the informal economy.

Governments should include and consult with persons with disabilities in the formulation of measures to promote the formalization of workers and measures promoting better working conditions among informal workers. Trade unions and other organizations working to promote the rights of informal workers should include informal workers with disabilities in their advocacy and information campaigns

4) Make all pathways into employment disability inclusive. More efforts are needed to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities in education, complemented with measures to ensure a solid transition from school to work. Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), apprenticeship schemes, public employment services, public employment programmes, universities, work-based training, business development services must all work to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, with a particular focus on the transition from school to work of youth with disabilities. Special attention should be provided to promote the employment of persons with disabilities by small and medium enterprises and organizations of the social and solidarity economy who often lack targeted support to become more disability-confident and inclusive. More efforts need to be made to include persons with disabilities in all measures promoting decent work in the rural economy.

5) Promote employment among underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities. Government should consult with and include underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities in their interventions and policies to ensure no one is left behind. Data should be collected and analysed to assess intersectionality on gender and disability, but also other relevant grounds (age, indigenous, minorities, etc.).

6) Continue to improve disability disaggregated employment data, in regular times and during crises. While it is encouraging that more and more countries are producing disability disaggregated

employment data, this effort needs to be upscaled and done systematically to improve the employment statistics for persons with disabilities. For instance, the Washington Group/ILO module on the employment of persons with disabilities (see chapter on Goal 17) can provide information on the gaps between persons with and without disabilities and also information on the root causes of these gaps. Information and data are also needed by type of impairment, to better guide policies to promote employment of persons with disabilities. Efforts should be made to collect employment data on persons with disabilities during crises, such as pandemics, to guide responses and mitigate negative impacts.