

## Employment of persons with disabilities

Data on persons with disabilities are hard to come by in almost every country. Specific data on their employment situation are even harder to find. Yet persons with disabilities face the same predicament everywhere. These data, culled from the media and from reports, provide an anecdotal picture of the current situation.

### Global

In developing countries, 80% to 90% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, whereas in industrialized countries the figure is between 50% and 70%.

*'Disabled still face hurdles in job market', The Washington Times, 5 December 2005*

In most developed countries the official unemployment rate for persons with disabilities of working age is at least twice that for those who have no disability.

*Employer's Forum on Disability, [www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/guests/info/csr/disability-online](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/guests/info/csr/disability-online)*

### Asia and the Pacific

There are 370 million persons with disabilities, 238 million of them of working age. Their unemployment rate is usually double that of the general population and often as high as 80% or more.

*Debra A. Perry, 'Disability issues in the employment and social protection', ILO Bangkok, 2002*

### European Union

There are approximately 40 million persons with disabilities, and of these 43% to 54% were of working age in 1998. Persons with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than others.

*EUROPS, 'The ability to work', 1998*

### Latin America and the Caribbean

About 80-90% of persons with disabilities are unemployed or outside the work force. Most of those who have jobs receive little or no monetary remuneration.

*World Bank, 'Disability and inclusive development: Latin America and the Caribbean', 2004*

### Argentina

The unemployment rate of persons with disabilities is estimated to be close to 91%.

*World Bank, 'Disability and inclusive development: Latin America and the Caribbean', 2004*

### Austria

In 2005, about 91,000 persons with disabilities were registered, of whom about two thirds were employed and some 31,000 economically inactive or mostly unemployed.

*European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 'Number of disabled people in employment remains low', 2006*

### Brazil

Of the approximately 24.5 million persons with disabilities in 2000, some 78.7% said they had a maximum of seven years of schooling. One out of 10 worked with an official labour contract and nearly two out of every ten were self-employed, according to census data. Since 2001, more than 55,000 persons with physical disabilities have entered the labour market.

*'Brazilian companies recruit disabled workers to comply with law', EFE News Service, 16 October 2006*

30% of persons with disabilities receive less than the minimum wage.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## Bulgaria

A research on persons with disabilities conducted in 2005 by the National Statistical Institute showed that only 13% of the interviewees at working age 16 to 64 years were employed.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## Canada

The unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is 26%, over five times higher than the 5% rate for persons without disabilities.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## Chile

Only 25.1% of persons with disabilities have some form of employment, in comparison to 51.6% of the general population.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## China

The estimated number of persons with disabilities is 83 million, accounting for about 6.3% of the country's population.

*'China Marks Help-The-Disabled Day', CRIENGLISH.com, 20 May 2007*

Approximately 83.9% of persons with disabilities were employed in 2003.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Asia', 2005*

## Costa Rica

According to estimates by disability organizations, the unemployment rate is around 65%.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## Estonia

The 2002 National Statistical Report showed that only 25% of persons with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 65 were employed.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## Greece

According to the Survey on People with Health Problems or Disability (second semester of 2002) by the National Statistical Service, the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is 84%.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## Honduras

According to the 2002 National Institute of Statistics household survey, 68% of persons with disabilities of working age are not in the active labour force, compared to 49% of the total population.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## India

According to the 2001 census, 21.9 million people or 2.13% of the country's population are persons with disabilities.

*'The disabled trip up on Job Street', The Economic Times, 19 August 2005*

74% of persons with physical disabilities and 94% of persons with mental retardation are unemployed.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Asia', 2005*

## Ireland

The Quarterly Household National Survey 2004 revealed that just over 37% of all persons of ages 15-64 with a disability/health problem were employed, compared to 63.8% for the total population in the same age category.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## Mexico

The country reports that 14% of persons with disabilities who are working receive no pay, and another 22.6% receive less than the minimum wage.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of the Americas', 2004*

## New Zealand

One in five New Zealanders has a disability.

*www.eeotrust.org.nz/toolkits/disability.cfm?section=whyemploy*

According to a 2001 survey, 29% of persons with disabilities of working age are in full-time paid employment. This is in contrast to the 65% of others of the same age who are employed.

*National Equal Opportunities Network, 'Disability in the workplace: the good news and the bad news', May 2006*

## Philippines

According to the 2000 National Population Census of the National Statistics Office, the population of persons with disabilities was 942,098, or 1.23% of the total population of 76,504,077.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Asia', 2005*

Of the total population of persons with disabilities, 57.12% are employed, compared to 82.3% of the general population.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Asia', 2005*

## Republic of Korea

The unemployment rate of persons with disabilities is about 30%, five or six times higher than that of the general work force.

*'Firms still failing to hire disabled', The Korea Herald, 6 June 2003*

## Russian Federation

According to data from the Federal Service of Labour and Employment, 70% of the disability population is unemployed.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## Spain

At least 66% of persons with disabilities of working age were unemployed in 2003.

*Disability World, www.disabilityworld.org/09-10\_03/employment/spain.shtml*

## Thailand

There are about 4.8 million persons with disabilities, about 1.3 million of whom are of working age.

*'Will work for dignity', Bangkok Post, 24 March 2002*

## Turkey

According to the Turkish Employment Organization, persons with disabilities constituted 7% of the unemployed population in 2006.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Europe', 2007*

## United Kingdom

Of the 10 million persons with disabilities, 6.8 million are of working age, one fifth of the total working age population.

*Disability Rights Commission, www.drc-gb.org*

Persons with disabilities and people with long-term health conditions have lower employment rates than the rest of the population, no matter what their qualification level. At every level of qualification, persons with disabilities are up to three times more likely than other citizens to be without a job yet wishing to work.

*Disability Rights Commission, 'Disability, Skills and Work: Raising Our Ambitions', June 2007*

Improving the employment rate of persons with disabilities would boost the economy by £13 billion (\$27.1 billion) – the equivalent of six months' economic growth.

*Disability Rights Commission, 'Disability, Skills and Work: Raising Our Ambitions', June 2007*

Companies do not have to make expensive changes to their workplace to accommodate persons with disabilities. The employment agency Remploy says that 80% of persons with disabilities do not require any adaptations to accommodate them in the workplace. Where adjustments are required, the average cost would be only £80 (\$167).

*'Food Manufacture: Disabled workers help solve recruitment issues', August 2004*

### United States

A 2004 survey found that only 35% of working-age persons with disabilities are in fact employed, compared to an employment rate of 78% in the rest of the population. Two-thirds of unemployed respondents with disabilities said they would like to work but could not find jobs.

[www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18](http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18)

For graduates of four-year colleges, the employment rate, for both men and women, is 89.9%. For college graduates with disabilities, the employment rate is 50.6%.

*'Labor day and people with disabilities', [www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/economics-employment/labor2001.htm](http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/economics-employment/labor2001.htm)*

### Vietnam

Approximately 69% of the 5.1 million persons with disabilities are of working age (16 to 55-60). Only 30% of them have a job and a stable income to support themselves and their family.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, 'Regional Report of Asia', 2005*

## Employing persons with disabilities: Fears and Realities

Persons with disabilities are frequently not considered potential members of the workforce. Perception, fear, myth and prejudice continue to limit understanding and acceptance of disability in workplaces everywhere. Myths abound, including that persons with disabilities are unable to work and that accommodating a person with a disability in the workplace is expensive. Contrary to these notions, many companies have found that persons with disabilities are more than capable. This sheet provides anecdotal examples of the reasons given for not employing persons with disabilities, and the benefits to companies that have.

### Africa

#### South Africa

“The real obstacle lies with employers. Many are still hesitant to take on employees with disabilities because they believe they may create problems in the workplace. There is also the assumption that this type of appointment will incur cost as the workplace is changed to become disability-friendly.” — Gillian Marescia, an associate in the disability division for Drake Recruitment.

*‘Disabled hiring still in its infancy’, Business Day South Africa, 14 October 2003*

### Americas

#### Bolivia

The major barriers to employment are lack of jobs, lack of technical or vocational training and discrimination.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, ‘Regional Report of the Americas’, 2004*

#### United States

“People with physical and mental disabilities continue to be vastly underrepresented in the American workplace,” said a 2003 Work Trends study conducted by Rutgers University’s John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. Misconceptions, on the other hand, are prevalent. One-third of the employers surveyed said that persons with disabilities cannot effectively perform the required job tasks. The second most common reason given for not hiring persons with disabilities was the fear of costly adaptations.

*‘The Next Great Hiring Frontier’, Wall Street Journal, 13 September 2005*

Few employers are willing to hire workers with disabilities. Fear is the biggest barrier, said former Congressman Tony Coelho, an epilepsy sufferer himself and one of the authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act: “It’s really fear of the unknown.” The best way to eliminate such fears, he argues, is to hire persons with disabilities. “You’ll find out that a lot of those things that you’re fearful of are not true.”

*‘A very able work force: businesses can benefit from hiring disabled people’, Nation’s Business, 1 October 1998*

### Asia-Pacific

#### China

“Disabled people are being forced out of work by bosses and co-workers who do not understand their needs.”  
 — A social worker.

*‘Lack of understanding forcing us out of our jobs, say disabled’, South China Morning Post, 5 July 2006*

#### Singapore

“I believe one of the main reasons that people with disabilities are consistently finding it difficult to gain employment is that employers tend to have this erroneous assumption that the disabled will likely under-perform in most areas of their duties. This is far from the truth, for many persons with disabilities are, in fact, intellectually superior and have innate talents. Another

reason could be that a majority of office set-ups do not have the specifications to cater for disabled personnel.” — Thirumalai Chandroo, Chairman of the education and training organization Modern Montessori International Group.

*‘Enabling the disabled’, Business Times Singapore, 11 December 2006*

## Thailand

Employers often prefer to give money to the national disabled rehabilitation fund rather than give a person with disabilities work because of a prejudicial attitude. Some fear they will have to make an unwarranted investment in providing facilities for persons with disabilities and some do not believe in the potential of persons with disabilities.

*‘Will work for dignity’, Bangkok Post, 24 March 2002*

Many businesses regard workers with disabilities as a waste of money and an unnecessary burden.

*‘The disadvantaged: repair firm finds disabled workers good for trade’, Bangkok Post, 19 August 2002*

## Europe

### Finland

According to the disability community, the biggest barriers to employment is prejudice and fear about potential additional costs for the employer, such as special transport costs for the employee with disabilities. Another is responsibility to meet the pension costs, should the employee become permanently incapacitated for work.

*International Disability Rights Monitor, ‘Regional Report of Europe’, 2007*

### Ireland

“They had never come into contact with a person with a disability, so the various preconceptions they had could never be openly discussed, such as: ‘Do you need them to telework?’, ‘Are they not expensive?’, ‘Are there not lots of accidents?’, ‘Are insurance costs going to go up?’ etc. That’s when I realized that the only reason they don’t know is because they have had no contact.” — Caroline Casey, founder of the Irish disability group Aisling Foundation.

*‘Employers and people with disabilities must work together’, Irish Times, 25 April 2003*

### United Kingdom

“Stereotypes of persons with disabilities as incapable, unambitious, unreliable and costly to employ still abound, says a revealing report on employers’ attitudes to disability by Scope, the cerebral palsy charity. Ignorance, fear and prejudice are among the reasons for persons with disabilities being five times more likely to be unemployed and claiming benefits than able-bodied people, said the report, ‘Ready, willing and disabled’.”

*‘Still afraid of the wheelchair’, Financial Times, 2 April 2003*

45% of employers said they could not afford to hire a person with disabilities and a further 44% did not know whether the cost would prevent them. Scope stresses that most adjustments are small and cheap to make, and can benefit non-disabled staff.

*‘Still afraid of the wheelchair’, Financial Times, 2 April 2003*

Over a third of businesses find it difficult to fill vacancies, yet 3.4 million persons with disabilities are out of work. One million say they want to work but cannot find a job.

[www.realising-potential.org/your-business-case](http://www.realising-potential.org/your-business-case)

## Why Hire Persons with Disabilities?

- Just like others, the majority of persons with disabilities want a dignified and productive life.
- Employment provides not only income but also opportunities for social participation. This is especially important for persons with disabilities.
- Spending on systems and facilities for persons with disabilities is not for the privilege of a small minority, but an investment for everyone.
- Diverse work groups develop better solutions to business challenges.
- Many companies have found that by employing persons with disabilities they have been better able to understand and serve their customers with disabilities. Adapting services to meet the diverse needs of persons with disabilities allows business to develop greater flexibility, builds reputation and reaches out to a sizeable market.

### Australia

One in five Australians has a disability. Many are able to work, want to work and simply need to be given the chance to show what they can do.

“Motivation, loyalty and perseverance were some of the characteristics of employees with a disability,” said Amanda Calwell, General Manager of Wollongong employment agency. “Having got a job, they want to maintain it probably more than any other job seeker because it probably took them three times as much effort to get there.”

*‘Opportunities for the disabled are essential’, Illawarra Mercury, 7 August 2001*

Eurest, a large catering company, employs 21 persons with disabilities across their network in South Australia and believes that employing persons with disabilities strengthens team bonds and increases moral.

*Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, ‘Haigh’s Chocolates and Eurest give people with disabilities a fair go’, 2002*

“Disabled people would achieve social justice through jobs, employers would get productive employees and the strain on the country’s social security system would be further reduced,” said Rhys Jordan, Public Affairs Manager at the Chamber of Manufactures in New South Wales.

### China

“One of the best and most effective ways to improve disabled peoples’ living conditions is to provide more employment access for them”, said Deng Pufang, Chairman of China’s Disabled Persons’ Federation.

*‘Disabled to have more job chances’, China Daily, 19 May 2006*

### India

Information technology-enabled services find persons with disabilities loyal and hard-working, and have no problem hiring them as long as their disability does not affect work.

*‘Calls for special skills’, Business Line: The Hindu, 4 February 2005*

Titan, one of the world’s largest timepiece manufacturers, had an inclination to employ persons with disabilities from the outset. Currently, persons with disabilities constitute about 4% of Titan’s employees. “Titan was clear that these people are an intrinsic part of our society and need understanding, support and opportunities, not charity or misplaced compassion,” says Titan representative Mamatha Bhat.

*Shobha Ramswamy, ‘Enabling the disabled’, 2005,  
[http://www.tata.com/0\\_our\\_commitment/employee\\_relations/articles/20050120\\_titan\\_disabled.htm](http://www.tata.com/0_our_commitment/employee_relations/articles/20050120_titan_disabled.htm)*

## New Zealand

“Persons with a disability bring with them something that a lot of other people don’t have,” said Mark Bagshaw, IBM’s accessible technologies guru. “They’re able to manage a very difficult life. They couldn’t manage ordinary life without developing excellent problem-solving skills, which makes them an asset.”

*‘Mark Bagshaw: Ignoring Disability a Wasted Opportunity’, 2006, [www.neon.org.nz/newsarchive/bagshawplusfour](http://www.neon.org.nz/newsarchive/bagshawplusfour)*

## Republic of Korea

About 80% of the 160 employees of Mugunhwa Electronics have some kind of disability. Labor productivity reaches around 70% of that of able-bodied workers, but Kim Dong-gyoung, the firm’s Vice President, believes that the near-zero defect rate in products makes up for this disparity. “Besides, staff turnover is very low with disabled employees, less than 2%.”

*‘A factory of hope for disabled’, [The Korea Herald](#), 29 August 2005*

Kookmin Bank hired more than 100 persons with disabilities. “We realized most of the job applicants with disabilities have far more potential and talent than those without disabilities,” said the Bank’s human resources manager, Lee Young-ree.

*‘Discovering strength in disabilities’, [Joins.com](#), 31 December 2006*

## Singapore

“Employers in Singapore are gradually becoming more receptive to hiring people with disabilities,” said Lars Ronning, President for North/Southeast Asia and Australia/New Zealand for Tandberg, a videoconferencing company. “I believe the reasons for this change are a result of our improved economy, public education about the disabled and the Enable Fund,” a government initiative that provides financial support for businesses that hire four or more workers with disabilities.

*‘Enabling the disabled’, [Business Times Singapore](#), 11 December 2006*

“With unemployment at record lows in recent years, we should actively be looking at ways to see how jobs can be restructured to suit the hiring of disabled people,” said Wee Piew, Chief Executive Officer of HG Metal Manufacturing Ltd.

*‘Enabling the disabled’, [Business Times Singapore](#), 11 December 2006*

“Each person is talented in his or her own way, and we should look at what they have and not what they don’t have,” said Tan Tong Hai, President and Chief Executive Officer of Singapore Computer Systems Ltd. “Very often, disabilities in some areas bring out strengths in other areas. A SCS subsidiary, Trusted Hub, has been employing disabled people for several years, and we have found them to be very dedicated to their work, very focused and very efficient. Trusted Hub is currently one of the largest employers of disabled people.”

## South Africa

“All said, the cost to accommodate a disabled person is minimal in comparison to the value that the person can bring to the business,” said Llewellyn Marescia, a former branch manager at a specialized disability recruitment agency.

*‘Disabled hiring still in its infancy’, [Business Day South Africa](#), 14 October 2003*

## United Kingdom

By employing workers with disabilities, the hardware chain B&Q finds that it has gained a number of benefits, including increased overall employee satisfaction and better retention and productivity rates.

*<http://www.pp4sd.org.uk/downloads/pdf/Case%20study%20BandQ.pdf>*

## United States

National employment studies, including a 30-year analysis by DuPont de Nemours, show that persons with disabilities have equal or higher performance ratings, better retention rates and less absenteeism.

Employees with disabilities relate better to customers with disabilities. In the United States, this represents \$1 trillion in annual aggregate consumer spending.

*[The Next Great Hiring Frontier](#), [Wall Street Journal](#), 13 September 2005*

Companies report that employees with disabilities have better retention rates, reducing the high cost of staff turnover, a 2002 study found. Other surveys reveal that after one year of employment, the retention rate of persons with disabilities is 85%.

*Unger, D. D., ‘Employer’s attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce: myths or realities? Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities’, 2002*

A 2003 survey of employers found that the cost of adaptation to accommodate employees with disabilities was \$500 or less. 73% of employers reported that their employees did not require special facilities at all.

*Dixon, K.A., Kruse, D. & Van Horn, C.E.,  
'Restricted Access: A Survey of Employers about People with Disabilities and Lowering Barriers to Work', 2003*

According to the food company Carolina Fine Snacks, based in Greensboro, North Carolina, “the impact of hiring people with disabilities is that employee turnover dropped from 80% every six months to less than 5%, productivity rose from 60-70% to 85-95%, absenteeism dropped from 20% to less than 5%, tardiness dropped from 30% of staff to zero.” Philip H. Kosak, the company’s President, said that “the new employee’s attitude was contagious: some of the non-disabled employees began to improve their performance.”

*Kansas University Center for Research on Learning,  
'Help Wanted: Diversifying and Strengthening your Workforce by Hiring People with Disabilities', 2005*