



# Investing in inclusion

**A handbook for businesses on disability-inclusive education, training, and employment**

**Report of the Global Business Coalition  
for Education Disability Task Force prepared  
in collaboration with Includovate Pty Ltd  
February 2022**

**} Global Business  
Coalition For  
Education**



**The Global Business Coalition for Education** is a movement of businesses dedicated to ending the global education crisis. Theirworld established the Global Business Coalition for Education in 2012 upon recognition that the business community was an important constituency with the potential to more proactively support global education in a sustainable and scalable manner.

Today, GBC-Education has become one of the most effective forums for connecting businesses that aim to make an impact on the lives of young people, with a network of more than 150 influential private sector companies committed to best practice in supporting education and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**Includovate** is a research incubator that designs solutions for inequality and exclusion in low-income countries. As a 100% female-owned social enterprise headquartered in Ethiopia and Australia, it encourages the development of participatory methodologies with an extensive pool of experts across anthropology, economics, evaluation, and social science.

[www.gbc-education.org](http://www.gbc-education.org)

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## Abbreviations

<b>AI</b>	artificial intelligence
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations)
<b>DEI</b>	Disability Equality Index®
<b>DIB</b>	Development Impact Bond
<b>ERG</b>	employee resource group
<b>ESG</b>	environmental, social, and corporate governance
<b>HR</b>	human resources
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technology
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>JAWS</b>	Job Access with Speech
<b>NEET</b>	not in education, employment, or training
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NVDA</b>	non-visual desktop access
<b>OPDs</b>	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
<b>PEAT</b>	Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology
<b>SME</b>	small and medium enterprise
<b>SIB</b>	Social Impact Bond
<b>TVET</b>	technical and vocational education and training
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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# 1. Disability inclusion: overview

**One billion people — 15% of the world’s population — live with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> They amount to the world’s largest minority group, but everywhere children and adults with disabilities face barriers that prevent their full and equal participation in education, employment, and society.**

Businesses are uniquely positioned to play an important role in fostering disability inclusion in the workplace, and in society generally. From consumers and employees, to governments and stakeholders, the private sector has the power to lead and catalyze others to promote the rights, abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities. This applies to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as major corporations.

Accessible and assistive technologies are particularly powerful enablers of inclusion<sup>2</sup> with the potential to lay the foundation for full participation of persons with disabilities in “the future of work”.<sup>3</sup> If accessibly designed, technological solutions can remove barriers and facilitate access to education, employment, and participation in the community.

This report provides guidance and highlights specific practices to help businesses effectively include and engage persons with disabilities as students, employees, consumers, and partners through:

- Establishing disability-inclusive hiring, employment practices, and corporate culture
- Promoting disability-inclusive education and training
- Tapping into the spending power of the world's largest minority
- Creating assistive technologies to facilitate inclusive education and employment for persons with disabilities
- Investing in partnerships that empower persons with disabilities and disability inclusion stakeholders.

This report shows that the benefits for businesses that practice disability inclusion are manifold, including:

- Expanded consumer base
- Inclusive design and product development
- Expanded talent pool
- Improved employee retention
- Improved corporate culture
- Increased brand value and consumer loyalty
- Higher productivity.

Hiring persons with disabilities and building an inclusive workplace culture increases teamwork, commitment, and employee morale for those with and without disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Businesses that invest in disability-inclusive education and training nurture skills and talent in the future workforce, create new innovations and business opportunities, and more affluent consumers. By targeting persons with disabilities as consumers

through improving service experiences and designing inclusive products, businesses benefit from tapping into a consumer group that is the world's third largest after the United States and China.<sup>5</sup>

Businesses that commit to and practice disability inclusion reap the benefits of engaging the world's largest minority group as employees, students, and partners.<sup>6</sup> Leading companies that followed best practice on inclusion are twice as likely to have higher total shareholder returns than their peers.<sup>7</sup>

The business community is equipped with diverse resources to improve disability inclusion. These include employee volunteerism and expertise; goods and services; supply chains; corporate social responsibility; environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) investment; philanthropy; and human resources policies.<sup>8</sup> Not only do individual businesses have the capacity to provide inclusive workplaces and decent work for persons with disabilities, but the private sector has the power to lead and catalyze other sections of society to promote the rights and contributions of persons with disabilities.

The opportunities for action for businesses outlined in this report make one thing clear: every company can do something. Action must start with challenging entrenched ideas that disability inclusion is a matter of narrow compliance such as providing accessible toilets or minority hiring quotas.

There is evidence from some countries (including Germany, the US and France) indicating that a disability quota system can become a barrier to getting more people with disabilities into the workplace.<sup>9</sup> Often organisations are prepared to pay financial penalties instead of hiring disabled people because they lack the confidence to get things right. These countries tend to operate a medical model of disability rather than a social model, which means their recruitment relies on medical evidence to offer employment support. This often means interventions can be expensive and employees are reluctant to declare their disability for fear of being excluded. By contrast, in a social model of disability, such as in

the UK, interventions are much cheaper and do not require medical proof, with the result that employees are more likely to request help.

Businesses must fully capitalize on disability inclusion as a leading component of their diversity and inclusion strategy. This report highlights businesses that are already shifting the paradigm in disability inclusion, identifying valuable actions to leverage their expertise, resources, and brand identities for social change. The report also shows that although disability inclusion may carry costs, they are not as significant as those unfamiliar with the subject might assume, though the benefits are so much greater. A large survey conducted by the Business Disability Forum shows that the return on investment in spending for disabled employees has a net positive financial impact on the employer by a factor as high as three to one, taking into consideration hidden costs such as absenteeism and loss of talent.<sup>10</sup>

Disability inclusion should be a business priority, not something that is 'nice to have' but a 'must-have'. The development of solutions for disability inclusion is a critical opportunity for businesses to engage with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>11</sup> which are anticipated to generate at least US\$12 trillion in business opportunities and an estimated 380 million new jobs by 2030.<sup>12</sup> Realizing these opportunities will require leadership and foresight from the business sector.

When businesses leverage their resources and expertise to create a more inclusive environment, progress, potential, and prosperity are realized for all. Inclusive businesses are an important foundation for inclusive societies and inclusive social change is undeniably good for business. ●

## Box 1

### Clarifying terms: persons with disabilities and disability inclusion

**Persons with disabilities** are identified in Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), or CRPD, as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.<sup>13</sup>

**Disability inclusion** refers to the process of removing barriers (e.g. social and attitudinal, environmental, and institutional) that hinder the equal participation of persons with disabilities, including in education and employment. This approach is grounded in a commitment to ensure the fundamental human rights of persons with disabilities to participate equally in society.

The authors note that other terminology is used and favoured by some groups and organisations. Please see the Annex for more.

## Endnotes

- 1 Fu et al. (2019).
- 2 ITU. (2013).
- 3 ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN) and Fundación ONCE. (2019).
- 4 Baart & Maarse. (2017); Pérez et al. (2018).
- 5 Anderson & Kennedy. (2018).
- 6 Accenture. (2018).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Theirworld. (2021).
- 9 Richard & Hennekam. (2021).
- 10 Scott-Parker. (2014).
- 11 See, for example, AkzoNobel et al. (2014); OECD. (2016). The Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals commit to “leave no one behind”, a bold vision entailing ending oppression and marginalization based on gender, ethnicity, geography, disability, race, or other status (United Nations, 2018; PwC, 2015; BSDC, 2017; OECD, 2016).
- 12 Business and Sustainable Development Commission (BSDC). (2017).
- 13 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>



## 2. Sustainable investments in persons with disabilities

### 1. Mutually reinforcing investments

Persons with disabilities are key stakeholders in the business community. Disability Hub Europe's '360° approach' for business identifies persons with disabilities as employers, consumers, suppliers, employees, and community members.<sup>14</sup> As such, persons with disabilities interact with businesses in multiple, overlapping ways.

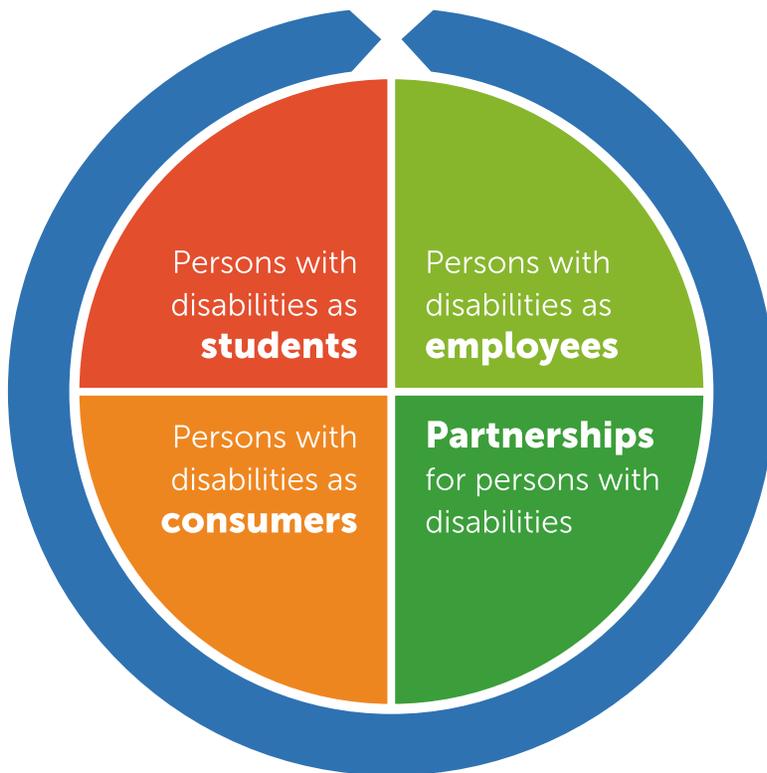


Figure 1 introduces a framework for disability inclusion that identifies how businesses interact with persons with disabilities as employees, students, and consumers. The fourth element – partnerships for persons with disabilities – highlights that businesses benefit from partnerships with persons with disabilities and with other disability inclusion stakeholders, including governments, business networks, and organizations of persons with disabilities.

**Figure 1**  
**Disability inclusion by the business community**

## 2. Persons with disabilities as students

Research shows that there are now 240 million children with disabilities around the world.<sup>15</sup> In low- and middle-income countries, some 50 per cent of children with disabilities are out of school,<sup>16</sup> a total of at least 40 million. They face a range of barriers to education, including school facilities and materials that are inaccessible to them, teachers who lack the training to support them, a lack of appropriate assistive technologies and cultural factors that keep them 'hidden' at home.<sup>17</sup> These issues are compounded further for girls with disabilities, because they are more likely than boys to face extra, cultural barriers to education.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore we are compounding the problem of the world not benefiting from the huge talent and potential of persons with disabilities.

The business community is increasingly active in education because education drives business. Without an educated labor force, businesses face shortfalls in talent, innovation, and consumers. Businesses that invest in disability-inclusive education and training fuel the skills and talent of the future workforce, ensure new innovations and business opportunities, and create more affluent consumers. It's a win-win situation for employees, shareholders, customers, and suppliers.

## 3. Persons with disabilities as employees

This is a major untapped talent pool. Across the world, persons with disabilities have lower employment rates than the general population. In 2020, New Zealand reported that 24% of persons with disabilities were employed compared with 72% of persons without disabilities. Furthermore, employed persons with disabilities in New Zealand earn a median weekly income 44% lower than that earned by non-disabled persons.<sup>19</sup> These trends are not unique to New Zealand and are reflected globally in workforce statistics.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, in July 2018, only 29% of Americans of working age with disabilities were participating in the workforce, compared with 75% of Americans without a disability.<sup>21</sup>

Hiring persons with disabilities and building an inclusive workplace culture increases teamwork, commitment, and employee morale for those with and without disabilities,<sup>22</sup> and is associated with improved financial returns,<sup>23</sup> as well as a more social and collaborative workforce.

A recent analysis shows that companies led by executives focusing on disability engagement experienced 2.9 times larger sales growth and 4.1 times larger profit growth when compared with their peers.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, many persons with disabilities in employment must contend with work environments that are not inclusive, despite the clear returns to companies from inclusive workplaces. Beyond the hiring processes, companies should examine the inclusive nature of their culture, environment and accommodations.



## 4. Persons with disabilities as consumers

Comprising one billion individuals and US\$8 trillion in disposable income, as a consumer group, persons with disabilities comprise the world's third largest economic power.<sup>25</sup> The business community has, however, yet to fully capitalize on this market with sufficient quantity and quality of inclusive and accessible products and services. More than half of business leaders report that the topic of disability rarely or never comes up on their leadership agenda.<sup>26</sup> In turn, persons with disabilities report between 75% and 80% of their customer service experiences are 'failures'.<sup>27</sup> The biggest spending power lies with the baby-boomer generation, which has accumulated substantial wealth through property ownership and savings, but is also at the greatest risk of disability and exclusion from the commercial marketplace due to inaccessible environments and IT platforms.

Many companies continue to see disability inclusion not as a source of market opportunity, but as a matter of compliance — for example, with non-discrimination policies. With a narrow focus on compliance, companies often miss key opportunities to improve service experiences, product inclusiveness, and workplace culture, all of which can deliver financial returns and expand consumer markets.

## 5. Partnerships for persons with disabilities

Inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees, students, and consumers can have numerous positive benefits for businesses and society, and partnerships can serve as a cornerstone in realizing this potential. Effective partnerships often also include other partners outside the business sector, such as civil society organizations, international organizations and networks, and governments. Partnerships with and for persons with disabilities offer the business community opportunities for mutually reinforcing strategic interventions at multiple levels:

- At the **micro level**, businesses can partner with persons with disabilities to embed inclusive practices and accessibility considerations into their core business and their employment practices, adopting universal design principles and growing their customer base.
- At the **middle level**, businesses can collaborate with diverse partners within and outside the business community to strengthen inclusive education and training systems, and advance employment inclusivity across industries or regions. This can include engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities and business networks to share best practice.
- At the **macro level**, the global business community can be a powerful force when it comes to setting policy agendas; establishing standards and priorities; investing in supporting strong, inclusive public systems; and driving equitable, inclusive growth. Through channels such as the United Nations Global Compact, for example, businesses can partner with intergovernmental organizations, national governments, and international advocacy groups to contribute to global disability inclusion efforts.<sup>28</sup>

The private sector was well represented at the first Global Disability Summit in 2018, hosted by the International Disability Alliance and the UK government. It created more than 1,000 new, ambitious and widespread commitments designed to achieve real change for persons with disabilities. Dozens of major companies signed up to its Charter for Change, including Reed Smith, the global law firm. Hundreds of governments, multilateral agencies and civil society organizations, including GBC-Education, were also signatories. The second summit is due to be held in Oslo in February 2022. ●

## Box 2

### Data collection as a cross-cutting enabler for disability inclusion

#### **Enhanced data collection is critical to assess disability prevalence and the benefits of accommodation and inclusion efforts, especially in the Global South.**

Although general data on the proportion of persons with disabilities is commonly available, there is a need for more granular data that will allow for deeper analysis particularly on the intersectional impacts of disabilities (e.g. to further illustrate persons with disabilities by sex, age, geographical location, educational attainment, etc.). This deeper analysis can ensure that businesses, educational institutions, employers, and states are equipped to maximize services for persons with disabilities and to guarantee the right attention for the most marginalized.

Businesses often monitor data on inclusion across multiple facets of human diversity, including race, gender, sexuality, and religion, with less focus on disability. Vibhu Sharma, a disability and inclusion researcher at Theirworld, reports that disability is often “left behind” in wider diversity efforts due to a lack of data collection, something reflected in research by the International Disability Alliance.<sup>29</sup>

Data collection can increase accountability and decrease the number of “diversish” companies that are selectively inclusive of some kinds of people.<sup>30</sup>

Businesses can contribute to enhanced data collection on persons with disabilities in multiple ways by:

- **Ensuring** that the firm-level data covers these different elements
- **Advocating** within business networks for other firms to do the same and sharing best practice
- **Sharing** company expertise with organizations of people with disabilities to improve their capacity to collect data
- **Partnering** with governments, organizations for people with disabilities, and/or technology companies to develop products and services that enable better data collection.

## Endnotes

- 14 Disability Hub Europe. (2021).
- 15 Unicef, 2021. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>
- 16 Hi 2020. <https://hi.org/en/news/half-of-children-with-disabilities-still-excluded-from-the-school-system>
- 17 International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (ICFGE). (2016).
- 18 World Health Organization (WHO). (2011).
- 19 Stats NZ. (2020).
- 20 International Labour Organisation (ILO). (2020).
- 21 Accenture. (2018).
- 22 Baart & Maarse. (2017); Pérez et al. (2018).
- 23 Accenture. (2020).
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Anderson & Kennedy. (2018).
- 26 The Valuable 500. (2019).
- 27 Donovan. (2020).
- 28 United Nations Global Compact and ILO. (2017).
- 29 International Disability Alliance. (n.d.)
- 30 "Diversish" is a term used by The Valuable 500.



## Case study: Benedicta Oyedayo Oyewole

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**Benedicta Oyedayo Oyewole is a 23-year-old Program Officer at Women's Health and Equal Rights Initiative in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. She is also a Global Youth Ambassador with the global education charity Theirworld.**

I am one of the privileged estimated 10% to get an education as a person with disability in Nigeria. A lot of persons with disabilities, especially women and girls, do not have access to education because of various barriers and discrimination from families, the educational sector and the societal perception of persons with disabilities. There are a limited number of special schools in Nigeria, and often people work there on a voluntary basis and don't necessarily have the right education or training as psychologists or physical therapists.

After my bachelor's degree, I applied for different jobs only for me to show up for the interview, and then they give comments like, "oh, you are not the type of person we are looking for", or "we don't believe you can do the job". Basically, they just believe you can't do it because persons with disability are oftentimes assumed to be incapable, not able to function properly.

Before Covid, I went for an interview with an event management company. I was sitting before he [the interviewer] came into

the office, so he didn't see my disability. It was so very exciting. It was a fantastic interview and he made so many promises, but when he realised that I was a person with a disability everything dropped. I was supposed to be going out for this event, and he said just to work in the office.

In Nigeria the disability mainstreaming has a very negative perspective. In our movies, in our documentaries, in our drama, persons with disabilities are often people that need help, people that cannot perform basic activities. And as we all know, Nigeria is a very religious place, so some believe that it's like a curse, a child with a disability is a curse, so if they are not cured at birth, they are made to hide from the world and no one knows they exist.

My parents have been supportive and through them, I got access to information and resources to human rights violations and also human rights defenders. With my interaction on the digital space, I've met other people like me. We bond over our shared experiences. So that has increased my resilience because I embody multiple marginalised identities. I am a woman, I am a disabled woman, and I am also a queer disabled woman living in Nigeria. Nigeria has discriminatory laws and harmful traditional and cultural practices.

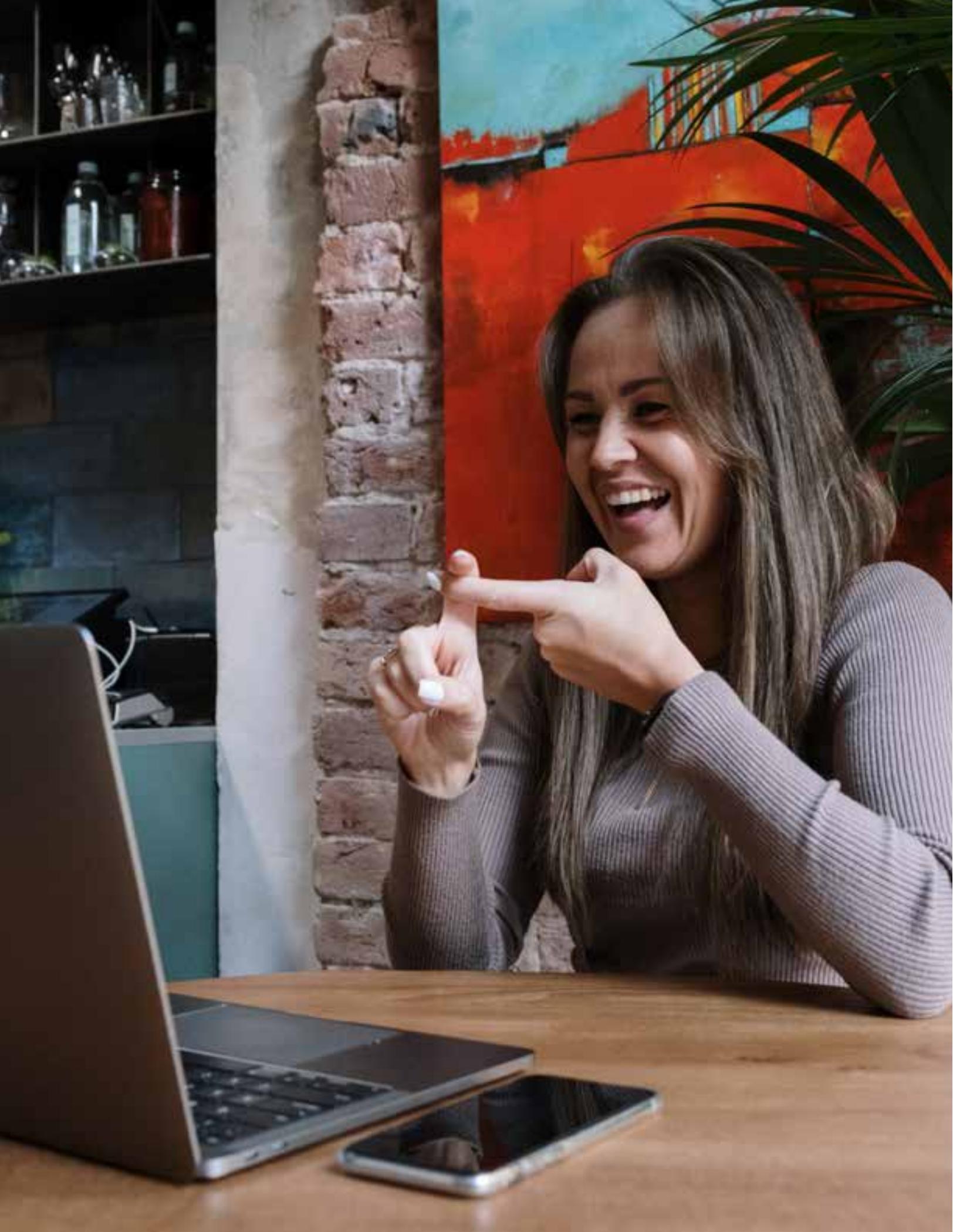
In 2019 Nigeria passed the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act. Discrimination against persons with disabilities is now illegal. Public organisations

are required to reserve 5% of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but people with disabilities still experience difficulties accessing safe, secure and qualified employment. It said that in five years all public buildings would be made accessible. At the moment almost none are. Let's see what happens.

I have cerebral palsy, which affects my mobility, dexterity, and my speech sometimes. I have lived with this disability all my life.

I can't go up stairs, so I can't take public transport. I have to pay and take cab hailing services or taxis to work, which is very, very expensive. I cannot go to some banks. Either I'm carried inside or I'm leaning on someone or the bank officials come outside to attend to me. I've fallen a lot because I try to navigate inaccessible structures and climb the stairs and I fall over and over and over again.

There's still a lot more work to be done in terms of access in Nigeria, but this is something I live with every day. When I talk about this, I'm often perceived as being sensitive or being angry, but I wouldn't be if I could even get ice cream because the ice cream place had a ramp. ●



# 3.

## Framework for action: disability inclusion in practice

**Whatever their size, businesses can support and advance inclusion for people with disabilities as students, employees, and consumers.**

Before going into more detail about how to put disability inclusion into action, businesses that are in the early stages of engaging with the issue may find useful a summary of disabilities, common assistive technologies and information about how they may be applied. They may be unaware that many solutions are available within common computer devices and software, free of charge.

Many people may be familiar with sensory disabilities, for example, sight and hearing challenges and physical disabilities such as those related to motor skills. There is, however, a range of mental and intellectual disabilities that hinder full and effective participation, which are often overlooked. Among these are autism, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. For employers, these disabilities can be challenging to detect and cater for.

Disability access remains uneven around the world. In many countries, it ranges from very poor to barely acceptable. In many richer nations, traditional infrastructure adjustments, like ramps, have helped to improve the accessibility of physical structures and are becoming more common in the workplace as well as accessible parking, tactile signage and wayfinding, and low-level tactile push buttons to open doors and to operate elevators. Increasingly common are assistive technologies to aid in the workplace, such as screen-readers, audio augmentation and accessibility programming built into software such as Microsoft Office, which is often underutilized

by businesses through lack of awareness. An inclusion-minded business will work to ensure that every internal platform — the payroll system, travel tool, or intranet — is completely accessible.

An inclusion-sensitive company will work to ensure that necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments are made to place people with disabilities on an equal footing in the workplace. ●

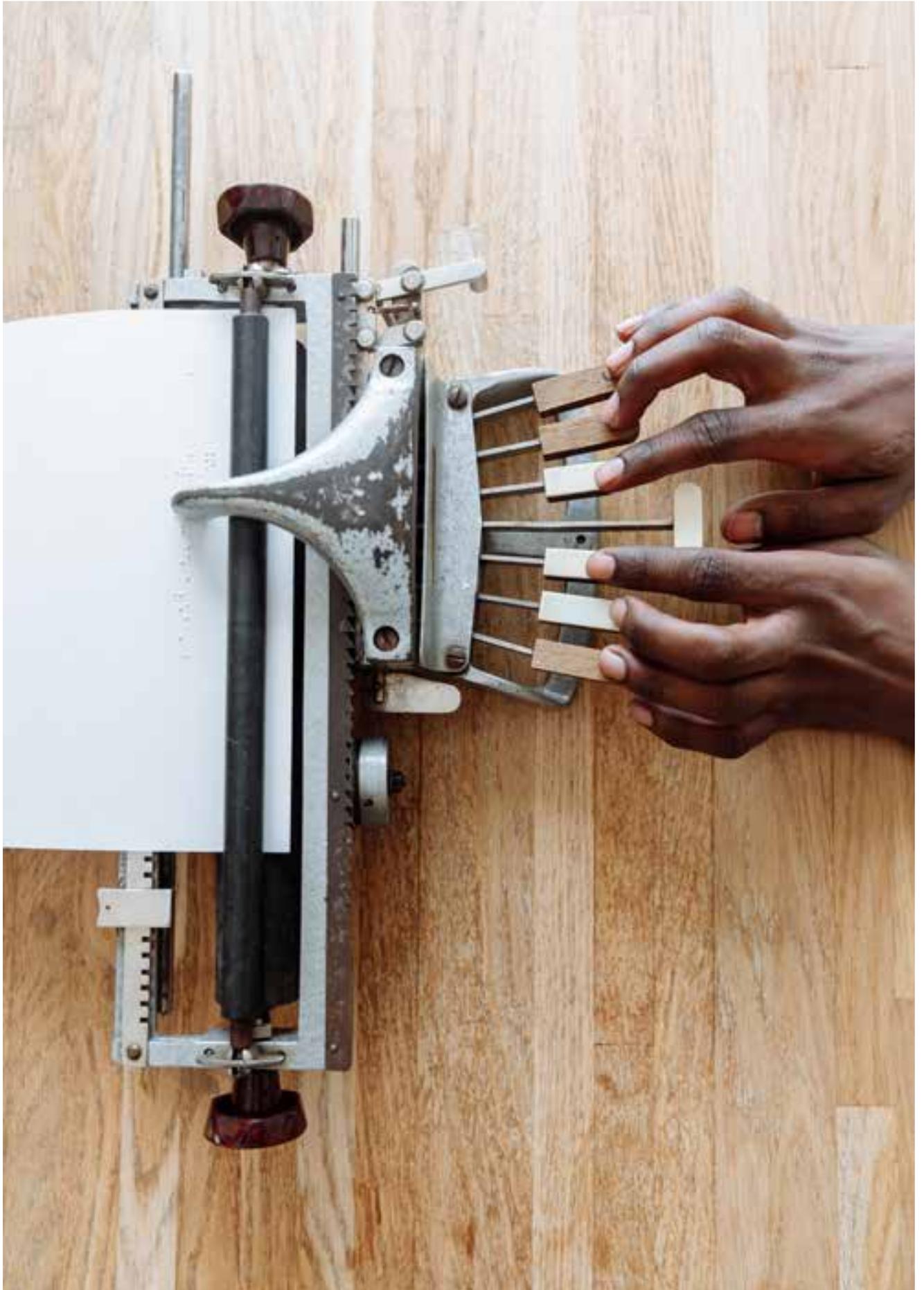
### Box 3

#### Clarifying terms: assistive and accessible technology

**Assistive technology** is specifically designed to enable a person with an impairment to perform a task or function. It encompasses a wide range of hardware and software tools and devices that facilitate mobility, hearing, vision, communication, and other capacities.

**Accessible technology** is designed with the needs of diverse users in mind and can be used successfully by persons with a wide range of functional abilities.





## Box 4

### Some common assistive technologies

**Adobe Acrobat Reader:** The full version of Acrobat helps create accessible PDFs

**Blue light filter glasses:** To reduce exposure to blue light and avoid strain to the eyes keep the circadian rhythm functioning optimally

**Braille Display:** Electro-mechanical device displaying Braille characters. blind and partially sighted computer users who cannot use a standard computer monitor can use it to read text output

**Color overlays, Texthelp, Brightday, Nurkor, Focusband:** Various software to eliminate or alleviate a wide range of reading and comprehension difficulties

**Dragon Naturally Speaking software:** Speech recognition software to give commands to your computer

**Ergonomic cushion:** Ergonomic seat design recommended by orthopedists and other doctors to help relieve back pain and pain from sciatica and other conditions

**Ergonomic keyboard and mouse:** Helps prevent carpal-tunnel syndrome

**Foot rest:** For posture correction

**Grammarly:** Grammar-checking software, very useful for persons with Dyslexia

**Happylight therapy lamps and boxes:** Light therapy that brings the daylight indoors. Full spectrum or natural light provides important signals to the body to help you relax, focus, and feel revitalized

**Headsets:** Wide range of speakers and headsets from Jabra and other leading companies with active noise cancellation and intelligent call control and transfer technologies, e.g. Jabra Evolve Series, Jabra Speak, Plantronics Encore, Bone Conduction and ADDASOUND

**Headspace:** Headspace is a mindfulness app that provides guide on meditations, animations, articles and videos

**JAWS (Job Access with Speech):** A screen reader application for Windows, which allows blind and partially sighted users to read the screen either with a text-to-speech output or by a refreshable Braille display

**Jouse 3 mouthstick:** A mouth-controlled USB joystick, plug-and-play solution for alternative cursor control and access for computers and mobile devices

**Laptop riser:** Height adjustable laptop risers

**Large font keyboards with tri-color backlight:** Big keys and large fonts keyboard to enable partially sighted persons

**Manual wheelchair:** Sturdy steel frame wheelchair that can be hand pushed

**Medical walker:** Lightweight and foldable medical walker

**Microsoft applications:** Accessibility checking in Word, Excel and PowerPoint; real caption and translation accessibility; email accessibility checks; live captions in meetings; speech to text in 70+ languages

**Microsoft Insights:** Helps persons with Dyslexia stay on point

**Microsoft Power Automate:** Helps persons with Dyslexia stay focused and avoid repetitive tasks

**Motorized wheelchair:** Lightweight electric wheelchair that may also be hand pushed

**NVDA:** Non-visual Desktop Access — A free, open-source screen reader for Microsoft Windows, which helps the blind and partially sighted use computers by reading text on screen out loud.

NVDA can also convert text into braille

**Recordable conferencing platforms:** Platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom offer the ability to record audio and video during meetings, allowing subsequent re-listening

**Thriving Mind / Thriving Together:** A mindfulness app that guides on belonging and dealing with stress

**ViSee Electronic Digital Video Magnifier for TV:** A pluggable reader device that helps to magnify the printed text on the screen

**Wysa:** Mood tracker, mindfulness coach, anxiety helper, and mood-boosting friend. Powered by artificial intelligence using therapy-based techniques, the Wysa penguin is an emotionally intelligent chatbot



## Case study: Michael Buckfield

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**Michael Buckfield is an assistive technology consultant at Microlink, a leading provider of assistive technology and disability management systems to businesses and educational facilities. He lives in Hampshire, England.**

At birth my hearing was about 50 per cent — I could only hear above 50 decibels. It was 1973 and there was still a stigma around deaf people — often people just didn't believe I was deaf. When I was small the doctors thought I had autism, or that I just didn't want to pay attention.

I was seven years old before I got hearing aids, and that was only because I went to a school for autism. When they tried one on me, I heard sounds I had never heard before. My eyes lit up with surprise!

I was sent to mainstream middle school with a Partially Deaf Unit. It was alright but kids would tease and bully me, so I had a lot of behavioural issues. I then got an apprenticeship as a cabinet maker. It was a good job but I wanted more, so at 23 I went to university to study engineering with business and started getting into computers.

I had some personal issues in the second year. The deafness was making things more difficult. I didn't revise enough and failed the first semester exams. Even though I retook and managed to pass three out of four,

they insisted I had to retake the whole year. I appealed but they wouldn't accept it. Maybe it would have been different today but then it was still very, very hard.

I already had a part time job at Microlink, so I spoke to Nasser [Siabi, the company's founder and CEO] and went full time. That was 24 years ago. I started with loading software, then repairing computers and troubleshooting. My work expanded gradually and I now have a lot of experience in assistive technology products and a broad understanding of how they can be applied to people with disabilities.

We devise solutions for blind people or people with muscular-skeletal issues. I help people with seating, desks and sit-stand solutions and explain why they are suffering from pain and how they can overcome it. I also recommend software or hardware. One of my main roles is as a hearing loss specialist. I install induction-loop systems and work with people over the range of hearing loss.

My hearing really deteriorated after 2001. I stopped hearing the birds in the trees. Eventually I decided to have a cochlear implant. It was incredible! I was opened up to all these amazing sounds: I could hear the leaves rustling, the birds tweeting. But I couldn't separate all the ambient noises and speech, so I explored more technology.

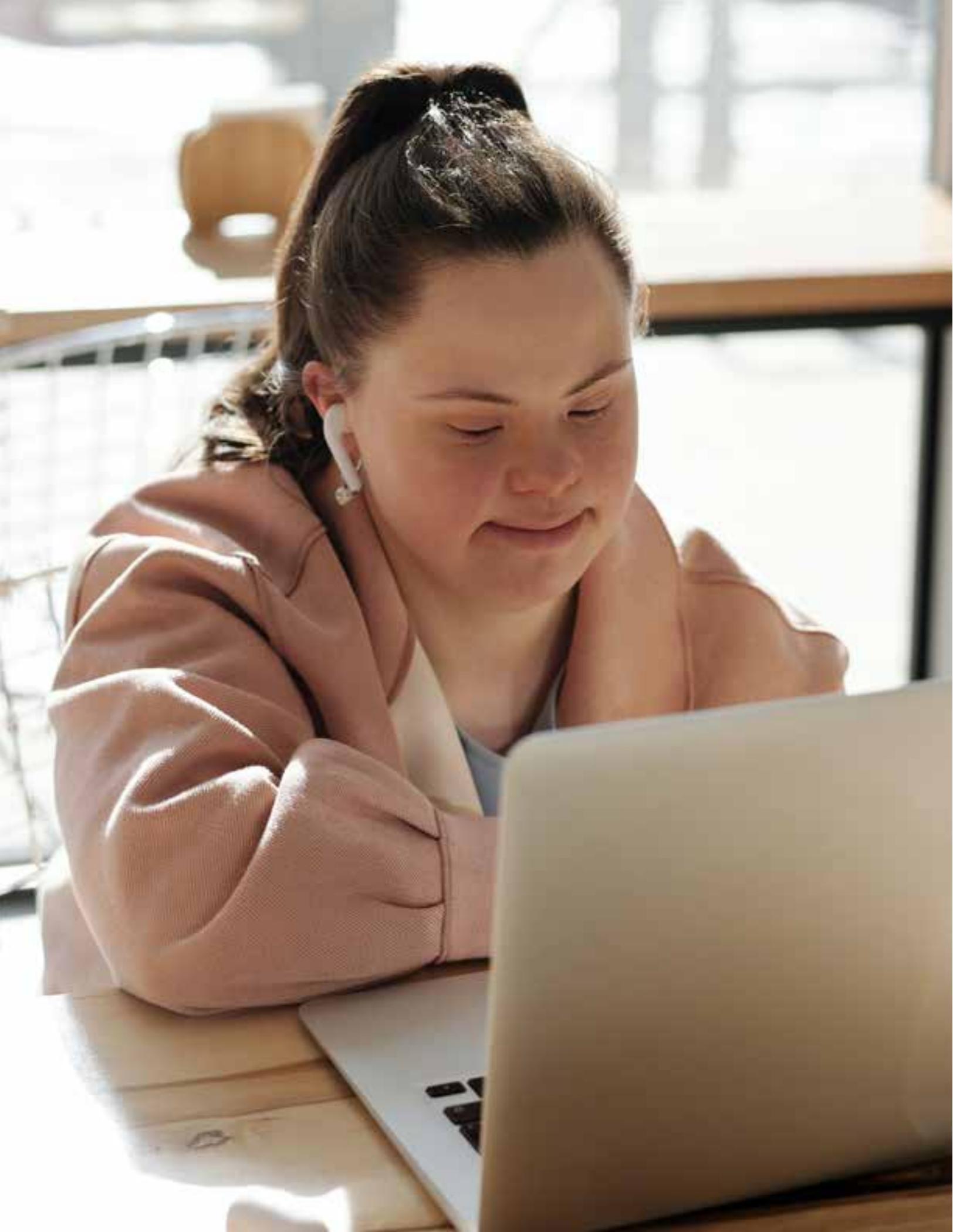
I now use a Phonak Roger Select for conversations. It's a transmitter that filters about 60 to 70 per cent of the noise and

goes direct to your implant or your hearing aids. It allows you to pick up speech with greater clarity. We supply these to a lot of clients in the workplace and they've made a huge difference to them. They are able to use telephones, have small meetings or give presentations, and teachers can speak to a group of deaf children.

There are other people with disabilities in the company — cerebral palsy, dyslexia, poor vision, neuro-diversity issues. We are a very supportive company so we identify their needs and support them.

Before, I didn't try to understand or accept my hearing loss. It caused me a lot of stress and contributed to a couple of breakdowns. But now I understand it better and I even appreciate the benefits of being deaf sometimes — you just take your hearing aids out and you have silence. It's an amazing silence.

Anything is possible in today's world, whereas 30 years ago it was hard. Hearing loss shouldn't be a barrier. I just tell people: you don't have an impairment, you just have hearing loss. You are more than capable. ●



# 4. Inclusive employment and workplace practices

## 1. The business case for inclusion

Disability-inclusive workplaces are key to providing meaningful work opportunities for persons with disabilities in the workplace. Disability-inclusive policies and practices benefit all employees, and companies that employ persons with disabilities increase shareholder value, improve productivity, and enhance company reputation and brand loyalty.<sup>31</sup>

The benefits of improving inclusivity in the workplace include the following:

### **Builds customer loyalty**<sup>32</sup>

Customers look favorably on businesses that employ persons with disabilities, especially those which are inclusive and treat people with disabilities equally and with respect, to the extent that they would consider switching brands on that basis.<sup>33</sup>

### **Increases teamwork, commitment, and morale of all employees**

Studies have found that hiring people with disabilities and building an inclusive workplace culture increases teamwork, commitment, and employee morale for those with and without disabilities.<sup>34</sup>

### **Yields high returns on investment**

Companies with inclusive working environments had improved returns — 28% higher revenue, 30% higher profit margins, and two times net income — over industry peers.<sup>35</sup>

## Promotes talent recruitment

Research suggests that a common oversight by businesses is a failure in recruiting, hiring, and engaging persons with disabilities.<sup>36</sup> Overfocusing on the need to meet quotas or other hiring criteria may overshadow talent and considerations on skills.

## Improves employee retention

Flexible work environments, universal design, accessible technology, and celebration of diversity all have the potential to improve employee experience and retention throughout the workforce (see Box 4).

For example, simplifying and shortening warehouse processes for someone with limited mobility results in a simplified process for all employees, which can improve morale and decrease costs.

Moreover, studies in the US have shown that a majority (56%) of accommodations to improve inclusive employment and workplace practices cost nothing, with the remaining accommodations having a median cost of US\$500, while yielding direct benefits with median estimated value of US\$1500.<sup>37</sup>

### Box 5

#### Spotlight on Vindhya E Infomedia

At Vindhya E Infomedia,<sup>38</sup> a business process outsourcing company in Bangalore, India, approximately 75% of its 1,400 employees are persons with disabilities. Through ensuring access to assistive and accessible technology for employees, such as screen reader software, the company has:

- Achieved an industry-leading employee attrition rate of 5–8%, compared with the industry average of 30–40%
- Built a strong workforce morale
- Established a growing and loyal client base.

## 2. Building inclusive workplaces

Businesses are the key to ensuring that employees with disabilities have inclusive workplaces, access to assistive and accessible technologies, and the support of leadership all the way to executive-level management. Developing inclusive workplaces is not just good for persons with disabilities, but it reaps clear benefits for companies in terms of expanding the talent pool, increasing employee retention, and improving productivity. Here is more detail on how businesses can adopt strategies and cross-cutting pathways that will promote disability-inclusive workplaces, with examples of inclusivity already being practiced.

### Promote accessible physical workspaces for all employees

#### **Embrace universal design**

All businesses can apply principles of universal design — which any kind of employee or consumer can use — to maximize accessibility of workplace infrastructure for all workers.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Incorporate the perspectives of persons with disabilities**

Involve persons with disabilities at every stage of the design process for physical infrastructure and workplace decisions.

#### **Maximize accessibility in the physical workspace**

Modify the physical workspace to create an inclusive environment for employees with disabilities. Adding room dividers or individual offices can minimize noise and distractions, while desks and doorways can be altered to accommodate users of mobility devices such as wheelchairs.

### Provide all necessary accessible and assistive technology to employees

Companies can increase workforce productivity and engagement by learning how to provide the right tools for all their employees. This should

be done at no cost to the employee and should keep pace with advancements in assistive and accessible technology products:

**The Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology** (PEAT) supports workplaces in using inclusive technologies to engage the skills of employees with disabilities.<sup>40</sup> As part of the program, PEAT has:

- Produced a series of digital accessibility toolkits including: procurement of accessible technology, digital accessibility guides, TalentWorks guide to accessible e-recruiting, TechCheck technology accessibility assessment, and accessibility in telework.
- Promoted an inclusive apprenticeship program to develop, test, and evaluate innovative approaches to apprenticeship-based skills training for persons with disabilities.<sup>41</sup> Industry partners to date include Microsoft, Amazon, and the US government.

**Microsoft's AI for Accessibility** grant program<sup>42</sup> works to reduce bias in artificial intelligence (AI) tools for recruitment that can be a barrier to inclusive workplaces, resulting in untapped labor sources and restricted career advancement prospects for persons with disabilities. Through the grant program, Microsoft partners with persons with disabilities, developers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, researchers, and inventors on projects that apply AI to increase the inclusivity of employment and the development of assistive and accessible technology. Some exciting AI developments such as 'Cogmap.ai' help to identify the right talent for the right job.

**"[An organizational] pro-disability climate has a direct effect on the availability of pro-disability technology... Organizations that have a pro-disability climate and a top-down commitment to embracing diversity have a good awareness that making technology accessible is much less costly and difficult than it may appear."**<sup>43</sup>

## Provide flexible work arrangements

Adjust work hours, adopt flexible schedules, and offer remote working options to remove barriers faced by persons with disabilities. The Covid-19 pandemic has compelled many businesses to implement easy and cost-effective accommodations, such as expanding flexible and remote working arrangements. These adaptations are positioned to have a meaningful and long-term positive impact for persons with disabilities, as well as all employees.

## Provide quality healthcare benefits to all employees

Ensuring quality healthcare helps all employees access tools and treatments to enhance their quality of life and that of their families. It is a critical component of maximizing the tools available to employees in the workplace.

## Target inclusive recruitment and hiring

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in hiring persons with disabilities is inaccessible recruitment processes. That is the starting point — managing the entire recruitment cycle from sourcing to onboarding to make the process fully accessible and ensure that persons with disabilities get a foot in the door:

### **Recruit talented persons with disabilities**

Working with organizations of persons with disabilities and others that specialize in recruiting persons with disabilities can maximize a company's access to this talent pool. Prioritize dissemination of vacancy announcements through accessible channels and technologies, including ensuring website accessibility. Job requirements must be non-discriminatory and highlight a desire to receive applications from qualified persons with disabilities.

**PepsiCo** launched Pepsi ACT (Achieving Change Together) in 2013 as a platform to attract and hire talent with disabilities. PepsiCo designed and implemented Pepsi ACT with Disability Solutions, the consulting arm of the

non-profit Ability Beyond, which specializes in working with companies to strengthen their workforce by hiring and retaining people with disabilities.<sup>44</sup>

### **Establish inclusive hiring processes**

Establish human resources (HR) protocols to maximize accessibility of interview formats (e.g. offering additional time where necessary) and accessible locations and/or mediums, such as digital meeting tools. Ensure that onboarding materials are accessible to all new employees and clearly list the available workplace tools and accommodations.

**Microsoft** established a specific Neurodiversity Hiring Program that offers an extended interview process focused on workability, team projects, and skills assessment, to allow neurodiverse candidates to demonstrate their strengths and qualifications.<sup>45</sup>

## **Provide inclusive employee support**

### **Use disability auditing and monitoring tools for the workplace**

Identifying and monitoring key indicators of disability inclusion will support accountability, track progress, and provide opportunities for celebrating improvements.<sup>46</sup> The tools listed below can assist in conducting an Accessibility Audit and Disability Inclusion Assessment to identify opportunities for improvements and develop an action plan moving forward:<sup>47</sup>

- [\*\*Workplace Disability Inclusion Assessment Tool\*\*](#) (US Business Leadership Network)
- [\*\*Accessibility Audit Checklist\*\*](#) and [\*\*Disability Inclusion Scorecard\*\*](#) (Light for the World)
- [\*\*BenchmarkABILITY\*\*](#) (Cornell University)
- [\*\*Global Business and Disability Network Charter Self-Assessment Tool\*\*](#) (ILO Global Business and Disability Network)
- [\*\*Business Disability Forum\*\*](#) (Tech Taskforce's comprehensive Accessibility Maturity Module).

**Establish employee resource groups (ERGs)**

ERGs (and similar groups like affinity groups, business resource groups, and employee network groups) are voluntary, employee-led groups that help foster diverse, inclusive workplaces by developing future leaders, and increasing employee engagement, advocacy, and awareness around inclusion.

**Google's Disability Alliance** is the ERG for Google (and Alphabet). It was founded in 2012 for employees who care about disabilities, learning differences, special needs, and neurodiversity, for themselves or a child, relative, or friend.<sup>48</sup> In 2020, Google's Disability Alliance was recognized as ERG of the Year by Disability:IN.

**Disability:IN's Maturity Model Matrix**<sup>49</sup> offers a blueprint for businesses to develop or build upon existing ERGs at all levels of maturity. The model provides tools for businesses to identify gaps, and measure progress, engagement, and return on investment of disability-focused ERGs.

**Purple Space** is a charity that created connected disability-networks in hundreds of companies throughout the world to share best practice on supporting disabled employees.<sup>50</sup> Every International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December it lights up famous landmarks and buildings in purple.

**Provide accessible professional development**

Provide access to mentorship for employees with disabilities either through a dedicated program or as part of an inclusive program, and provide leadership training and long-term career counselling.<sup>51</sup>

**Nurture talent with disabilities by providing the right training**

The entire training delivery approach needs to be customized as part of organizational culture to make it accessible. Persons with disabilities may need specific accommodation and style of training (accessible venues, virtual courses, interpreters, buddies, longer breaks etc.) to derive full benefit from a learning program.

## Create a corporate culture of inclusion

### Identify entry points

Implement a strategy for disability inclusion — either stand-alone or as a complement to additional strategies — with clear and measurable goals and tracking methods.

**Inclusive Futures' 'Disability-confident employers' toolkit'**<sup>52</sup> offers a portfolio of practical guides, checklists, case studies, and resources for businesses to build disability inclusion in the workplace, with specific guidance for select countries in the Global South.

### Lead from the top

Senior management must lead on disability inclusion and be accountable for progress. The '2020 Global Economics of Design Report' indicates that having even a single senior business leader accountable for inclusion encourages success in engaging disability markets.<sup>53</sup> Establishing a dedicated high-level position for disability inclusion can promote leadership and implementation. Managers at all levels must be informed, equipped, and accountable for promoting inclusion.

### Create an inclusive work environment

Supportive management practices that create trust and rapport in addition to supporting the different needs of each employee are critical to creating an inclusive work environment. Providing diversity training to all company employees, including management, and supporting workplace champions or allies can facilitate inclusion between employees.

## Partner with other businesses in the supply chain<sup>54</sup>

Disability inclusion extends beyond the workplace. Companies can leverage their procurement processes and supply chains to amplify and advocate for inclusive practices in the wider industry and across sectors.

**Kenya Breweries Limited** (KBL) partnered with Sightsavers, an international NGO, to develop new policies and business practices to increase representation of persons with disabilities throughout the KBL

value chain. The company started to issue farming contracts to smallholder farmers with disabilities in 2020. In 2021, KBL aimed to implement an affirmative action arrangement to increase recruitment of persons with disabilities into formal employment opportunities, with a target of persons with disabilities representing at least 3% of employees across the value chain by 2025.

**The Business Disability Forum Global Taskforce** has many useful policy and practice guides and best practices shared by global enterprises working towards disability inclusion.<sup>55</sup>

## Share best practices

Companies that share best practices and strategies for persons with disabilities as employees are well situated to promote messages of their value and productivity as employees, which change business perceptions.

**JPMorgan Chase & Co** promotes their Four A's Roadmap, 'Attitude, Accommodations, Accessibility, and Assimilation', within the global business community. According to Jim Sinocchi, Head of Disability Inclusion:

**"If companies work on those four areas, they'll become part of the new era of hiring people with disabilities and enabling them to contribute to the company and the country... When people with disabilities are seen as C-suite leaders, accessibility and inclusiveness will enrich that enlightened company's culture."**<sup>56</sup>

An excellent case study arose from Lloyds Banking Group talking to the Business Disability Forum.<sup>57</sup>

## Utilise the Disability Equality Index

The Disability Equality Index (DEI)<sup>58</sup> is a joint project between the American Association of People with Disabilities and Disability:IN. Focusing on Fortune 1,000 firms, the DEI provides an avenue for companies to compare their level of disability workplace inclusion with their competitors.<sup>59</sup>

In 2020, 247 corporations participated in the DEI, a historic milestone signifying a 37% increase from 2019. Each year, DEI publishes and promotes lists of top-scoring companies, offering visibility and exposure to high performers as 'Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion'.<sup>60</sup>

### **Amplify messages of disability inclusion**

Companies can highlight inclusion efforts through convening forums, discussions, and debates on disability inclusion. Individual companies and business sector networks are shifting the paradigm on disability as thought leaders generating and disseminating cutting edge evidence on inclusion.<sup>61</sup> For example:

**Microsoft** operates an annual Ability Summit and events during Disability Awareness Month in the US.

**Omnicom UK** hosted the OPEN DisAbility UK + Allies Summit in 2020, with the key objective of equipping their 9,000+ employees with tangible tools and resources to support disability inclusion in the workplace.

**The World Economic Forum's New Economy and Society Platform** produces and shares data, best practices, and benchmarks for advancing disability inclusion in the private sector.<sup>62</sup>

**Accenture, Return on Disability, and the Global Business and Disability Network**, among others, have published key reports outlining the business case and evidence for disability inclusion in the private sector.<sup>63</sup>

**The Valuable 500** (see opposite) has made fantastic progress signing up 500 global companies to include disability at their board-level focus.<sup>64</sup>

## Participate in global business networks

Global business networks provide companies with opportunities to access best practice learnings from other companies and tools created in coordination with leading experts. Such networks can also be important players in national and international advocacy efforts.

**The Global Business and Disability Network** was formed by 25 multinational companies and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2010 and includes national-level disability and business networks.<sup>65</sup>

**The Valuable 500** is an international collective of private-sector corporations committed to building confidence and competence of executives to advance disability inclusion; operationalizing disability inclusion across the value chain; and sharing best practice and benchmarks for disability inclusion. To date, leaders from more than 419 businesses — representing well over 10 million employees — have committed to taking action for disability inclusion in the workplace.<sup>66</sup>

**“It is critical that businesses begin to understand the myth that they assume the cost of hiring persons with disabilities is too high. At times reasonable accommodations can be as simple as work from home. This does not cost anything to the organization and now Covid has proven that this is possible. So, awareness-raising programs are very important. In addition, a CEO should be able to look at other aspects rather than just the cost. Currently they just look at the cost and overlook what they need to be seeing.”**

— Vibhu Sharma, Disability and Inclusion Researcher, Theirworld

## Box 6

### Spotlight on Lemon Tree Hotels' in-house training

**Lemon Tree Hotels chain in India has earned a reputation as a leading disability-inclusive employer**, winning international and national awards for its policies and practices in employing people with disabilities. As of 2018, the company had more than 400 employees with disabilities, comprising 13% of the company's workforce. Lemon Tree Hotels employs an array of training approaches to develop the skills of diverse employees and potential recruits. Their effective practices include:

- Partnering with organizations of people with disabilities and NGOs to develop and deliver training tailored to the needs of diverse trainees
- Conducting mandatory sign-language classes for all new employees (at every level of hearing), and offering monthly refresher training for all employees
- Offering six- to 12-month paid traineeships for persons with disabilities, supported by an NGO partner (and parents in some cases) to facilitate skill development and 'talent transformation' leading to full employment
- Designing a training video for people who are deaf or hard of hearing with assistance from an NGO with expertise in sign language
- Training programs that use assistive technology to facilitate the integration of employees with and without visual impairment in the same training setting.<sup>67</sup>

## Partner with organizations of persons with disabilities to enhance inclusive practices and connect to labor markets

**Lemon Tree Hotels in India** (see Box 6) worked with local organizations to design and deliver training customized to the diverse needs of trainees with disabilities. Such organizations can also be an important source of connection to potential students, employees, and customers with disabilities.

**Youth4Jobs**, an Indian organization, supports businesses in hiring young persons with disabilities. Through addressing both supply and demand issues, Youth4Jobs connects nearly 500 companies with a talent pipeline of young persons with disabilities that has resulted in more than 10,000 job placements for trained individuals.<sup>68</sup>

**Rabin Martin** partnered with SeeAbility, one of the oldest disability organizations in the world and an avid partner of the firm's business resource group, to establish the 'Ready, Willing and Able' program to match persons with disabilities with employer needs.

**Solar Ear** is a sustainable project to create low-cost hearing aids and diagnostic tools to help millions of people with hearing loss in low-income countries to be able to participate in education and the workplace. This also creates employment for deaf people, as well as protecting the environment from the disposal of millions of batteries.<sup>69</sup>

## Pursue multi-stakeholder partnerships

**The ILO** partnered with seven large companies, four smaller employers, and the Sri Lankan government to host a job fair that attracted 275 skilled jobseekers with disabilities to network and explore job opportunities. During the half day session, 81 persons with disabilities received job offers and 20 were selected for further interviews.<sup>70</sup>

## Partner with persons with disabilities

**Partner with businesses owned and operated by persons with disabilities** to open entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

**Kaleidoscope Group** invests seed capital in 'great business ideas' from persons with disabilities and provides mentorship to assist entrepreneurs with disabilities to grow their businesses.<sup>71</sup> Businesses can also contribute the time and experience of their staff to support entrepreneurial education for persons with disabilities.

## Make environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investments that target disability inclusion

There is growing promise and interest in the consideration of long-term and non-financial factors such as disability inclusion when evaluating potential corporate investments, with Bloomberg recently reporting: *"Disability inclusion is shaping up to be the next frontier of ESG investing."*<sup>72</sup>

### **Establish dedicated funds for accommodations**

This should be supported with a clear process for assessing different accommodations and providing maintenance and support for physical and technological accommodations over the long term. The Business Disability Forum has published the basic principles of how to create an inclusive workplace for employees with disabilities.<sup>73</sup> ●

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## Case study: Vaibhav Adlakha

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**Originally from India, Vaibhav Adlakha, 37, lives in London and is a regulatory and investigations lawyer, specialising in antitrust and competition law, at the international law firm Reed Smith.**

I was born in India with cerebral palsy. Initially I went to a special school before moving to a mainstream environment. In these years, I was just grateful to have an education and did not know what I could achieve or dreams I could attain. I took one step at a time and knew that it could stop at any moment. Even back then, there were people who were willing to think outside the box and take a chance, for which I am grateful.

At the age of 13, I moved to the Netherlands and attended the American School of The Hague. The teachers there encouraged me to make my own choices and taught me how to dream. They ensured that they were there to support and help me to fulfil my dreams and potential. They were even willing to re-invent the wheel and go out of their way to help me succeed. It is during one such endeavour that I fell in love with the law while participating in the Model United Nations Conference.

I attended Warwick University in the UK where I completed a degree in Law. The university was totally accessible, both

in terms of physical access as well as creating an environment that helps you feel empowered. The campus was most accessible because I could participate in all activities and classes in the same manner as any other student. At Warwick, I had a great education and university experience. That is what true accessibility means. I did not need to ask for anything, the university proactively took care of all my needs. I was provided with an amanuensis and a laptop along with extra time for my exams. All I had to do was to concentrate on just doing my best.

I did my Legal Practice Course from BPP College in London. Here again the college was fully accommodating of my needs and flexible in the way things needed to be assessed. However, I ran into a blockade while applying for training contracts when my disability seemed to be a barrier to my progress. The problem is that when firms have a particular system in place, it may be difficult for them to see how people who work differently can fit in. That is why people with disabilities do not generally have a shot. We have to wait for a firm that is willing to collaborate and adapt for the right talent as well as understand ambitions and business needs. For me, Reed Smith is that firm.

Before I joined Reed Smith, I went back to the Netherlands to understand the issues that I may face at work. I wanted to learn to deal with my limitations and find solutions

before I expect others to do so. During this period, I did a master's in Air & Space Law while also working in different places, trying to find where my skills could be developed and applied.

I do not think of my disability as part of my character. Nor does Reed Smith, as it focuses on ability rather than disability. They see themselves as a leader in Disability, Equity & Inclusion — so we are a perfect fit because I am also passionate about it.

I have been with Reed Smith for more than five years and am now a fully-fledged competition associate. It is still a work in progress. We are constantly collaborating to find a balance between what is good for the business and for my ambitions.

It took me time to realise that everyone has his or her own career path. I started with a path that is not traditional, but I have been able to make it my own. Through the platform provided to me by the firm, I have a responsibility to move the profession forward and open minds so that other people with disabilities have open doors. I hope to be able to continue this beyond my legal career. ●



# 5. Disability-inclusive education and training

## 1. The business case for inclusive education

Inclusive education and training for persons with disabilities is critically important to the development of productive, future employees and consumers. A global survey of more than 1,000 CEOs found that nearly 30% reported that talent constraints kept them from pursuing market opportunities,<sup>74</sup> while in 2019 the proportion of employers reporting talent shortfalls increased 17% from 2018.<sup>75</sup> Data suggests that that US\$1 invested in education can return US\$53 in value to employers at the start of a person's working years.<sup>76</sup> Education drives future business through growing the talents of the workforce, fueling innovation, expanding business opportunities, boosting wages, and creating more affluent consumers.<sup>77</sup>

**“Countries lose billions of dollars of potential income when persons with disabilities are not educated or working... On the other hand, child-friendly inclusive education that starts in the early years brings better social, academic, health and economic outcomes for all learners, and at less cost than special or segregated education.”<sup>78</sup>**

There are various ways that improving access to education and skills training for persons with disabilities benefits businesses. They include:

### Building human capital

Improvements in human capital are critical to sustainable economic growth.<sup>79</sup> Education is the foundation for a skilled workforce capable of improving productivity and driving business growth;<sup>80</sup> however, available data indicates that one in three children with disabilities of primary

school age are out of school, compared with one in seven children without disabilities.<sup>81</sup>

### **Improving returns to corporate philanthropy**

An estimated 27% of total corporate philanthropic giving (and 52% of giving by technology companies) goes to education programs, making education the number one cause that businesses support globally.<sup>82</sup> Enhanced coordination and targeting of these efforts towards persons with disabilities can amplify the impact of this funding and address talent gaps around the world. An inclusive education program will lift standards across all students and not only learners with disabilities.

**“In Sweden, the cost for assistive technology for a student is recovered if he or she is able to enter the labor market just one month earlier due to this technology.”<sup>83</sup>**

### **Addressing the global skills gap**

Inclusive education will serve the needs of both business and persons with disabilities seeking employment only if there is alignment between the skills developed and market needs.<sup>84</sup> Globally, it is estimated that more than 95 million workers lack the skills needed for employment in advanced economies. Additionally, there are at least 85 million too few workers with the secondary, vocational and college education needed to fill labor market gaps.<sup>85</sup> Nearly 70% of employers report talent shortfalls.<sup>86</sup> Promoting training and skills development frameworks that are inclusive of persons with disabilities can improve access and opportunities for all learners, with and without disabilities. Business engagement and investment in inclusive training not only supports pathways to employment for persons with disabilities, but also helps businesses to address skills gaps and anticipate future workforce needs. By engaging in inclusive training, businesses can develop their ‘talent pipeline’ and foster future employees and customers.<sup>87</sup>

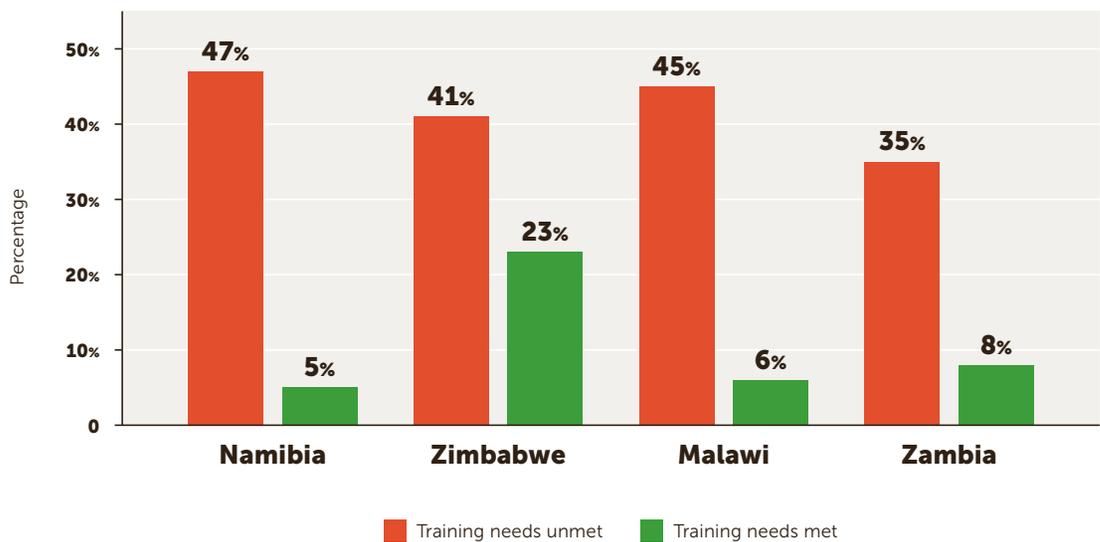
## Expanding inclusive vocational training

Exclusion from training, skills development, and continuing education opportunities is a barrier to workforce participation for persons with disabilities.<sup>88</sup> Mainstream vocational training facilities are often not accessible for persons with disabilities, while dedicated training programs frequently offer training that is not aligned with labor market demands.<sup>89</sup> This critical gap in preparation for employment for people with disabilities presents an opportunity for the business sector to make an impact.

Figure 2 illustrates the disparity between the need for and access to vocational training reported by persons with disabilities in four countries in southern Africa. Across the four countries, 35–45% of persons with disabilities said they needed vocational training, but only 5–23% had received it.<sup>90</sup>

**Figure 2**

### Access to vocational training for persons with disabilities in southern Africa



Source: World Health Report on Disability<sup>91</sup>

## Expanding the labor force

Globally, in 2020 more than one in five young people were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).<sup>92</sup> Persons with disabilities were more likely to be in this situation: “Throughout the world [persons with disabilities] typically have much higher NEET rates and NEET durations than other subgroups.”<sup>93</sup> New Zealand’s labor force statistics show that young persons with disabilities are five times more likely to be NEET than other youth (48.2% versus 10.6%).<sup>94</sup> In the EU, the estimated lost economic activity from the high proportion of NEET youth was estimated at €153 billion,<sup>95</sup> emphasizing the economic consequences of not tapping into this labor force.

## Promoting internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring programs

Important job-specific training and continuing professional development opportunities take place in the workplace, either directly provided by or facilitated by the employer.<sup>96</sup> This role offers businesses the opportunity to implement inclusive practices, to reduce NEET rates, and to ensure training is accessible to all employees, with and without disabilities.

**Social enterprises** — businesses with a social mission — have potential as important sites for workplace-based training. Social enterprises that hire persons with disabilities and provide inclusive workplaces can “serve as an important incubator for developing the skills, confidence and experience” of employees with disabilities, as well as serving as an example to mainstream businesses of the possibilities for increasing inclusive practices.<sup>97</sup> To complement vocational education and training, employers can create bridges from education to employment through corporate mentorship programs that provide exposure to the workplace, raise awareness about career options, facilitate networking, and build skills.<sup>98</sup>

## Increasing wages and spending power of persons with disabilities

Inclusive education has high rates of economic return<sup>99</sup> and is a cost-effective education delivery model.<sup>100</sup> In Bangladesh, reductions in wage earnings attributed to lower levels of education among persons with disabilities and their carers as children were estimated to cost the economy US\$54 million per year.<sup>101</sup> In the Philippines, increased schooling was associated with higher earnings among persons with disabilities, generating an economic rate of return to education of more than 25%.<sup>102</sup> In China, estimates indicated that each additional year of schooling for persons with disabilities leads to a wage increase of approximately 5% for rural areas and 8% for urban areas.<sup>103</sup>

**“Disabled people with enhanced skill sets will (in most low-resource countries) compete in labor markets that are already saturated with a supply of qualified jobseekers who are chasing a small number of ‘decent’ work opportunities.”<sup>104</sup>**





## 2. Building diversity-inclusive education and training

Inclusive education is an evolving field of research and practice, without one-size-fits-all solutions. Although governments play a critical role in advancing inclusive education systems, businesses can too, ensuring the delivery of equitable and accessible education, and charting pathways to opportunity for all.

### Box 7

#### Spotlight on Essilor International and vision screening in schools

**Essilor International**, a company that designs and produces corrective lenses, leveraged its core assets and expertise to provide a new type of ready-to-wear, clip-in eyeglasses to children and teachers with visual impairments.<sup>105</sup>

Essilor views eradication of untreated poor vision for all as their core mission.<sup>106</sup> It co-founded Our Children's Vision, a global community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations aiming to "upscale, accelerate and expand access to eye health services" to children across the world.

In partnership with the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education,

Partnership for Child Development (UK), Sightsavers International and national governments, Essilor offered vision screening for students and teachers in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana and Senegal.

The School Health Integrated Programming (SHIP) initiative highlights possibilities for addressing multiple dimensions of exclusion simultaneously. By providing vision screening and corrective glasses, Essilor addresses one of the most common impairments that can impede children's participation in education, while using vision screening as an opportunity to educate teachers on different types of learners, disability screening and assistive devices.

Businesses can promote inclusive, quality education and training by implementing the following strategies and cross-cutting pathways:

### **Design and produce disability-inclusive products and materials, technologies**

High-quality textbooks and other learning materials must be produced in accessible formats, such as braille, audio formats, and ensuring compatibility with available assistive and accessible technologies (e.g. screen readers).

**Kenyan start-up eKitabu** uses low-cost technology solutions to make digital learning materials accessible to learners with disabilities. The company distributes accessible digital content in local languages in 13 African countries via Orbit reader (a portable braille reader) for learners with visual impairments. eKitabu also launched Studio KSL (Kenyan Sign Language) to facilitate access to sign language instructional videos and visual storybooks for learners with hearing impairments.<sup>107</sup>

### **Equip schools and training centers with appropriate tools**

Businesses can work with schools and training organizations to ensure that persons with disabilities are instructed in using the assistive and accessible technologies that they will encounter in the workplace. For example, technology companies can ensure that these institutions have access to industry-standard assistive and accessible technology hardware and software, either through appropriate funding or direct contribution of these tools.

**Essilor International** tapped their core business mission as inspiration to develop low-cost, ready-to-wear, clip-in eyeglasses and provide these products in support of a multi-country effort to increase vision screening in schools (see Box 7).

## Promote inclusive digital learning

Due to Covid-19, many students and educational institutions experienced a sudden transition to digital learning platforms. Accessible educational technology (EdTech) — the combination of IT tools with educational practices — is a key field for business-sector contributions and public-private partnerships in accessible and inclusive education.

**Zain**, a mobile operator in Jordan, introduced an application featuring avatars that provide real-time sign language translation to support users with hearing impairments access digital learning materials.<sup>108</sup>

**Vodafone Foundation**, in partnership with technology company Milliweb, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and national education ministries, delivers the Instant Schools Network program to facilitate access to digital learning content for refugees, teachers, and host communities. Milliweb contributes its mobile learning software and Vodafone facilitates network access leading to higher levels of digital inclusion during Covid-19.<sup>109</sup>

## Deliver inclusive training to close the skills gap

**Cisco** trained and accredited more than 10,000 persons with disabilities through its global Networking Academy program, which operates in more than 180 countries.

**Marks & Spencer's** (M&S) 'Marks & Start' program in Bangladesh provides dedicated training for persons with disabilities to create pathways to employment in their garment factories. Prior to recruiting trainees, M&S factories identify the number of workers they are seeking to recruit, to ensure a match between trainee numbers and job openings. Persons with physical disabilities are recruited with the help of local organizations and selected in a competitive process. Successful candidates receive on-the-job training and 'buddy training' with experienced co-workers.<sup>110</sup>

## **Train HR departments to support internship and apprenticeship programs for persons with disabilities**

Targeted efforts to hire persons with disabilities for internships and apprenticeships by HR departments will expand the inclusiveness of these programs.

## **Expand inclusive internship, apprenticeship, and on-the job training**

Internships can be an important bridge between education and employment for students and young people with disabilities.<sup>111</sup> Internships provide valuable work experience for recent graduates with disabilities and are perceived as low-risk by employers. Such programs also provide exposure to persons with disabilities for all employees within the workplace.

### **Ensure safe and accessible training locations and workspaces for people with disabilities**

Support and put in place reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities to encourage their participation in internships and training opportunities. A first step to improving disability inclusion is to assess accessibility of the location, materials, and approach.<sup>112</sup>

### **Offer flexible apprenticeship and internship opportunities**

Simple flexibility options, such as part-time work opportunities, have a direct impact on bringing young persons with disabilities into the labor force.<sup>113</sup>

**“Facilitate internships for students with disabilities. These provide students with work experience while employers discover the added value of hiring staff with disabilities. This creates positive experiences on both sides, and, in many cases, leads to employment.”**<sup>114</sup>

### 3. Build partnerships for persons with disabilities in education and the transition to employment

#### Share best practices to enhance education and employment of persons with disabilities

**Accenture** offers a 'Skill-to-Success Learning Exchange' program of 130 digital modules designed to deliver employability and entrepreneurship training at no cost to any organization preparing persons with disabilities for employment.<sup>115</sup>

#### Collaborate with education and training institutions

Businesses who partner with training and education institutions can connect with students with disabilities, facilitate training opportunities, create bridges to employment, and shape curriculum development in line with industry needs.<sup>116</sup>

**EmployAble**, a multi-partner inclusive vocational training program for young people with disabilities in East Africa, identified collaboration between businesses, training institutions, NGOs, and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) as critical to its success.<sup>117</sup> In one instance, the EmployAble team partnered with **Safaricom** and a local digital skills training institution to train young people with disabilities in the skills that Safaricom was seeking in its recruitment of customer care executives.

#### Build networking and recruitment opportunities directly with educational institutions

The business community should participate in career development events, recruiting, and job placement for persons with disabilities.<sup>118</sup>

**Disability:IN's NextGen Leaders Initiative** matches students and recent graduates with disabilities who have demonstrated talent and leadership in the STEM, finance and business fields with corporate partners, providing exclusive networking opportunities, career development mentorship, and the chance to connect with other students with disabilities.<sup>119</sup>

**The Nigerian Chartered Institute of Personnel Management**<sup>120</sup> provides a mentoring service for graduates with disabilities, in which HR professionals provide practical career development support. The mentors work with the jobseekers to navigate recruitment, build professional networks, and secure employment. In turn, the HR professionals gain understanding of the barriers facing talented individuals with disabilities in the recruitment process.

## **Mobilize research**

Business can also play a role in bringing stakeholders together to share knowledge and establish promising next steps.

**Microsoft and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** (UNESCO) co-hosted a consultation with experts from 10 countries to identify “practical solutions and good practices” in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for inclusive education.<sup>121</sup> The event leveraged expertise from the IT industry, teachers and school administrators, OPDs and civil society, and provides an example of joint leadership by business and intergovernmental organizations to generate solutions.

## **Leverage financial resources to support global efforts**

Globally, there is an estimated minimum US\$75 billion annual financial gap in low- and middle-income countries to achieve inclusive, equitable, quality education for all.<sup>122</sup> The global business community can leverage financial resources and provide targeted investments to improve the delivery of inclusive education in schools, create equitable and accessible education systems, and generate additional pathways from education to employment.

## Advocate for inclusive policy and planning for education and training

As employers, the business community has a vital role to play in ensuring that training and higher education investments at a societal level meet current and future labor market needs.<sup>123</sup> Lobbying efforts to push for inclusive training and education and development of appropriate skills can help governments to identify effective policies, planning and investments.

**Theirworld and GBC-Education's** online toolkit, *The Key*, includes a chapter on 'Making the case: Education and inclusion and disability' that provides key facts and talking points.

## Partner with schools

Partnerships between businesses and schools can also be established on a small, local scale. Businesses are a vital segment of the communities in which schools operate, and strong relationships between businesses and inclusive schools can be mutually beneficial (see Box 8).<sup>124</sup>

## Employee volunteerism or secondment to build capacity within the education system

Education systems may not have the capacity to adequately promote disability inclusion or may lack awareness of available actions.

Strengthening inclusive education through employee volunteerism and/or secondment not only strengthens corporate social responsibility activities, but also builds employee perceptions of disability and paves the way for a more inclusive workplace. Businesses with technical and data collection expertise can partner with national statistical offices to help states gather and report on disability disaggregated data to support Sustainability Development Goal 4 of equitable, quality and inclusive education for all.

## Engage with public-private-non-profit partnerships

Partnerships can leverage expertise, resources, and reach of multiple partners to develop, test, and scale inclusive education interventions that strengthen public school systems.

**The IKEA Foundation** established a long-term cross-sector partnership with Save the Children and the Cambodian Ministry of Education to promote inclusive school infrastructure and curricula in the country (see Box 8).<sup>125</sup>

### Box 8

#### Spotlight on the IKEA Foundation and children learning together

Through a long-term funding partnership, the **IKEA Foundation** has supported **Save the Children** to work with Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to strengthen inclusive education. Through this partnership, the IKEA Foundation has funded the development of eight model schools in Bakan District to document realistic budgets for disability-inclusive education to be used in advocacy efforts with the government.

The Foundation also funded the creation of a Manual on Teaching Children with Intellectual Disabilities, Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder for teachers, in alignment with MoEYS's inclusive education guidelines. The Foundation's long-term investment, partnership with established civil society implementation partners, and alignment with government policies and priorities all contribute to the potential sustainability and impact of these inclusive education interventions.<sup>126</sup>



**“By partnering with schools to offer work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities, your business can help create a pipeline of future employees who are knowledgeable and trained for jobs in your organization.”**

— US Department of Education and Chamber of Commerce, 2005

## **4. Investment and innovation in education for students with disabilities**

### **Establish scholarships**

Establish scholarships to provide opportunities for students with disabilities, including targeting the most marginalized children to provide education and advocate for broader community inclusion.<sup>127</sup>

### **Invest in access to existing technologies**

Investment in simple technologies — even low-cost measures such as glasses, large print books, hearing aids, and mobility enhancements — is needed.<sup>128</sup> Financial contributions by companies to expand access to these technologies for young people with disabilities across the globe is an investment in building human capital.

### **Innovate ways to bring promising initiatives to scale**

Innovating to grow promising technologies at low cost could make it possible for millions of persons with disabilities to learn in the same classroom and with the same content as their peers.

**Labs for the Blind** empowers blind and partially sighted students in Africa through assistive computer technology and training. The initiative

uses text-to-speech technology to scan texts and read them aloud for individuals with visual impairments.

## Innovative financing mechanisms

Innovative financing mechanisms for results-focused impact investment have the potential to be leveraged for inclusive education through coordinating investment in strong, inclusive education systems.<sup>129</sup>

Examples of innovative financing mechanisms include Development Impact Bonds (DIBs) and Social Impact Bonds (SIBs),<sup>130</sup> which harness private capital investments to deliver public services such as education, with repayment of the bond linked to achievement of measurable outcomes.<sup>131</sup> The nascent success of impact investing in education targeting marginalized populations suggests possibilities for impact investing in disability-inclusive education.

**UBS Optimus Foundation** invested in the Educate Girls DIB in India. Over a three-year period, the intervention achieved 160% of its learning target, 116% of its school enrolment target, and a 15% internal rate of return for investors on top of recouping its initial investment.<sup>132</sup> Based on this success, in 2018 the UBS Optimus Foundation committed to invest US\$3 million in a new Quality Education India DIB targeting more than 300,000 children.<sup>133</sup>

**Big Society Capital**, alongside other partners, invested in the Energise SIB targeting teenagers at risk of becoming NEET in the UK. The program achieved positive educational and employment outcomes for more than 1,700 young people, and investors received their initial capital in full, plus a return.<sup>134</sup> ●

## Box 9

### Spotlight on school-business partnerships

A national study in the US found that partnerships between businesses and disability-inclusive schools were reciprocal and mutually beneficial.<sup>135</sup> While schools benefited from increased community support, resources, and relationships, businesses and other community partners gained personal satisfaction, increased business profile and exposure, and knowledge of inclusion best practices. Through interaction with inclusive schools, community partners gained knowledge of principles of universal design, internalized the strengths-based culture of inclusion, and shifted perceptions of disability. They then implemented these lessons and approaches with them into their businesses and community interactions.

Local educational technology companies partnered with inclusive schools in their communities to get feedback on their products from students and teachers. The schools gained from having access to the technology and training and ongoing support, while the businesses received valuable insight and feedback to improve their products.

**“They can call me up any time, and I’ll come out here to train them or work with them on the software. [The schools are] great partners in giving us ideas as to how to improve our software. It never ends. But we’re just happy to be a partner, and I’m happy to have some place close to home that I can go and see that I’m still having an effect every day, and from what’s going on in the classroom, to try to get better at what we do... Our software primarily serves those with learning disabilities and fits truly into a universal design for learning model, which is an on-ramp for everybody in education — fits right into an inclusive model, so it’s a great tool.”**<sup>136</sup>

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**David Moatshe, 49, is an education administrator from Botswana, currently on study leave at the University of Queensland in Australia.**

I grew up in Mochudi village in the southeast central of Botswana, a peri-urban area located about 4km from the capital city Gaborone. I lived in different parts of Botswana when I was growing up, and lived in Denmark in 1994 for about six months, in South Africa in the Northwest Province and later in Melbourne in Australia studying in the early 2000s.

I have worked at the Camphill Community Trust for over 15 years, and I have also spent two years studying at the University of Queensland since 2020 to date, studying for a master's in educational studies, majoring in leadership.

I work as a quality assurance officer at Camphill, which is part of an international movement that provides schooling, training and empowerment to people with learning disabilities.

As an individual with disability, the limitations that I have at work are minimal, since most of our buildings are wheelchair accessible and there are wheelchair pathways created to make movement around easier.

On the other hand, transport is an issue since I rely on the availability of

## Case study: David Moatshe

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company drivers to drive me wherever I may desire to go. This is because there is no accessible public transport nor adapted vehicles at work that I might use to drive myself. I would really like to have vehicle modifications to assist me to be able to drive independently. That would make a real difference to my life.

My disability is an acquired disability from a spinal injury that I got in my mid-twenties, that resulted in the loss of movement of my legs.

At work the assistive devices and technologies I need are adaptive worktables, laptops that I could take home if I needed to work from home since the computer in the office is a desktop computer and accessible flexible cabins for storage of papers and other items that I use daily in my work.

My experience with different organizations' recruitment and training procedures and capabilities in Botswana are that most still don't understand individuals with disabilities or the value of employing them. The issue is compounded by the lack of disability specific laws that could address many issues associated with disability, such as access to decent jobs, quality education, health and independent housing and living.

During my working life, things have not changed that much for the majority of persons with disabilities in my country. Fortunately, for me things have been better because of qualifications that I

was able to acquire over the years, which have given me an opportunity to compete despite the challenges facing people with disabilities. Attitudes towards people with disabilities have not yet changed that much. Discrimination and patronizing attitudes are still there among many elements in society.

There are very few instances where my disability has been very hard to handle. I have always had access to a wheelchair, and have been able to wheel myself around. I think that my ability and understanding of what it meant when I acquired a spinal injury somehow helped to prepare myself mentally and come up with coping mechanisms that have allowed me to do most of the things that I wanted to achieve even before I got injured.

The other important thing that has helped me is my support structures. I have a caring and supporting family and a circle of friends who ever since I got injured have offered assistance and let me know that I am not alone.

The message that I can give to young people with disabilities is that they should first realize and accept that they are human first — their disability is secondary. They should desire to fight and get the best they can by challenging the stereotypes about disability, and when they are given opportunities in the world, they must work hard, and they will reap the benefits. ●



# 6.

## Persons with disabilities as consumers

### 1. The business case

At nearly 15% of the global population, persons with disabilities represent a share of the market with an estimated spending power of US\$10.7 trillion;<sup>137</sup> however, only 4% of businesses in a survey of 17 developed economies said they were focused on considering the needs of persons with disabilities.<sup>138</sup> Globally, an estimated one billion people need one or more assistive products, but only one in 10 have access to the products they need due to high costs and a lack of awareness, availability, trained personnel, policy and financing.<sup>139</sup> By working to develop inclusive products and services, the business community can not only generate a new consumer base, but play their part in advancing sustainable development and human rights.

Companies that invest in persons with disabilities as consumers reap benefits through:

#### Expanding their consumer base

The total number of persons with disabilities is growing along with demographic shifts. Research from Canada estimates that spending in real terms by Canadians with disabilities will rise by 65% between 2018 and 2030.<sup>140</sup> In addition, brand leadership on inclusion can attract new consumers who value companies that care about social issues.<sup>141</sup>

## **Advancing product design**

Inclusive, universal design concepts are about serving all consumers. Targeting persons with disabilities as customers means identifying innovations that improve core designs for all, thus offering large potential returns.<sup>142</sup> Insights from persons with disabilities as consumers (and as employees) can drive innovation and inclusive product design.<sup>143</sup>

## **Improving the availability of assistive and accessible technology products and services**

The private sector already plays roles in the design, production, marketing and distribution of assistive and accessible technology worldwide.<sup>144</sup> Barriers to access are, however, particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>145</sup> Research by the Christian Blind Mission (CBM) in 2012 found that, among persons with disabilities living in the developing world, only 5 to 15% of those who need assistive devices had access to them.

## **Enhancing client-facing services for persons with disabilities**

In 2020 Accenture found that the organizations most focused on disability engagement — as measured through their DEI scores — were growing sales 2.9 times faster and garnering profits 4.1 times faster than their peers.





## 2. Investing in persons with disabilities as consumers

Through investing in persons with disabilities as consumers, businesses can tap into core practices to build innovation, expand their consumer base, and identify market gaps for the world's largest minority. To build persons with disabilities as consumers, the business community can:

### Design products for inclusive education and workplaces

Persons with disabilities are not the only consumers interested in accessible products, educational institutions and workplaces also have a demand for these products. Ensure team members understand the role of inclusivity and understand how to establish inclusive design as the foundation for developing products and services.

**Microsoft** has created an Inclusive Design Toolkit to provide product developers with critical design guidelines to consider in order to make "great products for the greatest number of people", including persons with disabilities. The toolkit provides a series of practical activities to add inclusivity considerations to existing design processes.<sup>146</sup> Embracing an inclusive design approach shifted accessibility from a checklist to be looked at after a product was designed, to an important factor throughout the design process. This has resulted in products that are accessible by the greatest possible number of people.<sup>147</sup>

### Involve persons with disabilities in product development

Involve persons with disabilities in every stage of product development, testing, and the improvement process to ensure that products meet their needs as consumers.<sup>148</sup> Their insights can also drive efficiency and innovation.

**Delta Airlines** are leveraging their Advisory Board on Disability (which includes consumers with disabilities) towards improving the experiences of customers with disabilities, including shaping Delta's Assistive Device Damage Reduction Strategy (which seeks to ensure that the assistive devices used by customers with disabilities are safely transported and accommodated), service animal policies, and inclusive marketing tactics.<sup>149</sup>

### **Invest in learning, design and media**

Seek conversations with persons with disabilities to learn directly about how to best serve them as consumers, and educate consumer-facing staff about the experiences of persons with disabilities as consumers. The development or introduction of new infrastructure, products, and services present key opportunities to include inclusive design from the beginning rather than trying to retrofit or adapt to meet accessibility needs after the fact.<sup>150</sup>

**The Bank of England's disAbility Network** ensures that consumer-facing staff are equipped with 'disability-smart' training that facilitates inclusion of persons with disabilities as consumers.<sup>151</sup>

**Nike's** Flyease shoes without laces were designed with inspiration from a teenager with cerebral palsy who wanted to be able to independently put on his shoes as he headed into his final year of high school. Nike's designers worked with an orthopedic and prosthetic company, Ossur, and created a shoe that was hugely popular with customers with and without disabilities.<sup>152</sup>

**Ankhgear** apparel company designed a one-handed zipper, the MagZip, in response to the inaccessibility of traditional zippers for people with fine motor challenges. The MagZip has since been picked up by major brands such as Under Armour and Tommy Hilfiger and is popular with athletes, children, and other consumers who value its ease of use.<sup>153</sup>

## Invest in inclusive media and advertising campaigns

Inclusive media campaigns go beyond persons with disabilities as consumers to illustrate disability as one facet of human experiences. Content and advertising targeted towards persons with disabilities can generate revenue through increased brand awareness and an expanded consumer base inclusive of persons with disabilities.

**Procter and Gamble's** (P&G) Company Accessibility Leader, Sam Latif, is a driving force behind P&G's moves to make both its advertising and its products more widely accessible to persons with disabilities. These moves have resulted in company innovations such as closed captioning on all television advertisements and tactile stripes on packaging to differentiate similar products for customers with all levels of visual impairment.<sup>154</sup>

**PepsiCo's** silent commercial during the 2008 Super Bowl and sponsoring of a sign language interpreter during the national anthem extended access to the brand's products for persons with hearing impairment and expanded the company's consumer base.

## Pilot test all accessible and assistive technology products to improve accessibility

By engaging with persons with disabilities as consumers, businesses can test assistive and accessible products that have the potential to be universally accessible.

**Standard Chartered Bank** introduced voice-enabled ATMs and mobile banking applications to make its worldwide services more accessible to people with visual impairments. This move to make the bank's technology interfaces more accessible aligned with the company's longstanding philanthropic effort to support persons with blindness and visual impairment, as well as the company's commitment to become a disability-inclusive employer.<sup>155</sup>

### 3. Building partnerships for persons with disabilities as consumers

#### Advocate for inclusive product standards

Through awareness raising and advocacy, the business community can promote inclusive industry and product standards for persons with disabilities as consumers. First, they must inform themselves of the global guidelines A11Y, the universal standard for accessibility.

**McKinsey** Design Engineering Director, Sara Cinnamon, argues that the design community can create, document, and disseminate best practices in accessible product design where none currently exist. Designers can build on existing standards, such as the Seven Principles of Universal Design, to create product shifts and define new benchmarks for accessibility.<sup>156</sup>

#### Public-private partnerships

**The Mada Center** (Box 10) is utilizing their core assets, resources, personnel, and expertise to promote accessible and assistive technology and inclusive education.

**“Mada’s strategy aims to provide an equal basis for persons with disabilities and the elderly to take part in cultural life through ICT and offers better opportunities for them to unlock their creative, artistic, and intellectual potential.”**

— Maha Al-Mansouri, Mada Center CEO<sup>157</sup>

## Box 10

### Spotlight on Mada Center, a public-private partnership for accessibility

**Mada Center is a pioneer in digital accessibility in the Arabic-speaking world.** It was established in 2010 as a public-private

partnership between the Government of Qatar and Qtel, Vodafone Qatar, Qatar National Bank and Microsoft, and has since grown to involve more domestic and international partners. Mada serves as a 'one-stop-shop' for all aspects of accessible and assistive technology for people with disabilities, providing:<sup>158</sup>

- **Assistive technology services**, including assessment, technical support, and information in Arabic and English, all available remotely
- **Inclusive digital education portal**, including Open Education Resources, educational applications for students with different backgrounds and abilities, and accessible educational resources for Universal Design for Learning and Digital Inclusive Education environments to improve distance education for all students, including those with disabilities
- **Digital accessibility consulting and accreditation services** for digital platforms including websites, mobile technology, electronic kiosks and ATMs, public venues, and electronic documents
- **Research and innovation** driving the advancement and dissemination of industry leading practices in ICT accessibility
- **Training and capacity-building** through public and tailored training programs covering assistive technology, inclusive education, policy and best practice.

### **Conduct a brand experience survey**

Companies can utilize a survey or other audit tool to assess the customer experiences of persons with disabilities and identify usability strengths and weaknesses.

**Interbrand**, an international marketing consultancy, was inspired by The Valuable 500 to start to see disability inclusion as a smart brand move. Recognizing that if a brand is not meeting the needs of persons with disabilities it is missing out on a global market of one billion, Interbrand now routinely incorporates a disability lens when it conducts brand audits for clients.<sup>159</sup>

### **Connect with institutional consumers**

Often, educational institutions and employers lack knowledge regarding available assistive and accessible technologies or have misperceptions regarding the costs involved. Promoting transparency and best practices among these potential clients can build inclusive environments for persons with disabilities in education, employment and society.

**BuyIT!** Is an online resource to assist employers in purchasing assistive and accessible technology.<sup>160</sup> ●

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## Case study: Fernando Botelho

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**Fernando Botelho, 51, is a Brazilian currently living in New York, where he works as a program specialist for assistive technology with UNICEF. He earlier founded a social enterprise which provided low-cost assistive technology and support to persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries.**

I had almost good vision until I was about 16 or so, and then I lost more sight before I became totally blind. But I was very fortunate that my parents were able to purchase the technology that was available at the time, and always treated me as somebody with potential. That's not always the case. They never treated me as a victim and were always fairly demanding of me in terms of getting good grades. The psychological side of the equation is quite important, perhaps more important than the technological side.

I was able to study in the US, where so much stuff was provided to people with disabilities. It really opened a lot of doors and I was able to also go for a master's degree in international affairs.

When I finished that, I realized it was difficult to find a job, so I just went for whatever I found. I worked in a small company that did physical therapy and I took care of their computers. It wasn't my

degree, but just from being blind, the fact is you use computers for everything and I was much more fluent in computer technology than a lot of people.

I then worked with an NGO concerned with blindness issues and eventually I learned about social entrepreneurship and learned how innovative it was and how much impact it could have. I had this obsession about lowering the cost of assistive technology for the blind and making it more available in developing countries, because I knew so much of my opportunity had happened because of access to technology.

We called it F123 Consulting and we did it for 13 years. We helped persons with disabilities and their families to improve their opportunities in education and employment through affordable technologies. I'm proud that we developed a free and open-source speech synthesizer in Brazilian Portuguese, and we were in the process of the first of its kind in Arabic when the pandemic hit. Our major funder withdrew so we closed things temporarily. This great opportunity came up with UNICEF, and I joined in December 2020.

These days, technology has moved on but there are still obstacles, however. For example, when people share a presentation on a Zoom or Teams call, I'm not able to access that because it's transmitted as a video signal, and my screen reader just cannot interpret that.

So what we usually do is we ask, please share your PowerPoints or whatever document you want to share on screen with me ahead of time. For every obstacle, there is usually a solution. What really makes the difference is not the technology as much as it is the attitude of people around you, and the willingness to rethink a couple of steps.

There are areas where technology can improve, such as web navigation and email reading. They tend to be too verbose. When a sighted person opens up an email, your eye jumps right to the content immediately, which is efficient. It's wonderful.

If I open an email, the typical experience is that I hear the screen reader say who it is from, what's the date and time it was sent, what's the subject line, to whom it was sent, who was copied. Half a minute to a minute later I finally get to hear the message. This is incredibly annoying.

Or if your screen reader is voicing an article, you hear 'Share it in Facebook', 'Share it on Twitter' and all these things other than the article itself. It requires more intelligence in the system to distinguish between real content and garbage. That would be amazing in terms of the quality of experience I have. ●

# 7.

## Conclusion and next steps

**Businesses are uniquely positioned to play an important role in fostering disability inclusion and promoting the rights and contributions of persons with disabilities for the benefit of individuals, businesses, and wider society.**

The business case for investing in disability inclusion is compelling. Businesses benefit from persons with disabilities as employees as a result of inclusive workplace cultures, increased productivity, and improved employee morale and retention for those with and without disabilities. Businesses that invest in disability-inclusive education and training fuel the skills and talent for the future workforce, ensure new innovations and business opportunities, and create more affluent consumers. Finally, through targeting persons with disabilities as consumers, businesses gain from designing better inclusive and innovative products, improving customer service experiences, building brand recognition and loyalty, and tapping into one of the world's largest consumer blocs.

The roles of persons with disabilities as employees, students, and consumers represent a continuum of interdependent and overlapping processes that amplify the value of disability inclusion. Inclusive education prepares for and feeds into inclusive training, which provides the skills needed by businesses and improves employment, provided there are inclusive hiring practices and workplaces. These practices also improve product design, innovation, and consumer services that benefit all consumers and open new opportunities for business.

**Figure 3**  
**Continuum of disability inclusion**



The opportunities for action for businesses outlined in this report make one thing clear: every company can do something. Action must start with challenging entrenched ideas that disability inclusion is simply a matter of narrow compliance such as providing accessible toilets or minority hiring quotas. Furthermore, as persons with disabilities are the world's largest minority group, businesses must fully capitalize on disability inclusion as a leading component of their diversity and inclusion strategy. The businesses highlighted in these pages show that businesses are already leading in disability inclusion, identifying valuable actions to leverage their expertise, resources, and brand identities for social change. However, so much more needs to be done. The world is missing out on so much untapped talent.

**Inclusive businesses are an important foundation for inclusive societies — and inclusive social change is undeniably good for business.**





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## Annex 1: Methodology

### 1.1 Project purpose and research questions

**Theirworld established the Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-Education) in 2012 as a movement of businesses committed to ending the global education crisis and unleashing the potential of the next generation.** Its mission is to harness the assets of the business community to ensure that every child has the best start in life, a safe place to learn, and skills for the future. GBC-Education set up a Disability and Education Task Force charged with identifying policy and programmatic actions the business community can take to:

- Support education systems to be more inclusive, and advocate for strong and inclusive public-school systems, starting in the early years
- Establish strong corporate policies including promoting inclusive hiring practices, creating a friendly working environment for employees with disabilities, organizing platforms where employees without disabilities can interact with their peers with disabilities, and bridging a connection between education and workforce for youth with disabilities
- Harness assistive technology, including technologies utilized to facilitate learning in the classroom and improve the ability to hire, accommodate and actively engage employees with disabilities
- Create training programs that generate pathways from education systems to employment opportunities for people with disabilities.<sup>161</sup>

**GBC-Education engaged Includovate Pty. Ltd. to support the task force's work** by developing a report outlining the scope of the challenge, highlighting best practices and lessons learned, and recommendations for the business community across the four priority areas outlined above. As a foundation for this work, Includovate conducted a literature review

to identify research, evidence, and promising practices across four core questions, with disability inclusion as the centre piece:

- 1** How can the business community support global education systems to be disability-inclusive?
- 2** What corporate policies can be put in place to ensure an inclusive working environment for people with disabilities?
- 3** How can the business community harness the power of assistive technology to support people with disabilities?
- 4** How can the global business community create real world and tangible training programs which generate pathways from education systems to employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

## **1.2 Approach**

**Includovate works from a human-rights-based understanding of disability.** This approach considers persons who live with disability first and foremost as human beings. This approach does not consider persons with disabilities as “‘objects’ of mercy, treatment and social protection”, but rather as “‘subjects’ possessing rights which they are able to claim, make decisions and be active members of society”. The CRPD clearly states that disability inclusion is an issue of ensuring human rights in line with principles of:

*“Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, and independence of persons with disabilities, non-discrimination, full and effective inclusion and participation in society, respect for and acceptance of difference, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women, and respect for the evolving capacity of children with disabilities and for their right to preserve their identities”*  
(Article 3, CRPD).

Accordingly, in this paper, we use first-person language to identify persons with disabilities instead of identifying them with their impairments or with terms that denote their political and socioeconomic condition, such as “the disabled”. We also avoid characterizing actions that fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities as “support” or “help”; instead we describe practices and environments as “disability-friendly” or “disability-inclusive”.

This report uses the term ‘persons with disabilities’ contained in the CRPD, but the authors note that the term ‘disabled person’ is preferred by many working in the field of disability rights and activism. This term accords closely with the social model<sup>162</sup> of disability, according to which it is physical, intellectual and attitudinal barriers of society that cause disability, not the impairments themselves. Likewise, this report has used ‘blind and partially sighted’, and ‘deaf and hard of hearing’, when when some prefer the terms ‘visually impaired’ and ‘hearing impaired’.

### 1.3 Working definitions

This report uses the following working definitions:

#### **Inclusive education**

Although inclusive education is itself a broad concept with its own principles, in this study the term ‘inclusive education’ refers to a system or process of education that accommodates children with disabilities so that they can acquire quality and equitable education. Inclusive education may be implemented through a twin-track approach that simultaneously focuses on changing systems to improve learning and accessibility for everyone, with providing specific support to learners with disabilities.

#### **Inclusive vocational training**

In this research paper inclusive vocational training refers to training that enables persons with disabilities to be included in the mainstream vocational education system and acquire skills that help them to participate in meaningful jobs in an equal manner with persons without disabilities.

**Assistive technology**

In this research paper assistive technology is defined as a technology that enables persons with disabilities to engage in life activities, or technologies that enable persons with disabilities to tackle challenges in relation to accessibility of environment and communication.

**1.4 Methodology**

The study was grounded in a literature review conducted to explore current knowledge, evidence, policies and practices related to business community engagement in inclusive education, training and employment. The literature search covered a wide range of academic and grey literature, in order to capture not only published research but also policy and strategic documents, company reports, websites, best practice guidelines, and more. Identified literature was systematically reviewed for relevance, and those screened in for inclusion were analyzed in more depth using a thematic coding scheme aligned with the research questions. The preliminary findings of the literature review were validated, revised, and augmented through a series of semi-structured interviews with GBC Task Force members and other key informants.

**1.5 Scope and limitations of the study**

The scope of this report is broad, covering multiple core concepts spanning distinct fields of study and bodies of literature. Given this breadth of scope, coupled with limitations in time and the intent to produce a single report, the study could not address each sub-topic in full depth. Many of the research sub-questions could be (and in some cases are) topics of entire books. The study aimed to provide a scan of important literature, practices, and emerging research across the four main research questions, and to identify key frameworks, approaches, evidence-informed practices and real-life examples that can provide a foundation and starting point for further exploration of these topics.

**Endnotes**

- 161 The above paragraphs are taken from the terms of reference (TOR) of GBC, developed for this assignment. Some words or terms are substituted: for example, “disabled” and “non-disabled” are substituted with “persons with disabilities” and “persons without disabilities” respectively. The term “support for employees with disabilities” mentioned in the second task by the TOR is substituted by the term “disability friendly working environment”.
- 162 <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness>

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