



International  
Labour  
Organization

## Policy brief

# Persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy

### Introduction

The world of work is intrinsically linked to the natural environment and climate change.<sup>1</sup> Global temperature rise and extreme weather are lessening productivity and putting the health of many workers at risk.<sup>2</sup> Jobs in multiple sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism are being destroyed. In many instances, working conditions are being negatively impacted from extreme weather events such as heat stress.<sup>3</sup>

Efforts are being ramped up to meet the long-term goal of the Paris Agreement to keep the increase in global average temperature to less than 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. Transitioning to a more sustainable and low-carbon economy is one of the most significant actions countries can take towards this goal. While such a transition will have both negative and positive effects on the world of work, it has the potential to be a net generator of jobs<sup>4</sup> and, if done right, open new opportunities to create a sustainable and inclusive world of work.

1 – Jobs everywhere rely on a stable environment, and 40 percent of total world employment depends directly on ecosystems services as reported by ILO's *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs*.

2 – ILO. 2018. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs* (Geneva). Available at <https://www.ilo.org/weso-greening/>

3 – ILO. 2019. *Working on a warmer planet: The effect of heat stress on productivity and decent work* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_711919/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_711919/lang-en/index.htm)

4 – ILO's *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs* reports that measures taken in the production and use of energy alone will lead to job losses of around 6 million as well as the creation of some 24 million jobs. The net increase of approximately 18 million jobs across the world will be the result of the adoption of sustainable practices, including changes in the energy mix, the projected growth in the use of electric vehicles, and increases in energy efficiency in existing and future buildings.

This represents a tremendous opportunity to enhance decent work for persons with disabilities who currently face many socio-economic vulnerabilities in the world of work, and are disproportionately affected by adverse climate change impacts. Equally, involving persons with disabilities - who comprise 15 per cent of the global population - is critical to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals that pledges to 'leave no one behind'.



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### Persons with disabilities and extreme weather events

One of the alarming ways in which climate change manifests in our lives is through more intense and more frequent disaster events, including slow-onset ones like sea-level rise and sudden ones like flooding or cyclones. Such events can lead to disproportionate loss of life and livelihoods among persons with disabilities because they are commonly excluded from societal planning and decision-making. Such disaster losses can lead to further marginalization, creating a cycle that reinforces social and economic exclusion and increases vulnerability. Alarming, 85 per cent of persons with disabilities from 137 countries reported in a 2013 UN survey that they have not participated or been consulted in community disaster management processes. Early warning or evacuation systems in place may not, therefore, reflect the ideas and disability-related needs of persons with disabilities. Their exclusion from the decision making and planning of such processes places them at increased risk of loss of life or harm during climate and disaster events - a risk that cannot be overstated given the increased frequency and intensity of disasters related to climate change.

The critical need for the transition to a low-carbon economy to be both fast and fair is recognised in the Paris Agreement itself.<sup>5</sup> While evidence suggests that the low-carbon economy will boost prosperity and be a net driver of job creation, there will be transitional challenges for workers and communities as this shift takes place, making the greening of the economy a social justice issue. In this context, the ‘just transition’ framework offers a range of social and economic interventions needed to secure rights and livelihoods, enhance green jobs opportunities and climate ambitions. At the same time, a just transition also contributes towards an economic shift to a sustainable pathway needed for climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as for the protection of biodiversity.<sup>6</sup>

A key premise of a just transition is that persons affected by the greening of economies should be considered by those making the decisions to green the economy. Furthermore, a well-deliberated mix of legal standards, social protection policies, social dialogue and skills development programmes is required to ensure that those negatively affected are supported effectively through

5 – p 2, United Nations. 2015. *Paris Agreement*

6 – In this regard, the ILO’s *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* of 2015 is a landmark document.

the transition.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a just transition, according to ILO’s *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* must “contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty”.<sup>8</sup> The goal of social inclusion and ‘leaving no one behind’ is central to the idea of a just transition. In this context, the adequate inclusion of persons with disabilities and their needs within the greening of jobs is indispensable to ensuring a just transition. Indeed, a transition cannot be ‘just’ if its implementation disregards the persistent marginalization of persons with disabilities within the world of work and the disproportionately adverse impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities. At the same time, the empowerment of persons with disabilities in the world of work through a just transition is critical to leverage their contributions and enhance climate ambition as well as strengthen climate action.

Addressing climate change requires countries to undertake economic restructuring, including transformations of production and consumption patterns in several sectors, and a transition from the entrenched fossil fuel-based system to one that relies on clean, renewable sources.<sup>9</sup> Such large-scale and significant changes are urgent to tackle the climate crisis confronting the world today. Such changes and transformations, however, also present governments, businesses and social partners with an opportunity - to successfully leverage the previously untapped potential of persons with disabilities, develop their capacities further, and implement significant improvements to ensure access to decent work that contributes to climate action. To make full use of this opportunity, it is fundamental to recognize that environmentally sustainable economies and a world of work that is inclusive are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing.

### Persons with disabilities in a world of work confronted by climate change

With respect to the world of work, persons with disabilities have historically faced serious challenges hampering their ability to contribute equally, which is not only a violation of their rights but a loss for our societies

7 – ILO. 2018. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs* (Geneva). Available at <https://www.ilo.org/weso-greening/>

8 – p 4, ILO. 2015. *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/publications/WCMS\\_432859/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/publications/WCMS_432859/lang-en/index.htm)

9 – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (n.d.). *Just Transition of the Workforce, and the Creation of Decent Work and Quality Jobs [Technical Paper]* (Bonn). Available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Just%20transition.pdf>



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and economies. Many persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination with respect to opportunities, treatment and outcomes in the world of work. This is evident from both the quantitative and the qualitative angles.

Quantitatively, there is disproportionately low representation of persons with disabilities in the global labour market. Across eight geographical regions, the employment-to-population ratio (EPR) for persons with disabilities aged 15 years and older is 36 per cent on average, whereas the EPR for persons without disabilities is 60 per cent.<sup>10</sup> In the European Union, about 47 per cent of persons with disabilities are employed compared to 72 per cent of persons without disabilities.<sup>11</sup> A staggering 70-80 per cent of working-age people with disabilities across Africa are unemployed.<sup>12</sup> In India - home to 15 per

cent of the global population - almost three out of four persons with disabilities are excluded from the labour force.<sup>13</sup>

Second, in terms of quality, even when persons with disabilities are employed, they face obstacles such as poor promotional prospects and poor working conditions. They are also more likely to be in contingent, part-time and low-paid jobs. This is mostly not out of choice but as a consequence of a lack of opportunities in the formal economy and in the absence of other means of livelihood. Consequently, they also face a lack of social protection.

Impacts from climate change are exacerbating both the quantitative and qualitative challenges confronted by persons with disabilities in the world of work. For instance, when there are reduced job opportunities due to economic losses from climate disasters, persons with disabilities may especially struggle to find work if employers harbor misconceptions about their work capacities. At the same time, those with mobility limitations and health conditions may find heat stress

10 – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2018. *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities* (New York). Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf>

11 – Gramenos, S. 2013. *European comparative data on Europe 2020 & people with disabilities*. Available at <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1569&context=gladnetcollect>

12 – African Studies Centre Leiden. (n.d.). *Disability in Africa*. Available at <https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/disability-africa>

13 – Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Sample Survey Office. 2017. *India - Employment and Unemployment Survey 2011-2012, with ILO standard variables*. Available at [https://www.ilo.org/surveydata/index.php/catalog/1351/related\\_materials](https://www.ilo.org/surveydata/index.php/catalog/1351/related_materials)

causing their manual labour to become hazardous, or difficult for them to continue doing. Extreme weather events can have multiple effects on the lives of persons with disabilities, including injury, loss of accessibility, or damages to assistive devices, which can severely impact their livelihoods and employment. Furthermore, poorly designed action to combat climate change can exacerbate exclusion and worsen conditions for persons with disabilities in the world of work, while at the same time weakening climate action and sustainable development.

To get it right, the voice, agency, and empowerment of persons with disabilities as climate and economic actors are indispensable and must be amplified to identify the precise needs and gaps faced by persons with disabilities in all contexts. Designing meaningful climate action and ensuring a just transition depend on it.

### *Understanding the future of the world of work*

Ours is a time of transformative change in the world of work, driven in significant proportion by climate change as well as its proposed solutions. Specifically, a global transition towards a low-carbon and sustainable economy can have varied implications for the world of work, both positive and negative. These impacts are, most directly, a result of changes in government policy, which then translate into changes in investments, trade and production as well as consumption patterns. The overall implication of the switch to a greener economy is that output and employment in low-carbon industries and services will grow, while energy and resource-intensive sectors are likely to contract. This can be expected to give rise to four trends in the world of work: job creation, job substitution, job elimination (especially in polluting sectors), and job transformation and redefinition.

Addressing the climate change challenge requires a fundamental restructuring of the energy supply sector, transitioning from the world's fossil fuel-based system to clean, renewable sources of energy. Of equal importance is the need to bring about sharp increases in energy efficiency. Therefore, we can expect to see new jobs being created in fields such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, organic and conservation agriculture, adaptation projects intended to protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity, and infrastructure upgrading projects to accentuate physical resilience to climate-induced disasters. These jobs will require the development of new vocational skills.

### **Électricité de France, an emerging actor in renewable energy and disability inclusion**

The French electric utility company Électricité de France (EDF) was the first producer of renewable electricity in Europe. It currently produces 8 gigawatts (GW) of renewable electricity but aims to amplify its production to over 50 GW by 2030 to become 'an efficient, responsible electricity company that champions low-carbon growth'.

EDF is also a member of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN). The company's foray into disability inclusion began over 25 years ago when it signed an agreement with trade unions on professional inclusion for persons with disabilities. With the help of experts across multiple fields, EDF has established multi-stakeholder networks to support employees with disability issues and monitor progress against disability action plans. This kind of disability-specific governance mechanism is a go-to resource for employees with and without disabilities, thereby creating a more enabling environment for informed and disability-sensitive decision-making and implementation across the board.

Secondly, some existing jobs will be substituted as a result of shifts in the economy from less to more efficient or from high-carbon to low-carbon. For example, operations related to landfilling may be substituted for recycling and refurbishing operations. Truck-based transportation may be substituted for rail-based transportation. These fall under job substitution and may require an upgrading of skills or greening-of-skills programmes.

Certain jobs may be eliminated without any direct replacement altogether. Extraction of natural resources such as coal, or production processes that are particularly polluting such as those involving petrochemicals may slowly phase out causing a direct loss of jobs. Greater energy and water efficiency in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing may also result in more efficient processes and thus a loss of jobs. Automation of certain jobs would result in a similar outcome. In such circumstances, access to skills development programmes and social protection schemes will be critical.

Most commonly, however, existing workers may have their jobs transformed and redefined as day-to-day workplace practices, skill sets, work methods and job profiles are greened in phases. For example, plumbers, electricians, metalworkers and construction workers will upgrade work practices to align with green principles. Farmers will adjust growing methods to adapt to the



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changing climate. On-the-job re-skilling and training will be critical for this category, as will access to public education and training systems.

Estimates suggest that overall, the transition to low-carbon economies worldwide will be a net generator of jobs, with as many as 18 million new jobs appearing by 2030, according to the ILO World Employment Social Outlook 2018.<sup>14</sup> Taking action in the energy sector to limit global warming to 2 degrees centigrade by the end of the century can create around 24 million jobs, largely offsetting the expected job losses estimated at 6 million and resulting in a net gain of 18 million jobs.<sup>15</sup>

How all the above-mentioned trends in the world of work play out for persons with disabilities will be determined largely by the local and national policies of governments and social partners. If the principles of a just transition are done right by, the world of work will move towards a more inclusive and empowering situation for persons with disabilities. They would have equal opportunities at benefitting from new or upgraded green jobs and

the economic empowerment those jobs can offer. For example, skills development initiatives in the renewable energy sector that are disability-inclusive could pave the way for an effective match of green jobs with applicants with disabilities. Similarly, education and training systems focused on conservation agriculture, renewable energy, sustainable tourism or green urban design, among others, could direct efforts at including trainees with disabilities and in doing so, equip them with the knowledge and competencies to compete in the emerging green jobs market. Furthermore, inclusive social protection systems could play an important role in minimizing threats faced by persons with disabilities from both climate impacts and climate actions. In turn, these could contribute towards creating an atmosphere that enables people to invest in their own productive capacity, giving them the potential to enhance innovation and entrepreneurship, both of which are vital for strengthening climate action and building a low-carbon economy.

It is noteworthy that in addition to the greening of the economy, other forces such as those of technological innovations, demographic trends, and globalization are also having a profound impact on the nature and future of

14 – ILO. 2018. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs* (Geneva). Available at <https://www.ilo.org/weso-greening/>

15 – Ibid.

work.<sup>16</sup> For example, exponential technological change, often referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is transforming every aspect of life, and in the world of work, is leading to new opportunities (e.g. the home-based gig economy and new tools for accessibility), and at the same time exacerbating inequalities (e.g. through job automation and increased demand for highly skilled labour). People living longer has led to an increased demand for life-long learning opportunities and calls for redefining the thresholds of ‘retirement’. Cultural attitudes to work are also changing and in some parts of the world are translating to increased emphasis on establishing time sovereignty and work-life balance.<sup>17</sup> In formulating just transition plans, keeping these factors in mind will also prove to be relevant, as some aspects will pose challenges to strengthening climate action, while others could be leveraged and built upon for shaping a low-carbon economy.

### *Existing frameworks to guide action*

Greater engagement and attention to the intersection of persons with disabilities, decent work and climate action is critical for addressing existing inequalities, ensuring effective adaptation and mitigation of climate change, building resilience and promoting the right to work of persons with disabilities. In order to do this, five international frameworks and guidelines provide important benchmarks that should be at the heart of such engagement. In addition, regional and national instruments not listed here also need to be taken into consideration, where relevant.

**The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006, restates, reinforces and develops rights contained in other international human rights instruments and confirms that all such rights apply to persons with disabilities. States Parties to the CRPD recognise in Article 27 the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, which includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible. States Parties also undertake to take appropriate steps, including those mentioned in the CRPD like accessibility and the provision of reasonable

accommodation, to safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, provide the basis for rights-based and inclusive global sustainable development efforts in the coming decade. The SDGs make explicit reference to the need for the inclusion of persons with disabilities including in the context of just transition. The inclusion of persons with disabilities has particular relevance to the SDGs’ emphasis on eradicating poverty (SDG 1); on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (SDG 4); on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8); on reduction of inequality within and among countries (SDG 10); and making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11). Further, SDG target 8.5, in particular - ‘by 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value’ - recognizes that sustainable development is only possible with the active engagement of the world of work towards decent and inclusive jobs.

**The 2015 Paris Agreement within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** lays out an ambitious plan for nations to combat climate change and accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low-carbon future. Signatory parties acknowledge that efforts to mitigate the risks of climate change should respect human rights obligations, including the rights of ‘persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations’.<sup>18</sup> Specific Articles speak directly to the importance of ensuring that adaptation is rights-based and inclusive. Finally, the Paris Agreement gives particular importance to the ‘imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities’.

**The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030** provides a blueprint for achieving the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses. It recognizes that exclusion from society increases vulnerability and risk of losses from climate-induced and human-made disasters, and it explicitly calls for accessibility, inclusion and the principles of universal design throughout the framework. Two focuses of the agreement are noteworthy: (1) the call for a disability

16 – See also ILO. 2019. *ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS\\_711674/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS_711674/lang-en/index.htm)

17 – See also ILO. 2019. *Work for a Brighter Future* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms\\_662410.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_662410.pdf) and ILO. (forthcoming). *Making the Future of Work inclusive for people disabilities [Working title]* (Geneva).

18 – p 2, United Nations. 2015. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*.

perspective to be applied in all planning and policy-making concerning risk management and (2) the call for data related to disaster mortality, economic losses and health impacts be disaggregated by disability in order to build the evidence required to make risk-sensitive investments.

At its 102<sup>nd</sup> Session, in 2013, the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution and a set of conclusions concerning sustainable development, decent work and green jobs. The subsequent policy framework for a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies formed the basis of the **2015 Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for all**, adopted by tripartite consensus. These provide practical suggestions to governments and social partners to formulate, implement and monitor policy frameworks for greening the economy, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities. Social inclusion is a fundamental pillar of the guidelines for a just transition, which state that greening the economy ‘presents many opportunities to achieve social objectives: it has the potential to be a new engine of growth, both in advanced and developing economies, and a net generator of decent, green jobs that can contribute significantly to poverty eradication and social inclusion’.<sup>19</sup> In 2019, the ILO marked its centenary and complemented these guidelines by reiterating the importance, in the Centenary Declaration, of directing efforts towards “ensuring a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions” and “ensuring equal opportunities and treatment in the world of work for persons with disabilities”.<sup>20</sup>

### *An inclusive transition to a low-carbon economy*

The changing trends in the world of work offer significant opportunities to address disability-based discrimination and to promote equality for persons with disabilities at work from the outset. Doing so will yield both immediate and long-term benefits.

In the short- and medium-term, changing the current labour market situation where a large number of persons with disabilities are un- or under-employed can reverse

19 – ILO. 2015. Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/publications/WCMS\\_432859/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/publications/WCMS_432859/lang-en/index.htm)

20 – ILO. 2019. ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS\\_711674/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/texts-adopted/WCMS_711674/lang-en/index.htm)



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the social and economic losses caused by exclusion, estimated by the ILO to cost between 3 and 7 per cent of low- and middle-income countries’ GDP.<sup>21</sup> Education, training and employment for persons with disabilities will accelerate the progress to achieve the SDGs, particularly SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10 and 11.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the goals of all the major international agreements of 2015 – be it the SDGs, the Paris Agreement or the Sendai Framework – stand to make progress when people with disabilities are engaged.

Furthermore, encouraging green businesses owned and controlled by entrepreneurs with disabilities can provide underlying infrastructure support for green industries. At the same time, negative effects of the transition to a low-carbon economy can be minimised by focusing on building capacity and securing green jobs for persons with disabilities. Intersecting identities – such as gender, age, indigenous or ethnic identity, or migrant status – play an exacerbating role in pushing persons with disabilities into informal, part-time, or segregated working arrangements. Paying attention to identity-specific needs, while providing opportunities for decent work, can help counter such marginalization.

In the long term, including persons with disabilities in the design and decision-making processes of new low-carbon sectors will lead to increased integration of universal access and universal design principles and contribute to designing inclusive societies for all. Furthermore, inclusive and decent work will promote positive attitudes about persons with disabilities and

21 – ILO. 2009. *The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work* [Working paper] (Geneva). Available at [http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/working-papers/WCMS\\_119305/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/working-papers/WCMS_119305/lang-en/index.htm)

22 – SDG 1: Eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all; SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries; SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

help undo misconceptions about their work capacities. Negative beliefs and prejudices constitute serious barriers to education, employment, health care and social participation. Instilling positive attitudes about persons with disabilities early on can help ensure future generations value inclusiveness and avoid perpetuating or creating barriers to inclusion.

From a public policy perspective, implementing a just transition that ensures disability inclusion will require appropriate legal standards, social protection mechanisms, skills development initiatives and finally, attitudinal changes at the societal level.

*Legal standards* can promote progress towards more inclusive and decent work during the transition to a low-carbon economy. There is a rich body of international legal standards on the human rights of persons with disabilities and on their inclusion in the world of work. Similarly, international climate change and disaster risk reduction frameworks also provide for a social pillar that prioritizes inclusion and in some instances, makes explicit mention of persons with disabilities (see section on ‘existing frameworks to guide action’ above). These can provide minimum thresholds for countries to generate their own context-specific legal standards that will promote disability inclusion in the transition to environmental sustainability. One concrete area that national legal standards can shape is discrimination-free recruitment. Progress must be made to ensure mainstream green jobs are advertised in accessible ways and that recruitment must be free of discrimination, with persons with disabilities seen as potential contributors to economic activity. Governments can have a profound impact on this by creating an enabling environment through anti-discrimination legislation and by explicitly referencing people with disabilities in national green jobs promotion efforts.

*Social protection systems* can serve as the first line of protection against the negative effects of the transition to greener economies such as loss of jobs, or reduced income. Such systems are still absent in many countries or are weak with limited access for persons with disabilities. ILO reports that about 4 billion people, 55 per cent of the world’s population, are not covered by adequate social security.<sup>23</sup> In the context of a just transition, four social protection tools can offer synergies with disability inclusion: unemployment protection, cash transfer programmes, public employment programmes (PEPs) and

payments for ecosystem services (PES).<sup>24</sup> Unemployment protection schemes and cash transfer programmes, for instance, can play a critical role in supporting workers facing job loss related either to the transition or climate impacts. They facilitate the transition to new jobs, particularly when combined with skills development and job placement or relocation measures. Measures can be included to ensure persons with disabilities are adequately identified and serviced through such schemes. Similarly, PEPs, for example, are mechanisms for direct employment by the government and can be powerful tools to address the impact of climate change on workers and their incomes. Furthermore, PES, although originally conceived with an environmental objective to incentivise eco-friendly practices in agriculture or forestry, can provide effective support for persons with disabilities whose businesses or livelihoods have the potential to go green.

### The Gaibandha Model in Bangladesh: disability-inclusive resilience

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries with respect to climate change. Water stress, sea level rise, cyclones and flooding are just some of the hazards the country is faced with. In Gaibandha district in northern Bangladesh, flooding is a recurring hazard which, apart from risking loss of life, is also proving to be extremely expensive for the communities.

CBM in collaboration with a local NGO called GUK, intervened at three levels: at the household level, people with disabilities were identified and supported individually with rehabilitation measures and livelihood support. At the community level, self-help groups of people with disabilities and community-based Ward Disaster Management Committees (WDMC) were established. At municipal level, formal DPOs were established for the first time, consisting of representatives from all self-help groups.

Every member of the self-help groups received individual guidance and counselling to find themselves an appropriate livelihood and get the necessary assistive devices to enable them to sustain their employment or business. At the same time, a community plan was developed for leaving no one behind in case of flooding. A system was developed whereby when a flood is expected, persons with disabilities who are likely not to receive the early warning are alerted through individual house visits to ensure that no one is left behind. The Gaibandha Model encompasses both targeted employment support for persons with disabilities as well as inclusive governance mechanisms that ensure that persons with disabilities are not bearing the brunt of climate change.

23 – ILO. 2017. *World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_604882/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_604882/lang-en/index.htm)

24 – ILO. 2018. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs* (Geneva). Available at <https://www.ilo.org/weso-greening/>



In addition to legal standards and social protection, it is vital that governments and employers provide the *skills development* needed for workers with disabilities to succeed in green jobs. The necessary skills will differ from context to context and need to be anticipated locally through labour market research and industry-specific studies and assessments in construction, energy, transport, waste management, manufacturing and agriculture, among others. In some contexts, green skills will be best determined through regional assessments in addition to local ones. At the government level, strong coordination and data-sharing between the ministries of labour, skills, environment, climate change and social protection will be important for success. Multi-sectoral bodies formed at the national level, such as national commissions dedicated to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, can also be involved. To meet the demand for new or upgraded skills, education and training systems will need to evolve and ensure equal opportunity for everyone to access training and learning opportunities for successful skills development. Accessibility, reasonable accommodation and disability awareness among trainers and fellow trainees are among the requirements to enable persons with disabilities to take training courses and access mainstream technical and vocational education and training (TVET).<sup>25</sup> In the case of women with disabilities, further measures may be required to encourage them towards training attendance, particularly in countries where their employment training opportunities are limited for social and cultural reasons. Furthermore, indigenous or tribal persons with disabilities would also benefit from the recognition and promotion of traditional knowledge, which has been identified to be vital for climate adaptation in emerging research.<sup>26</sup>

*Attitudinal transformation at the societal level* towards disability is a critical pre-condition for making workplaces inclusive. Public and private employers can play an important role by becoming agents of change and transforming attitudes within their workforces, and in turn strengthening their hiring pipelines. When workplaces arrange trainings and other activities to ensure *all* employees reflect on and transform attitudes about disability, offering opportunities to persons with disabilities will become more and more mainstream. In addition to such training, one of the significant ways in which

25 – ILO. 2017. *Making TVET and skills systems inclusive of persons with disabilities [Policy brief]* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---ifp\\_skills/documents/publication/wcms\\_605087.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_605087.pdf)

26 – ILO. 2019. *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change: Emerging Research on Traditional Knowledge and Livelihoods* (Geneva). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/indigenous-tribal/publications/WCMS\\_686780/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/indigenous-tribal/publications/WCMS_686780/lang--en/index.htm)

businesses can ensure equal opportunity is by engaging disabled people's organizations (DPOs). This can help tap the talent pool of persons with disabilities. Often, persons with disabilities may be hesitant to apply for jobs they do not think they will get, so their talent and interest remain under the hiring radar. To address this, companies can start by engaging with DPOs and NGOs that support the inclusion of people with disabilities. Equal treatment at the workplace must also be ensured to set workers with disabilities up for success and self-actualization. Many persons with disabilities have reported being placed in positions where there is "less of a fit" between their skills and demands of the job. They report less empowerment on the job, less perceived lack of organizational support, lower quality relationships with their managers and less fair work arrangements in comparison to employees without disabilities.<sup>27</sup> Training programmes and opportunities to connect with other employees will help ensure that persons with disabilities develop and succeed. The organizational code of conduct, culture and leadership can have a powerful impact on how inclusive, respectful, empowering and equal a workplace is. Mentoring and coaching initiatives can also be vital. Nevertheless, the foundation of the above-mentioned measures will be transforming the attitudes towards disability.



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27 – Nishii, L., & Bruyere, S. (2014). *Inside the Workplace: Case Studies of Factors Influencing the Engagement of People with Disabilities* (Cornell University). Available at <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1351/>

### Targeted capacity-building and transparency by Siemens Gamesa Renewable

Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy, based in Spain, is the world's second-largest wind turbine company and provides onshore and offshore wind services around the world.

In Hull, UK, Siemens Gamesa partnered with Pathway Plus in 2017 to offer internships to students with disabilities and subsequently provide them employment at Siemens Gamesa in the UK. Interns were given work placements in various departments in the wind turbine blade factory to build their capacity and develop skills necessary for factory employment. This kind of targeted capacity-building can ensure that the skills persons with disabilities gain are aligned with the needs of the sector.

In Canada, Siemens Gamesa publicly announced a multi-year accessibility plan for 2017–2021 that aims to remove accessibility barriers for its employees and customers and to align its operations with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA). The accessibility plan focuses on concrete steps to remove barriers and enhance the experience of both employees and customers with disabilities. Making such a plan public can increase transparency and accountability for a business and ultimately inspire trust and goodwill.

## Conclusion

A global transition towards a low-carbon economy has both positive and negative impacts on the world of work, but the transition is expected to be a net generator of jobs. Against the backdrop of high global under- and unemployment of persons with disabilities, as well as the persistence of discrimination, a just transition - with its inherent focus on social inclusion and poverty eradication - offers the unique opportunity of maximizing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, while minimizing the negative impacts of the transition. In addition to more effective climate change action, which relies on whole-of-society approaches to be successful, this can also lead to increased economic empowerment and reduced vulnerability among persons with disabilities. For employers, it can lead to reaping the benefits of leveraging a previously under-utilized talent pool.

Implementing a just transition to a low-carbon economy that aims to leave no one behind will require a context-specific and locally determined mix of legal standards, social protection, skills development and attitudinal transformation that create an enabling environment for green jobs to perpetuate and decent work opportunities

for persons with disabilities to proliferate. If done right, a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all can contribute to the goals of achieving social justice, decent work, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty. At this unique time that climate action is accelerating and the transition to green economies has started to take form, a just transition - that is inherently disability-inclusive - represents a unique opportunity to shape a future that works for all.

## Key recommendations

### Governments can:

- Formulate national plans for a just transition, creating decent work as well as green jobs, in line with the ILO “Climate Action for Jobs” initiative presented by the UN Secretary-General at the 2019 Climate Summit and ensure space for persons with disabilities in the plans.
- Ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and in just transition strategies and plans, including through consultation and engagement with DPOs and networks.
- Ensure mainstream public employment services, including any specialized green job employment services, are accessible for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure all green skills development, including TVET systems, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship programmes, are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- In plans to manage and reduce the adverse impacts of climate change through social protection programmes, ensure that persons with disabilities are prioritized.
- Review legal frameworks to ensure that green jobs and green contracts promote disability inclusion, e.g. by adding a requirement of employing a locally determined percentage of persons with disabilities.
- Collect disability-disaggregated data on labour markets, including new and emerging green sectors.

### Enterprises can:

- Implement the ten principles of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network Charter designed to create equal opportunities at the workplace for persons with disabilities.<sup>28</sup>

28 – ILO Global Business and Disability Network. Available at <http://www.businessanddisability.org>

- Develop traineeship-to-employment programmes for persons with disabilities that are aimed at meeting the demand for green skills.
- Conduct an accessibility audit of their physical and digital spaces and be prepared to make reasonable adjustments based on individual needs, where required.
- Connect with DPOs, community groups, disability advocates and experts to promote disability inclusion, including through strengthening the hiring pipelines.
- Join employer-led national networks on disability to benefit from peer-to-peer support and to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace.

#### Trade unions can:

- Include disability inclusion issues in their promotion of a just transition.
- Include just transition issues in their promotion of the labour rights of persons with disabilities.
- Strengthen partnerships between the workers' movement and the disability sector.
- Enhance awareness about green jobs and opportunities in a low-carbon economy for persons with disabilities.
- Support training of persons with disabilities on climate change related issues to enhance engagement at national and international levels.

#### UN and international organizations can:

- Develop and continue to update guidance on making climate change strategies disability-inclusive with

a focus on just transition, and ensuring coherence between national climate action plans and national disability strategies.

- Develop guidance on adjusting existing national disability strategies to account for climate change impacts on the labour market and implications for workers and entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Facilitate exchange, dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders on just transition and disability.
- Integrate concerns and needs of persons with disabilities in climate change and disaster risk reduction related discussions at international and regional levels.
- Promote the collection of internationally comparable, reliable and valid data on people with disabilities' access to labour markets, including new green sectors.

#### Non-governmental organizations can:

- Those working in the areas of climate change and green livelihoods should ensure interventions are disability-inclusive.
- Those working on disability should engage in the climate change and just transition discussions at the global, regional and national levels.

#### Development partners can:

- Make disability inclusion a priority while funding just transition initiatives and incentivize disability-sensitive programme design, monitoring and reporting.



## Key websites

[ILO topical portal on “Green Jobs”](#)

[ILO topical portal on “Disability and Work”](#)



**Green Jobs Programme**  
Enterprises Department  
Email: [greenjobs@ilo.org](mailto:greenjobs@ilo.org)

**International Labour Organization (ILO)**  
4, route des Morillons  
CH-1211 Geneva 22  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 799 6730  
Website: [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

**Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch (GED)**  
Conditions of Work  
and Equality Department  
Email: [ged@ilo.org](mailto:ged@ilo.org)