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Article

## Leveraging Employer Practices in Global Regulatory Frameworks to Improve Employment Outcomes for People with Disabilities

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### Abstract

Work is an important part of life, providing both economic security and a forum to contribute one's talents and skills to society, thereby anchoring the individual in a social role. However, access to work is not equally available to people with disabilities globally. Regulatory environments that prohibit discrimination and support vocational training and educational opportunities constitute a critical first step toward economic independence. However, they have not proven sufficient in themselves. In this article, we aim to infuse deeper consideration of employer practice and demand-side policy reforms into global policy discussions of the right to work for people with disabilities. We begin by documenting the employment and economic disparities existing for people with disabilities globally, followed by a description of the international, regional, and local regulatory contexts aiming to improve labor market outcomes for people with disabilities. Next, we examine how policies can leverage employer interests to further address inequalities. We discuss employer policies and practices demonstrated in the research to facilitate recruitment, hiring, career development, retention, and meaningful workplace inclusion. The goal of the article is to synthesize existing international literature on employment rights for people with disabilities with the employer perspective.

**Keywords:** disability; disabled worker; employment; employment equity; employer practices; human resources; international disability policy

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

37 Work is an important part of life. It is a source of not only economic power, but also social and personal well-  
38 being. At the most basic level, work provides security by enabling the procurement of food, shelter, and other  
39 basic needs for survival and good health. Beyond that, work allows individuals to contribute to the community  
40 with their abilities and skills, and provides the means for establishing a social position from which others perceive  
41 them. Our jobs often determine how society views us, and therefore influence how we view ourselves. Equitable  
42 access to work is a basic right, and at the core of what it means to be human.

43 However, individuals with disabilities around the world have not been able to gain equitable access to  
44 employment. Many factors contribute to the employment disparities for individuals with disabilities. Among them  
45 are unequal preparation for the labor market, insufficient support in finding and retaining employment, and poor  
46 awareness among employers about effective recruitment and retention strategies for workers with disabilities.  
47 These barriers exist in low-, middle-, and high-income countries alike. Individuals who experience a “precarious  
48 relationship with the labor market” face additional barriers related to access to social and political participation,  
49 as well as necessities integral to quality of life (Harris, Owen, & Gould, 2012, p. 824). While many people with  
50 disabilities are able to achieve gainful employment and societal integration, as a group they face disproportionate  
51 poverty and unemployment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2007a).

52 The emphasis of this article is on the role that employers—the demand-side of the disability employment  
53 continuum—play in improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities, and how government policy initiatives  
54 can drive more substantial demand-side effort (Bruyère, 2016). Traditionally, scholars have studied disability  
55 employment inequalities from the viewpoint of the individual, particularly focusing on the medical, educational,  
56 psychological, and vocational factors that affect a person’s work-related functioning and job skills (Chan, Strauser,  
57 Gervy, & Lee, 2010). On the other hand, scholars describe individual rights primarily in relation to governmental  
58 action and enforcement. Both approaches tend to overlook “the fact that labor market outcomes such as  
59 employment are determined when the *supply of* individuals’ labor aligns with *demand for* labor on the part of  
60 employers” (Bruyère, VanLooy, von Schrader, & Barrington, 2016, p. 5). In other words, they tend to downplay  
61 employer considerations. On the other hand, policies accounting for the demand-side aim to cultivate change at  
62 the organizational level in order to improve labor market conditions (Bruyère et al., 2016).

63 This article further explores the employer side of the international regulatory context, engaging in a discussion of  
64 empirically supported best practices in recruitment, hiring, advancement, retention, and full inclusion of  
65 individuals with disabilities in the workforce. We set this information in the context of the international legislative  
66 and regulatory environment that influences the behavior of employers. Policy approaches that combine supply-  
67 and demand-side reforms have not seen proper attention in the global literature, especially as applied to the  
68 responsibilities of states parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
69 (UNCRPD). In attempting to bring employer needs to the fore, we advocate policymaking efforts aimed at  
70 broadening the pool of stakeholders participating in inclusive hiring practices and increasing the accessibility of  
71 the open labor market. Employers who are open to inclusive practices, aware of both the intangible and bottom-  
72 line benefits of such practices, and equipped with the strategies to implement them, have a powerful role to play  
73 in making the labor market favorable to people with disabilities.

## 74 **2. Global Situation of Work and Economic Disparities for People with Disabilities**

75 Individuals with disabilities make up approximately 15% of the world population, or more than one billion people  
76 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011). Projections indicate that the number and proportion of people with  
77 disabilities worldwide will continue to increase due to aging, chronic health conditions, workplace related

78 incidents, and other factors (Harper, 2013; Houtrow, Larson, Olson, Newacheck, & Halfon, 2014; Vos et al., 2015).  
79 Low- and middle-income countries, often referred to as “developing” nations, have higher rates of disability  
80 prevalence than high-income countries: globally, nearly 80% of people with disabilities reside in low-income  
81 nations (WHO, 2011). Despite the high overall demographic representation, people with disabilities continue to  
82 be significantly under-represented in the world’s labor force.

83 The employment rate of people with disabilities globally is 44%, compared with 75% for people without disabilities  
84 (WHO, 2011). The inactivity rate for people with disabilities is almost 2.5 times higher: 49% vs. 20% (WHO, 2011).  
85 Estimates indicate that the social exclusion of people with disabilities from the workplace results in trillions of  
86 dollars in annual loss in GDP (Metts, 2000; Ozawa & Yeo, 2006). In addition to lost labor, the marginalization of  
87 people with disabilities in employment creates “structural and social costs,” including “high benefit levels and  
88 health and social inequalities” (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain, 2014, p. 2). Lost labor and increased social cost  
89 only further magnifies the case for demand-side focus: in many cases, employers are not even aware that they  
90 are limiting their talent pools and sacrificing productivity by forgoing inclusive recruitment and hiring practices  
91 (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). As such, employer practices research indicates that “the competition that drives  
92 business innovation could also play a part in encouraging businesses to compete with each other on issues related  
93 to diversity and inclusion” (Henry, Petkauskos, Stanislawzyk, & Vogt, 2014, p. 246).

94 Disparities exist in nations across economic and political conditions. In 2015, approximately 35% of working age  
95 people with disabilities in the United States attained employment in the open labor market, compared with 78%  
96 of people without disabilities (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2017). Similar trends exist in Organization for  
97 Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, where most recent figures estimate the average  
98 employment rate for people with disabilities at just over 40%, compared with approximately 75% for people  
99 without disabilities (OECD, 2009). Statistics for OECD nations show that people with disabilities are less likely to  
100 have full-time work, more likely to be un- or under-employed, have lower relative income levels, tend to earn less  
101 even when employed, and have a higher likelihood of living in poverty (OECD 2009; WHO, 2011). Income levels  
102 are much higher among groups of people with disabilities who have high educational attainment or full-time  
103 employment (OECD, 2009). Analyses of economic inactivity in the European Union (EU) shows high variation by  
104 type and severity of disability (e.g., 75% unemployment for people with mental illness in the United Kingdom)  
105 (ILO, 2007b).

106 Surprisingly familiar thematic barriers emerge in many disparate national contexts. These include tensions arising  
107 between employees with disabilities and employers due to legislative efforts, immoderate belief in the perceived  
108 fairness of open labor market practices, and reliance on stereotypes about people with disabilities’ lack of  
109 productivity or the expense of accommodating (Harpur & Bales, 2010). Many of these themes pertain to employer  
110 perceptions and resulting practices. In many global contexts, the imposition of duties on employers meet with  
111 resistance for these reasons. However, employers who do provide accommodations report that they are typically  
112 inexpensive (Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003), have high return-on-investment (Unger, Wehman, Yasuda,  
113 Campbell, & Green, 2002), and result in improved retention rates, organizational culture, and productivity (Kaye,  
114 Jans, & Jones, 2011).

115 Empirical evidence demonstrates employment disparities in a number of low- and middle-income contexts as well  
116 (see, e.g., Hoogeveen, 2005 [Uganda], Lamichhane & Okubo, 2014 [Nepal], Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2008 [India],  
117 Mizunoya, Yamasaki, & Mitra, 2016 [Vietnam], Trani & Loeb, 2010 [Afghanistan, Zambia]). Mizunoya and Mitra  
118 (2013) assessed the employment gaps in fifteen low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin  
119 America, and found statistically significant employment gaps for people with disabilities in nine out of the fifteen

120 examples; interestingly, the six countries that had either no gap or a statistically insignificant gap were low-income  
121 nations, while all but two with a significant employment gap were middle-income.

122 Where poverty is widespread, persistent disability is often an additional dimension to poverty, rather than the  
123 fundamental cause (Eide & Ingstad, 2011). For this reason, Yeo and Moore (2003) describe the social, cultural, and  
124 political processes that link disability and poverty as a “vicious circle.” The dimensions of the link between  
125 disability and poverty differ significantly between low- and high-income contexts, and causality can run in either  
126 direction—that is, poverty can also lead to disability. We can see this in the examples of lack of workplace safety  
127 regulations, inadequate healthcare interventions, poor nutrition and hygienic conditions, pollution, and higher  
128 prevalence of inaccessible or disabling environments. Lower income levels may also affect people with disabilities  
129 differently: additional costs for personal support, medical care, and/or assistive devices can result in greater odds  
130 of experiencing financial hardship than peers without disability at similar income levels (e.g., catastrophic health  
131 expenditure) (WHO, 2011). Government spending and activity in poverty alleviation for households that have an  
132 individual with a disability also lead to unexpected interactions. In countries where poverty is endemic, the  
133 introduction of disability grants or pensions can lead to markedly improved standards of living (Loeb, Eide, Jelsma,  
134 Ka’Toni, & Maart, 2007). However, in high-income countries, scholars cite such benefits as potential “poverty  
135 traps” that “contribute to exclusion from the labor market and result in a comparably low life income” (Eide &  
136 Ingstad, 2011, p. 5).

137 Issues of access to social institutions constitute one of the most intractable barriers to employment and quality of  
138 life. Access to education and training provides pathways to employment, whereas marginalization in educational  
139 opportunities only furthers employment disparities. In particular, youth with disabilities constitute a “significant  
140 proportion of the youth population in every society,” and estimates indicate that approximately 80% of youth  
141 with disabilities (ages 15 to 24), or between 180 and 220 million people, live in developing countries (U.N. Division  
142 of Social Policy and Development [DSPD], 2010, p. 2). Yet youth with disabilities are less likely to start school in  
143 the first place, have lower rates of enrollment and promotion in school, and lower transition rates to post-  
144 secondary education and work than their peers without disabilities (WHO, 2011). Many countries exclude people  
145 with disabilities from mainstream schooling, and have inadequate or fragmentary school-to-work transition  
146 frameworks (Stewart, 2009).

147 The overall lack of services and coordination often leads to a “difficult period of upheaval and uncertainty” as  
148 youth with disabilities “transition from childhood into adulthood, primarily in the area of achieving successful  
149 employment and independent living” (DSPD, 2010, p. 4). For instance, analysis from four southern African nations  
150 found difficulties accessing rehabilitation services (between 26%–55% obtained needed services) and vocational  
151 training (between 5%–23%) (WHO, 2011). Even in high-income nations with comparatively robust rehabilitation  
152 and social service offerings, people with disabilities often report not having their everyday service needs met  
153 (between 20%–40%) (WHO, 2011). At the intersection of supply and demand, lies the availability of skilled workers  
154 equipped to meet the needs of the market. As policy concerns, the expansion of educational opportunities,  
155 demand-driven skills training, rehabilitation services, and career development opportunities for people with  
156 disabilities are of paramount importance (ILO, 2010).

### 157 *2.1. International Framework for Employment and Training*

158 The UNCRPD was the first binding international human rights treaty to codify the rights of people with disabilities  
159 on a global scale. Adopted by the General Assembly in December of 2006, the UNCRPD currently has 160  
160 signatories and 174 ratifying parties (U.N. Enable, 2017). The Convention covers a broad array of human rights

161 topics, including an explicit right to work and related rights pertaining to non-discrimination, awareness raising,  
162 education and training, rehabilitation, accessibility, and quality of life. The UNCRPD is a powerful international  
163 legal instrument, but as a corrective, its effectiveness is subject to national and local variation. The role of  
164 employer practices has been under-explored in scholarship on UNCRPD implementation (see, e.g., Brayley, 2012;  
165 Owen & Harris, 2012; Power, Lord, & deFranco, 2013). This is not entirely surprising, as human rights instruments  
166 generally conceptualize “rights” (often in a negative rights sense), as inhering in the individual, or alternatively  
167 seek to impose affirmative responsibilities on stakeholders without adequate attention to converging interests.  
168 However, the UNCRPD does contain certain mandates for states parties to facilitate demand-side buy-in, such as  
169 employer awareness building and incentives, and market-driven skills development practices. These elements of  
170 the CRPD warrant deeper discussion.

171 With any international treaty, ratification makes the terms of the agreement legally binding, although  
172 enforcement typically falls within the purview of state parties through processes of domestic incorporation (Lord  
173 & Stein, 2008). As such, “substantive rights will often get their complexion from the local cultural environment  
174 within which they have to be given concrete, practical meaning” (Ncube, 1998, pp. 14-15). Moreover, depending  
175 on the level of centralization in legal, regulatory, and enforcement mechanisms, regional variations may also  
176 shape the prospects of people with disabilities seeking to exercise their rights. For instance, in the area of  
177 employment and work, “the number, size and type of companies in the region, compliance to the law among  
178 employers, and the resources, skills and competencies of the regional employment services” may all moderate  
179 the practical effect of employment policies and laws (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain, 2014, p. 22).

180 Work and training topics play a prominent role in the UNCRPD. Article 26(1) requires that parties organize,  
181 strengthen, and/or extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation programs and services in the areas of  
182 health, employment, education and social services, including effective measures “to enable persons with  
183 disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and  
184 full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.” Article 27 outlines the right to work and employment “on an  
185 equal basis with others.” This includes the “opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a  
186 labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible.” It also places a prohibition on  
187 employer discrimination (hiring, retention, and advancement), and provides rights to equal remuneration,  
188 reasonable accommodation, favorable and safe working conditions, systems for redress of grievances, union  
189 participation, and access to technical and vocational guidance and training. These are more traditional human  
190 rights edicts, primarily guaranteeing the individual a right to equal access and nondiscrimination.

191 However, Article 27 also calls for parties to promote advancement and return-to-work efforts, as well as  
192 alternative pathways to employment such as self-employment, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, public sector  
193 employment, and affirmative action programs/incentives. Article 27(1)(h) holds that states parties shall “promote  
194 the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures,  
195 which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures.” 27(1)(j) requires that  
196 participants “promote the acquisition...of work experience in the open labour market.” Article 24 further contains  
197 language implicating not only a nexus between education and the right to work, but also identifying the  
198 importance of vocational training, tertiary education, and lifelong learning as human rights. Objectives like this  
199 steer the Convention into the territory of demand-side considerations—or at least into the convergence of supply  
200 and demand interests—such as employer incentives and market-driven (competitive) skills development. The  
201 UNCRPD is a modern human rights instrument, outlining rights consistent with a “substantive” notion of equality.  
202 That is, it distinguishes equal treatment from identical treatment, and extends policies beyond negative rights,

203 towards eliminating the conditions that perpetuate discrimination (see, e.g., Committee on Economic, Social and  
204 Cultural Rights, 1994).

205 The balancing of supply- and demand-side policy reforms must also account for local economic factors: for  
206 instance, the concept of “productivity” in labor is contingent on which economic sectors predominate in a given  
207 region. Lower-income nations tend to feature agrarian economies where the primary sectors (e.g., agriculture,  
208 forestry, mining) account for a large share of the jobs, whereas in middle- and high-income countries, the  
209 secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (services) sectors may be more extensive. Policy incentives, injections,  
210 and offsets must account for not only existing conditions, but also future trends. Demand-driven reforms can help  
211 enhance the agency and participation of private sector stakeholders—especially those less inclined to participate  
212 on social grounds. However, reform efforts must not merely cater to employer interests. They must utilize  
213 incentives, services, and training opportunities to “restore more choice and control to people with disabilities over  
214 the types of support they may need,” and prioritize “facilitation mechanisms such as independent planning and  
215 supported decision making” (Power et al., 2013, pp. 441-442). Efforts that increase civil society’s participation by  
216 fomenting employer action are good; efforts that do so while increasing agency and self-determination for people  
217 with disabilities are better.

## 218 *2.2. Approaches to Implementation*

219 The primary strategy of industrialized welfare states has been an investment in employment readiness and  
220 training programs and anti-discrimination legislation (Grover & Piggott, 2007; Humpage, 2007). However, at the  
221 time of the UNCRPD’s adoption, there existed substantial heterogeneity in the types of legal protections and  
222 service systems available to people with disabilities on a country-by-country basis. The creation of new  
223 international norms must be backed by regional, national, and local implementation efforts, as the “touchstone  
224 of the CRPD’s significance is whether it changes policies and practices at national level[s] and whether it makes  
225 any difference in the actual living conditions of persons with disabilities” (Waldschmidt, Sturm, Karačić, & Dins,  
226 2017, p. 177).

227 Cultural attitudes remain a major threshold obstacle, particularly when it comes to implementing sweeping  
228 reforms “in a manner that responds to broad obligations while being duly consonant to domestic social and legal  
229 norms” (Lord & Stein, 2013, p. 99). For instance, analysis by Dinerstein (2017) noted that many Southeast Asian  
230 countries implicitly perpetuated medical views of disability by choosing social welfare or health agencies as the  
231 implementation “focal point,” rather than justice-based agencies. Furthermore, enforcement of non-  
232 discrimination provisions can be expensive and beyond the means of countries that lack an existing mechanism.  
233 For example, one analysis found that most Pacific Island states lacked appropriately comprehensive frameworks  
234 for enforcement (Harpur & Bales, 2010). While it is outside the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive  
235 review of disability policy worldwide, in this section we provide some instructive examples of the various  
236 contextual issues at national and regional levels, particularly those that touch upon employer practices, interest  
237 convergence, and policies that encourage (rather than merely compelling) employer action.

238 Innovations in policies encouraging supported employment can play a role in bridging employee and employer  
239 needs. Certain EU countries (e.g., Germany, Sweden, and Norway) have developed programs to afford supported  
240 employment opportunities to people with disabilities (Waldschmidt et al., 2017). In Germany, this includes  
241 training and support in work, protecting the right to employment for people with severe disabilities, and legally  
242 defined special allowances in the workplace (tax relief, a parking badge, and protection against dismissal)  
243 (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain, 2014). Germany’s social services subsystem offers vocational training centers for

244 youth with disabilities, re-training centers for adults, and integration centers that help individuals with severe  
245 disabilities identify and maintain employment, move from training centers to work, and liaise with employers to  
246 moderate accommodations and special dismissal procedures. In Sweden, supported employment entails financial  
247 support for the purchase of assistive devices in the workplace by employers or individuals, as well as “special  
248 introduction and follow-up support” services (before or during the introductory period of a job and up to a year  
249 after employment commences) (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2012). Norway promotes  
250 supported employment through subsidies, grants, assistive technology centers, vocational training and higher  
251 education opportunities, and incentives for the provision of accommodations (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain,  
252 2014). Overall, the emphasis appears to have been effective: from 2000–2010, a 50% increase occurred in the  
253 population of Norwegians with disabilities working in supported employment (Official Norwegian Reports, 2012).

254 Italy instituted measures for a targeted employment framework, graduated hiring quota, and regionally  
255 implemented assessment guidelines for work capacity, job-matching candidate’s skill set to employer needs, and  
256 training criteria (Agovino & Rapposelli, 2011; Law 68/1999). Penalties exist for failing to meet quotas (companies  
257 of 15–35 employees must hire one individual, 36–50 must hire two, and 50 or more have a quota of 7%), while  
258 conversely employers may receive incentives for employing people with disabilities, such as tax subsidies, wage  
259 contributions, and reimbursement for workplace adaptations (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain, 2014). Quota  
260 systems have been a popular policy directive in a number of contexts, with some nations opting to penalize, others  
261 to incentivize, and still others to treat quotas as explicitly or implicitly (due to lack of enforcement mechanism)  
262 aspirational. On the incentives side, Uganda, for instance, has provided tax cuts for private sector employers who  
263 employ people with disabilities at a rate of 5% of their total workforce (The Persons with Disability Act, 2006).  
264 However, 2009 amendments cut the available tax refund from 15% to 2% (Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009), a  
265 figure that commentators note is unlikely to provide the needed incentive to employers (Nyombi & Kibandama,  
266 2014).

267 In some contexts, there is an element of choice. The Czech system, for instance, allows employers to employ  
268 people with disabilities “directly,” or “indirectly” by commissioning goods and services from organizations that  
269 do: for 2010, direct employment accounted for 56% of the obligations met (Committee on the Rights of Persons  
270 with Disabilities, 2013; see also The Employment Act, 2004). Governments often allow employers to miss the  
271 quota in exchange for payment of a penalty or additional taxation. Serbia’s quota system outlines penalties and  
272 subsidies for missing, making, or exceeding targets (see Act on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of  
273 Persons with Disabilities, 2009; Prohibition of Discrimination Act, 2009). While many employers choose to pay the  
274 fine rather than comply, the government applies penalties to employment, education, and poverty reduction  
275 initiatives for people with disabilities (Sainsbury & Coleman-Fountain, 2014).

276 In many European states, Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) aim to improve the functioning of the labor  
277 market by directing policies towards unemployed persons, including targeted populations vulnerable to labor  
278 market exclusion (Waddington, Pedersen, & Ventegodt Liisberg, 2016). In this way, ALMPs direct policy efforts  
279 towards both the supply and demand-side of labor—equipping unemployed individuals with demand-driven skills  
280 needed to enter the labor market while simultaneously offering incentives to employers (Auer, Berg, & Cazes,  
281 2007). The Council of Europe formalized a preference for ALMPs in its 2015 Guidelines for Member State  
282 employment policies (Council of Europe, 2015). Commentators note that these policies are not without  
283 downsides, as many national efforts have led them to adopt “work-first” measures that place pressure on  
284 individuals to leave or phase out of benefits programs. This can result in the deterioration of financial position and  
285 security for individuals who struggle to find adequate employment (Waddington et al., 2016).

286 Denmark has become an interesting case for ALMP reforms, both because of its high rates of general employment  
287 and “flexicurity” labor market model (Ventegodt Liisberg, 2011). The flexicurity model prioritizes both high levels  
288 of income support during unemployment and quick reentry into the labor force, especially through upgrading of  
289 skills and “activation” obligations for unemployed individuals (Danish Government, 2013). The percentage of  
290 Danish individuals with disabilities in supported employment conditions rose from less than 10% in 2002 to more  
291 than 25% in 2014 (Waddington et al., 2016). The Danish policy framework focuses on incentivizing, rather than  
292 merely compelling employers (e.g., no quota, high degree of freedom in termination/hiring decisions). Denmark’s  
293 system includes subsidies for “ice breaker” wages for recent graduates, flexjobs (subsidized wages for transitional  
294 work in special working conditions such as adapted environments or schedules), workplace alterations, mentor  
295 opportunities, job trials, and technical or personal assistance (Gupta, Larsen, & Thomsen, 2015).

296 Thus far we have provided background and examples of the global, regional, and local regulatory efforts to  
297 minimize employment discrimination and maximize employment outcomes, including by formulating policies  
298 which account for employer needs and interests as stakeholders (with varying levels of duty and responsibility for  
299 private sector employers). Against this backdrop, we turn now to the subject of employer practices, and  
300 adaptations to workplace culture that can support an inclusive, 21st century workforce amenable to hiring people  
301 with disabilities while also keeping the business case in focus.

### 302 **3. The Importance of Employer Practices**

303 Regulatory environments often aim not only to improve job-seeker prospects (through education, vocational  
304 training, VR services, etc.), but also to positively affect employer behavior (through incentives, non-discrimination  
305 rules, awareness raising, etc.). Therefore, the critical next step in our examination of meaningful labor market  
306 inclusion draws us closer to the actual employment experience, and to the functioning of the enterprise itself. In  
307 this section, we discuss common organizational weaknesses and promising employer practices to help frame the  
308 strategies that governments may bake into their policy directives. Research indicates that private employers who  
309 value workforce diversity desire additional government support in adapting their recruitment and hiring  
310 practices—perhaps even beyond legally prescribed levels—and are more open to collaborating with government  
311 agencies who “understand their needs” (Henry et al., 2014).

312 Employers around the globe are beginning to acknowledge that people with disabilities make reliable and  
313 productive employees, and that “having a diverse workforce inclusive of those with a disability makes for a sound  
314 business case” (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014, p. 446). The business case for diverse hiring practices, grounded in  
315 substantial research, operates under two notions. First, that when provided with an enabling environment, people  
316 with disabilities represent a qualified but under-tapped pool of potential workers (direct productivity). Second,  
317 that people with disabilities contribute to a diverse workforce, with attendant benefits for workplace culture,  
318 morale, and organizational reputation (indirect productivity) (ILO, 2010). Research into organizational diversity  
319 actually goes even further, indicating collateral benefits such as lower costs of discrimination and liability, greater  
320 organizational problem solving capacity, more innovation, and stronger appeal to a diverse customer base (Yap &  
321 Konrad, 2009).

322 Setting policy aside, the critical initial step in getting people with disabilities into the workplace lies with the  
323 employer’s recruitment, selection, and hiring processes, which may take different forms in different regions and  
324 economies. Throughout the discussion of employer practices, we encourage consideration of how government  
325 policy can reify abstract notions of equality in the workplace (turn policy into practice). Companies respond  
326 differently to public policy directives in the area of disability employment: research from Norway and Sweden, for



327 instance, indicates certain prevalent themes in large companies' approaches to recruitment, including the  
328 importance of support beyond mere financial incentives or offsets (e.g., advisory support or technical assistance)  
329 and the importance of "value choices" by management (Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017). Studies further show that  
330 employer knowledge, especially at HR and management levels, is a key threshold ingredient affecting employer  
331 commitment to disability inclusive hiring, including training of management in pertinent legal requirements and  
332 potential workplace accommodations (Chan, Strauser, Maher, et al., 2010). Government-sponsored incentives,  
333 awareness raising, and technical assistance efforts help alert management personnel of recruitment strategies,  
334 while national and local employment services can play a key role in connecting employers to job seekers with  
335 disabilities (Luecking, 2011). Research from the United Kingdom highlights the benefits of flexible, personalized  
336 approaches to job placement, which offer supported employment opportunities through careful job matching,  
337 on-the-job support, and barrier reduction (Roulstone, Harrington, & Hwang, 2014).

338 In a study conducted in the U.S., researchers asked 700 human resource (HR) professionals whether their  
339 organizations had put in place any of ten policies and practices that facilitate recruitment and hiring of individuals  
340 with disabilities (Erickson, von Schrader, Bruyère, VanLooy, & Matteson, 2014). More than half reported including  
341 disability in their diversity and inclusion statements (59%), requiring sub-contractors/suppliers to adhere to  
342 disability nondiscrimination requirements (57%), and having relationships with community organizations that  
343 promote the hiring of people with disabilities (54%). Far fewer reported having explicit organizational goals related  
344 to the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities (25%), or participating in internships or similar programs  
345 that target people with disabilities (19%). 45% reported that their companies actively recruit individuals with  
346 disabilities, and 38% reported having senior management that demonstrates a strong commitment to hiring  
347 people with disabilities. Evidence suggests that only a small share of employers actively recruit workers with  
348 disabilities (Domzal, Houtenville, & Sharma, 2008). However, further analysis demonstrates that the more of these  
349 practices a company reports, the more likely they are to hire people with disabilities. Those organizations  
350 reporting targeted internship programs were almost six times as likely to have hired a person with a disability in  
351 the past year; those with strong senior management commitment were almost five times as likely; and those  
352 reporting relationships with a community organization were almost three times as likely (Erickson et al., 2014).

353 Certain multinational corporations have recently taken it upon themselves to become leaders in recruitment  
354 efforts, in part as a means to broadening their available talent pools as well as viewing "neurodiversity as a  
355 competitive advantage" (Austin & Pisano, 2017, p. 96). For example, German-based software company SAP  
356 developed a goal of 1% of its workforce to be individuals with autism by 2020 through extensive recruitment,  
357 screening, and training initiatives (Shumaker, 2015). In recent years, a number of multinational companies have  
358 reformed their HR practices as a means to accessing neurodiverse talent. These include Hewlett Packard  
359 Enterprise (now DXC Technologies), Microsoft, Willis Towers Watson, Ford, and Ernst & Young; others like  
360 Caterpillar, Dell Technologies, Deloitte, IBM, JPMorgan Chase, and UBS, have pilot or exploratory efforts in motion  
361 (Austin & Pisano, 2017). In addition to finding promising examples among large employers, public sector  
362 employment practices are often fundamental to driving reform in hiring practices. This is why advocates often  
363 push governments to conduct themselves as model employers (Brooks, Dougherty, & Price, 2015). Research  
364 suggests that private employers often look to the public sector for support in adapting their recruitment and hiring  
365 practices (Henry et al., 2014).

366 Getting into the workplace is only the first hurdle in employment for individuals with disabilities. Once an  
367 individual acquires a position, career development and advancement also pose challenges, and are often the site  
368 of employment discrimination against people with disabilities. People with disabilities report perceived bias in the  
369 career advancement process within organizations (von Schrader & Nazarov, 2016), are paid less and hold less-

370 desirable jobs than their non-disabled peers (Kruse & Schur, 2003), and are far less likely to work in management,  
371 professional, and related occupations than their peers without disabilities (31.3% compared with 39.2%) (U.S.  
372 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). People with disabilities also tend to experience jobs with less autonomy and  
373 decision-making compared to their peers without disabilities, as well as jobs that require less education (Colella  
374 & Bruyère, 2011). This may result from the absence of proper procedures for handling retention and advancement  
375 issues—in the US context, for instance, few employers report offering mentoring (17%) or career planning and  
376 development tools (16%), and even fewer have explicit goals or standards for retaining and advancing employees  
377 with disabilities (Erickson, von Schrader, Bruyère, & VanLooy, 2013).

378 More commonly, U.S. companies have formal policies for return to work or disability management (76%), and for  
379 flexible work arrangements (57%) (Erickson et al., 2013). Disability management mitigates the impact of the  
380 disability by offering comprehensive services, accommodations and workplace modifications (Doyle, Dixon, &  
381 Moore, 2003). Common practices include personalized case management, stay-at-work and transitional work  
382 assignments, creativity in making accommodations, building support systems using community resources, and  
383 training managers (Von Schrader, Bruyère, Malzer, & Erickson, 2013). Flexible work arrangements might include  
384 adapting schedules or leave to accommodate medical needs, part-time or seasonal schedules, phased retirement,  
385 flex-place arrangements, and more (von Schrader et al., 2013).

386 Professional development and career development practices are a critical component of inclusive employment  
387 policies at the organizational level, and can contribute to employee retention rates (Hausknecht, Rodda, &  
388 Howard, 2009), yet have received inadequate treatment in the employment-focused literature relative to other  
389 topics. In a study examining research on employment of people with disabilities research across a 20-year period  
390 (1990–2010), articles about workplace accommodation, organizational culture, recruitment and hiring were  
391 published with significantly greater frequency than research on retention and advancement (Karpur, VanLooy, &  
392 Bruyère, 2014). For most employers, there remains quite a bit of work to do in improving career advancement  
393 and retention practices. Importantly, such practices potentially benefit *all employees*, both with and without  
394 disabilities. Interestingly, personalized approaches to career development are not the norm in corporate settings,  
395 despite the fact that “flexible, supportive organizations” benefit all employees’ career development (Schur, Kruse,  
396 & Blanck, 2005).

#### 397 **4. Conclusion**

398 By framing the discussion starting with broad public policy directives and challenges, then zooming in to nation-  
399 level strategies for facilitating private sector buy-in and later to actual employer practices, we hope that we have  
400 helped to apply a rudimentary taxonomy to the complicated task of converting broad international directives  
401 (policies) into real-world changes at the market and organizational levels (practice). Despite heterogeneous  
402 political and economic contexts from country-to-country, the leveling of employment opportunities is a persistent  
403 public policy challenge (from training to job procurement to advancement and beyond). This is true of low- and  
404 middle-income countries with minimal frameworks for legal enforcement or workforce development, as well as  
405 high-income countries with substantial mechanisms for both.

406 While the particular public policy challenges take on a national flavor defined by cultural attitudes, political and  
407 economic models, predominant market sectors, and available systems, services, and opportunities for redress,  
408 evidence from around the globe demonstrates that antidiscrimination mechanisms and workforce development  
409 offerings alone may not be enough to manifest truly inclusive conditions. Newer strains of public policy in the area  
410 of disability employment have begun to extend into the realm of employer practices, and the convergence of

411 interests among policymakers, employers, and individual workers or jobseekers. For instance, countries have  
412 begun to adopt an array of interventions to try to address education/training inequities to facilitate skill  
413 development in an increasingly competitive labor market, as well as supports to facilitate transition to this  
414 marketplace for talent in an increasingly technology-intensive business environment.

415 There is a need for evaluation of these interventions, to identify effective practices that policymakers can replicate  
416 in different contexts across low-, middle-, and high-income countries. This must occur with reference to the  
417 specific context, such as how these interventions play out in the actual hiring, retention, and advancement of  
418 individuals with disabilities. The desired outcome of improved employment prospects for people with disabilities  
419 globally must be a multi-stakeholder effort, which includes government, education/training, employers,  
420 community service providers and the disability advocacy movement. Policies that attempt to widen the net by  
421 bringing new stakeholders into the effort of creating inclusive markets as collaborators and beneficiaries offer  
422 new pathways to driving effective reform.

#### 423 **Conflict of Interests**

424 The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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