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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all**

**Statement submitted by the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), Institute for Multicultural Counseling & Educational Services (IMCES), International Council of Psychologists, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Reducing Poverty by Employment of Persons with Disabilities: Contributions of Psychological Research and Practice**

The purpose of this statement is to advocate for governments, UN agencies, the private sector, civil society and all stakeholders to focus on employment issues for persons with disabilities, informed by psychological principles and research, to achieve the sustainable development goals.

The Commission for Social Development has long been involved with activities to improve the well-being of persons with disabilities. It is entirely fitting that advocacy for persons with disabilities be a major component of the 2018 Commission meetings. Advocacy for persons with disabilities is essential to achieve SDG Goal 1 to eradicate poverty and to “leave no one behind.” This is a major concern for psychologists who represent NGOs accredited by ECOSOC at the United Nations, as well as a subject of psychological research and practice.

Research shows a direct link between disability and poverty. A greater percentage of individuals with disabilities live in poverty compared to the percentage of individuals without disabilities. According to a report by the OECD (2010), 21% of all households with a person with a disability live below the poverty line as compared to 14% of households without a person with a disability. Poverty and disability are a circular process; people living in poverty are more prone to becoming disabled than those not living in poverty, and poverty conditions mitigate against good health and increase the probability that disability will be a consequence. Furthermore, discrimination against employing people with disabilities increases the likelihood that they and their families will be living in poverty. This circular poverty-disability issue is multi-dimensional, leading to psychological, economic and workforce problems. The solution demands multi-stakeholder cooperation among multiple stakeholders including United Nations Member States, United Nations agencies, the public and private sectors, academia, and others. Fortunately, the poverty-disability link can be broken. This statement urges those multiple stakeholders to act to sever this link.

A critical cause of the cycle of discrimination and poverty is the reluctance of employers to hire persons with disabilities. This is true for persons with physical as well as intellectual and developmental disabilities. Those setting employment policies have succumbed to the myths about persons with disabilities that have been documented as untrue: for example, the myth that absentee rates and health care costs of persons with disabilities are higher than for persons without disabilities. Such discrimination is caused by a lack of knowledge and understanding about disabilities, as well as by stigma and negative emotional reactions to people with disabilities based on ignorance and fear. Even where laws prohibit discrimination and where there is a conscious effort to employ persons with disabilities, there is a lack of inclusion within the organization. This lack of inclusion leads to workers with disabilities being dissatisfied with their jobs, having negative attitudes to their employers and lower engagement with their work and organization, and suffering other psychological distress such as low self-esteem. This cycle has been shown to be mitigated in situations in which there is interaction among employees with disabilities, among employees with and without disabilities, and between employees with disabilities and their supervisors. A culture of promoting such interactions reduces dissatisfaction of workers with disabilities and increases productivity and greater involvement between workers with and without disabilities. A culture of inclusiveness must be established within the organization that specifically targets employees with disabilities.

Therefore, the sponsor/co-sponsors of this statement urge all Member States, Governments, UN entities, NGOs and CSOs, the private sector, and other stakeholders to focus on the achievement of Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (i.e., Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) with regard to persons with disabilities, as specified in target 8.5 (i.e., By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value).

**We therefore recommend that these entities:**

- (1) Acknowledge the outstanding existing work in the DSPD section of UNDESA, particularly for the 2018 Flagship Report on Disability and Development ([A/RES/69/142](#)), and strengthen all efforts of this work programme related to employment of persons with disabilities.
- (2) Urge Member States to request in a resolution of ECOSOC to the General Assembly that the Secretary-General include a section on the status of employment and rights thereof for persons with disabilities in his Report on “Mainstreaming disability in development,” to be submitted to the Commission for Social Development; that this resolution also call for an interagency working group to be formed to address the above objectives, and that a high-level meeting be convened on this topic.
- (3) Insure that all efforts related to employment of persons with disabilities be informed by psychological research and practice, especially regarding the field of humanitarian work psychology (Carr et al., 2012; Reichman, 2014).
- (4) Develop, elaborate and promote a policy statement on employment of individuals with disabilities that provides an example that can be adjusted to each national context; and establish a national organization on disability and employment that implements this policy, and commits to promote work opportunities for individuals with disabilities and to keep records on the employment of workers with disabilities. All information on these policies and their implementation should be sent to the UNDESA/DSPD section, which will act as a clearinghouse for information relevant to promoting employment for persons with disabilities.
- (5) Document corporations and programmes that are already addressing the employment of persons with disabilities to serve as models that can be replicated and scaled up.
- (6) Form a multi-stakeholder partnership as called for in SDG 17 to work on the above objectives, that includes Member States, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other UN agencies, the private sector, representatives of UN Major groups, humanitarian groups, academic institutions, media, youth, psychologists with expertise in this area, and other stakeholders.

The policy statement mentioned above will set the groundwork for increasing the recruitment, hiring and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce at national and global levels. It will further set standards for developing a culture of inclusion for persons with disabilities in the workplace and lead to the desired decrease in the number of persons with disabilities and their families living in poverty.

**We recommend that such policy statements:**

1. Contain the goal of having a workplace that is accepting and accommodating to persons with disabilities
2. Identify initiatives to implement the policy

3. Establish hiring goals and a method for tracking the ratio of job applicants, and hires, of persons with disabilities to job applicants, and hires, of persons without disabilities
4. Set procedures and steps to build a disability-inclusive culture within an organization through training, education and promoting interactions within teams including employees with and without disabilities
5. Introduce a process for maintaining the same policies for employee assessment, rewards and promotions for employees with and without disabilities
6. Support programs developed for employees who become disabled while working for an organization

We recommend that a summary of this statement be included in the Outcome Document of the 2018 Commission for Social Development.

**References:**

Carr, S. C, MacLachlan, M., Furnham, A. (Eds.) (2012). Humanitarian Work Psychology. UK: Palgrave Macmillan

OECD (2010), *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries*, OECD Publishing, Paris.  
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