



INCLUSIVE DIGITAL EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITY (IDEA) LANDSCAPE REVIEW:

Barriers and opportunities for the inclusive employment of youth with disabilities



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Acronyms

B-BBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
GBS	Global Business Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDEA	Inclusive Digital Employment Activity
ILO	International Labour Organization
NDP	National Development Plan
NEETs	Not in employment, education, or training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

1 Introduction

South Africa has one of the highest structural youth unemployment rates in the world. Hundreds of thousands of school leavers are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), and are often unable to meet the entry-level requirements set by training institutions or employers. On the demand side, however, hundreds of thousands of vacancies and work opportunities go unfilled annually across the public and private sector, impeding economic growth and development. The ability to fill many of these vacancies is often hampered by the difficulty, risks and costs associated with hiring young South Africans searching for their first job. This reality is even harsher for youth with disabilities¹ who face additional barriers such as a lack of access to quality education, lack of in-demand skills, inaccessible workplaces and public transport, and discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions around their abilities.

The Global Business Services (GBS) sector is uniquely positioned to pilot innovative and inclusive digital opportunities for youth with disabilities. The sector has been growing at an impressive rate with projections estimating 500 000 new digital and digitally enabled jobs in the sector by 2030. This presents a window of opportunity for the inclusion of youth with disabilities into digital jobs.

To explore this opportunity, Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator² (hereafter: Harambee) has partnered with USAID on the Inclusive Digital Employment Activity (IDEA) programme. The programme seeks to facilitate the economic inclusion of youth with disabilities. The focus sectors are the Global Business Services (GBS) and digital sectors.

IDEA is a three-year programme comprising three phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Production of a research report to understand the disability landscape in South Africa.
- Phase 2: Design, implement, and test a pilot intervention.
- Phase 3: Develop a business case that supports scalability and sustainability.

A co-creation steering committee has been established to ensure youth with disabilities are fully engaged in the design and implementation of the programme so that they are not merely perceived as beneficiaries of the initiative. The co-creation steering committee is made up of employers of persons with disabilities, youth with disabilities from the Harambee network, disability experts, and partners from associations of persons with disabilities.

This report is the first phase of the programme. It comprises a supply-side element to understand the barriers and opportunities for youth with disabilities to gain and maintain employment, and a demand-side element to explore the demand from employers for youth with disabilities, together with related barriers and employment strategies.

Information for this report was sourced through a desktop review of the available literature, with a focus, where possible, on research and reports from South Africa, Africa, and the Global

¹ Defined as young persons with disabilities, aged 18-34.

² Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator is a not-for-profit social enterprise that solves youth employment by unlocking jobs and breaking down the barriers that keep millions of young South African unemployed.

South. Thirteen interviews were conducted with persons with disabilities, employers of persons with disabilities, and disability experts – asking questions related to their experience, challenges, and opportunities for youth with disabilities. This was supported by conducting a survey, which targeted young people in the SA Youth network³ who had disclosed that they have a disability. The survey was distributed via an SMS (text) link to the mobile phones of 5,500 young people who self-reported having a disability. There were 522 responses, 492 of which confirmed they had a disability. Although this is a relatively small survey, the results still provide a snapshot of some of the realities for youth with disabilities in the SA Youth network. The co-creation steering committee was consulted at various stages during the research process and provided inputs into the draft version of the report.

Before moving forward, it is important to discuss some of the issues around defining disability, and the terminology used in this report. As reflected in South Africa’s White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “disability is a complex and evolving concept [and] to date there is no single definition of disability that has achieved international consensus.”⁴

It is also worth outlining the various models of disability⁵ as they present some of the common ways of thinking about disability, with a move towards a more progressive understanding of disability in more recent times:



Welfarist model

Views persons with disabilities as victims who are helpless and depend on the support of the state, society, or the goodwill of others.



Medical model

Views disability as a medical condition or impairment that could be cured or rehabilitated to help those affected be considered ‘normal’.



Social model

Focuses on the environmental, societal, and cultural barriers that marginalise persons with disabilities, rather than emphasising individual impairment.

This report aims to follow the social model.

There are also variations in how disability is described. We have chosen to use the phrase “persons with disabilities,” however, some articles and legislation which we quote, use the phrase “people with disabilities.” We also use the phrase “youth with disabilities,” which is equivalent to “young persons with disabilities.”

³ SA Youth is a national network for young people to access learning and earning opportunities for free. It is a collaboration between government, business and civil society, and operated by Harambee. SAYouth.mobi is an innovative zero-rated multi-channel platform, that allows works-seekers and employers to connect. Through partners.sayouth.org.za, employers can reach a national database of millions of young entry-level work-seekers for free.

⁴ “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

⁵ “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2”; “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

2 Legislation, policy, and regulation related to persons with disabilities

It is widely agreed that South Africa has one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world and that this applies, too, to legislation, policy, and regulation specifically designed to address inequality. This also includes legislation to promote the labour market participation of persons with disabilities. Despite it being almost 30 years after the end of apartheid, however, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world, with persons with disabilities believed to be one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups. There is little understanding of the effect of labour policy and legislation related to persons with disabilities, but many have argued that it has not been successful in increasing employment of this group.⁶

The following table outlines the most relevant pieces of legislation, policy, and regulation as they relate to the empowerment and labour market participation of persons with disabilities. The first section outlines general policies, and the second section focuses on those policies directly pertaining to the employment of persons with disabilities.

General policy, legislation and regulation		
Item	Description	Relation to persons with disabilities
The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996)	The supreme law of South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities through a social model and human rights framework. Supports equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and their integration into society.⁷
National Development Plan (NDP), 2012	A long-term strategic framework for government planning which aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa by 2030.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledges that persons with disabilities may face a range of barriers that affect their ability to reach their full potential. It stipulates that “disability must be integrated into all facets of planning, recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach.”⁸ Envisages that there will be an increase in skills development for persons with disabilities from 4% in 2020 to 7% in 2030, and that 5% of procurement opportunities will be awarded to persons with disabilities by 2030.⁹
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)	Ratified by South Africa in 2007. ¹⁰	Aims to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.” ¹¹

⁶ Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities”; Bam and Ronnie, “Policy Brief: Inclusion at the Workplace: An Exploratory Study of People with Disabilities in South Africa”; Kwazi Majola and Dhunpath, “The Development of Disability-Related Employment Policies in the South African Public Service.”

⁷ “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2.”

⁸ “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

⁹ “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2.”

¹⁰ “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2.”

¹¹ “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

Social Assistance Act (Act No 13 of 2004)	Addresses the provision of social grants and outlines the eligibility criteria for social grants. ¹²	Grants relevant to persons with disability include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Grant: for persons with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 59 who are not cared for in a state institution and earn less than R96 840 (R8070 per month) if single or R172 560 (R16 140 per month) if married. The maximum grant is R2080 and works on a sliding scale if recipients receive other income. • Care Dependency Grant: for caregivers of children younger than 18 years with severe physical or mental disabilities, who are not cared for in a state institution. • Grant-in-Aid: for people with a physical or mental condition that means they require regular attendance by another person.¹³
White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (March 2016)	Envisages a free and just society inclusive of all persons with disabilities as equal citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a framework for ensuring all policies and legislation, across all spheres of government, work towards ensuring inclusion, integration, and equality for persons with disabilities in South Africa.¹⁴
Regulation pertaining to the employment of persons with disabilities		
Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998)	"Requires fair treatment in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, training and advancement of all employees including people with disabilities." ¹⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Employers employing more than 50 employees must develop employment equity plans annually and submit the reports to the Department of Labour. These plans must include targets for hiring and working with persons with disabilities."¹⁶ • Despite this legislation, it is believed that disability, as an employment equity consideration, is given less attention than other employment equity categories such as race and gender.¹⁷
Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act No 85 of 1993)	Requires employers to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe for all employees.	The needs of employees with disabilities must be included, and evacuation procedures must cater to ensure the safe evacuation of employees with disabilities during an emergency. ¹⁸
Policy on quotas for persons with disabilities	Youth with disabilities has been identified by the South African government as a priority group, however, there is no associated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For persons with disabilities as a group, there is no legislated quota for their employment, however, there is an obligation in the public sector to employ 2% persons with disabilities. This figure is routinely monitored, however,

¹² "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2."

¹³ "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2"; "SASSA Disability Grant."

¹⁴ "White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"; "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2."

¹⁵ Kwazi Majola and Dhunpath, "The Development of Disability-Related Employment Policies in the South African Public Service."

¹⁶ "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2."

¹⁷ Bam and Ronnie, "Policy Brief: Inclusion at the Workplace: An Exploratory Study of People with Disabilities in South Africa."

¹⁸ "Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace."

	quota legislation attached to this priority. ¹⁹	has not yet been achieved by most department. ¹⁹
Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE)	A South African policy with associated legislation and codes ²¹ , which means “the viable economic empowerment of all black people, in particular women, workers, youth, people with disabilities and people living in rural areas, through diverse but integrated socio-economic strategies.” ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies can earn four B-BBEE scorecard points if they spend 0.3% of their payroll on learning programmes for black employees with disabilities. Learning programmes include bursaries or scholarships, internships, learnerships and apprenticeships, work-integrated learning, and informal training. • Companies can earn two points if 2% of their employees are black persons with disabilities.²³
Learnership programmes	Learnerships, facilitated by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) ²⁴ involve a combination of classroom teaching and workplace experience and usually span 12 months. Candidates who have completed a learnership receive a qualification within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on Level 1-10. Learners also receive a stipend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SETAs can provide funding to employers to host learnership programmes in-house at the employer. Alternatively, some employers choose to outsource the training elements to external providers. External providers may also be able to access SETA funding for their programmes. • Employers can also access a tax incentive for learnerships – more on this below.²⁵
Employee Tax Incentive for learnerships	A tax incentive for registered learnership agreements was introduced to “encourage job creation by reducing the cost of hiring and training employees through learnerships; promote skills development; and encourage human capacity development. [...It is] an allowance which may be deducted from the employer’s income from trade when the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers qualify for a greater deduction for learnership agreements with new employees and even greater for persons with disabilities. Completion of a learnership agreement qualifies an employer for an additional tax deduction. • For example, a learnership agreement with a new employee enables an employer to deduct 100% of total remuneration up to a maximum amount of R30 000. Whereas an agreement with a new employee with a disability enables an employer to deduct 175% of total remuneration up to a maximum of R50 000.²⁶

¹⁹ Engelbrecht, Shaw, and Van Niekerk, “A Literature Review on Work Transitioning of Youth with Disabilities into Competitive Employment.”

¹⁹ Kwazi Majola and Dhunpath, “The Development of Disability-Related Employment Policies in the South African Public Service.”

²¹ B-BBEE legislation has an associated scorecard where companies can determine their scorecard points and thus their B-BBEE level. There are 8 levels with levels 1 to 4 being the most desirable as they are the target of government procurement. The scorecard is divided into 5 sections with associated points for compliance, these are ownership, management, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and socio-economic development.

²² “Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act.”

²³ “Codes of Good Practice on Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment”; Ariefdien, “Learnerships: Enabling Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities into Employment.”

²⁴ The South African government established Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to address the skills shortages in the South African workforce and thus help improve productivity and the competitiveness of the labour market and economy. There are 21 industry-specific SETAs. The SETAs offer several skills development programmes, learnerships being the most relevant to this discussion.

²⁵ Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities.”

	employer's taxable income is determined." ²⁶	
Code of Good Practice on Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 2002		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a guide for employers on promoting equal opportunities and fair treatment for persons with disabilities as required by the Employment Equity Act.²⁷
Technical Assistance Manual, 2005		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists employers with regards to reasonable workplace accommodation.²⁸

²⁶ "Guide on the Tax Incentive for Learnership Agreements."

²⁷ "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2."

²⁸ Kwazi Majola and Dhunpath, "The Development of Disability-Related Employment Policies in the South African Public Service."

3 Socio-economic context of youth with disabilities

Globally, there are an estimated 180 to 220 million youth with disabilities. These young people are often the poorest and most marginalised of the world's young people and face numerous and generally compounding challenges. They are more likely to live in poverty, have less education, and are less likely to be employed. There is a gendered component, where women with disabilities are employed at lower rates than men with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are often classified as inactive in labour market terms and thus not registered as work-seekers.

Persons with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with different types of disability and varying degrees of severity. Some disabilities are acquired at birth, others at a later stage in life, and some require disability-related support whilst others do not. There are also variances in demographic factors such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, rural/urban status etc.²⁹

This situation is reflected in South Africa where “persons with disabilities are less likely to access information and services such as health care, education, employment and to participate in the community. They are more likely to live in poverty, experience higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse, and are among the most marginalised in any crisis-affected community.”³⁰ The extent to which persons with disabilities in South Africa are disadvantaged are outlined in the following points:

- Persons with disabilities have on average 1.4 years less schooling than persons without disabilities and are more likely to have never attended school or to have dropped out of school.
- Households caring for children with disabilities earn on average 70% of that earned by households with children with no disabilities.
- Women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination due to the intersectionality of disability and gender, and are most vulnerable to poverty, stigma, and discrimination.
- Black persons with disabilities are the most disadvantaged of all the population groups.³¹

Accurate data around the number of persons with disabilities in South Africa is challenging to source, with figures varying according to collection method and different survey techniques. Nevertheless, the following figures give some indication of the situation:



6.0%

The disability prevalence among persons aged 5 years and older (Census 2022), slightly down from 7.4% in 2011. Reports indicate that this change may be due to a better understanding of the Washington set of questions³² amongst respondents.

4.9% vs



7.0%

²⁹ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities”; “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

³⁰ “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

³¹ “Marginalised Groups Indicator Report 2021”; “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”; “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2.”

³² The Washington Group set of questions, is a set questions designed to identify people with a disability. The questions assess whether people have difficulty performing basic universal activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, cognition, self-care and communication.

	More women than men were classified as persons with disabilities at 7.0% women and 4.9% men in Census 2022 compared to 8.3% and 6.5% in Census 2011. ³³
9.5%	Disability prevalence was highest in the white (9,5% in 2022 vs 6.5% in 2011) population in Census 2022. Whereas in Census 2011 disability was more prevalent among black people (7.7% in 2011 vs 5.7% in 2022).
3.2%	Estimate of the South African youth population with a disability – from General Household Survey 2021.
	>1m 1 038 137 people received the Disability Grant – as at June 2023.
	>150K 159 540 receiving the Care Dependency Grant – as at June 2023 ³⁴
	21K Number of youth in the SA Youth network (operated by Harambee) who have disclosed a disability. This is approximately 0,6% of the total network.
	>18K Number of youth with disabilities who have been supported within the SA Youth network.
	6770 Number of youth with disabilities who have accessed opportunities in the SA Youth network.

Regarding the setting of employment targets for persons with disabilities, one of our employer interviewees highlighted the importance of understanding that the percentage prevalence of persons with disabilities in the country does not equate to the actual percentage of working-age, employable persons with disabilities.

Of the recent Harambee survey, 492 youth reported that they had a disability, with almost 58% being female, 41.3% male, and the balance, non-binary or preferring not to disclose their gender. Regarding race, almost 92% of respondents indicated they were African, with close to 7% Coloured, 0.6% Indian, and 0.2% White. 54.6% reported living in urban areas, compared to 27.4% in rural, and 16% in per-urban areas.

Regarding types of disability, respondents were able to select more than one disability and so 532 disabilities were reported for 492 individuals. One of the employers we interviewed reported that the presence of a person with multiple disabilities reflected their experiences in the workplace. The types of disabilities are reflected in the chart below.

³³ “Census 2022 Statistical Release”; “Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2”; “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

³⁴ “Third Statistical Report 2023/4: Social Assistance.”

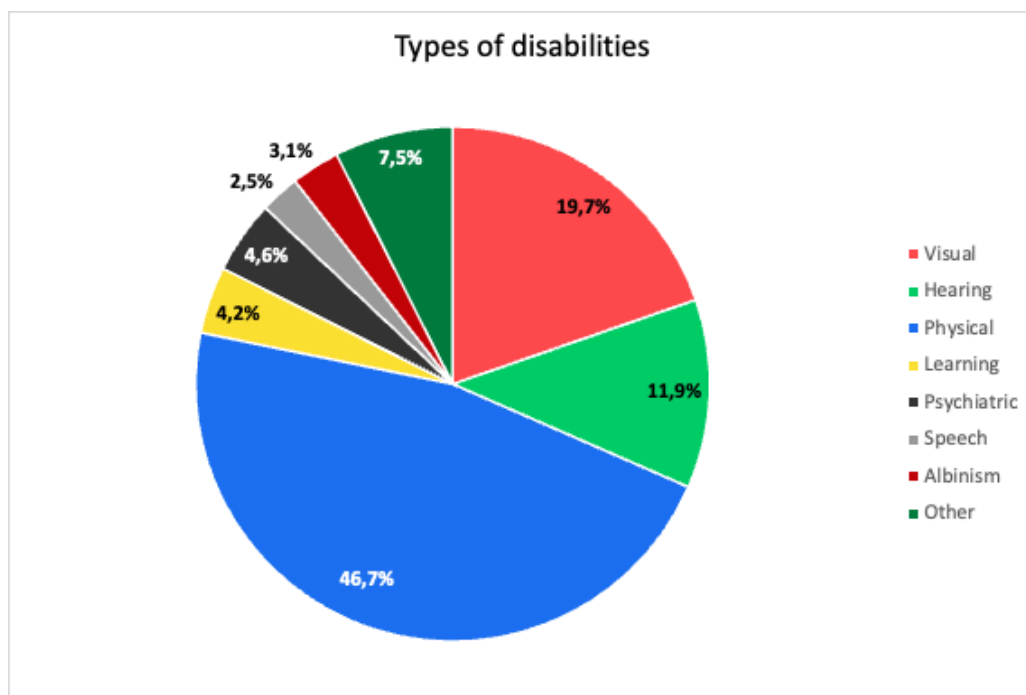


Figure 1: Types of disabilities (Harambee Survey)

Quite a high proportion of respondents had Matric (the school-leaver qualification in South Africa), at close to 40%, however a significant proportion only completed Grade 9 (7.5%) or had below Grade 9 (2.4%). Interestingly, close to 7% of survey respondents indicated they had a university degree with 5% reporting a post-graduate degree/diploma.

Regarding the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, exact reports vary, however it is believed that the majority of persons with disabilities are unemployed. Below are some figures from different reports³⁵ which provide some indication of the situation:

70%	The unemployment rate for youth with disabilities (compared to 64% for youth without disabilities)
1.2%	Persons with disabilities in the private sector workforce
0.9%	Persons with disabilities in the government sector workforce
8/10	Persons with disabilities who are unemployed in South Africa

The labour market participation of the respondents from the recent survey conducted by Harambee is detailed in the graph below. Of the unemployed respondents, the majority were female (60%), with 39% male and the balance non-binary or preferring not to say.

³⁵ "23rd Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) Annual Report 2022-2023"; "Mapping Learning to Earning Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa"; "Promoting the Right to Work of Persons with Disabilities."

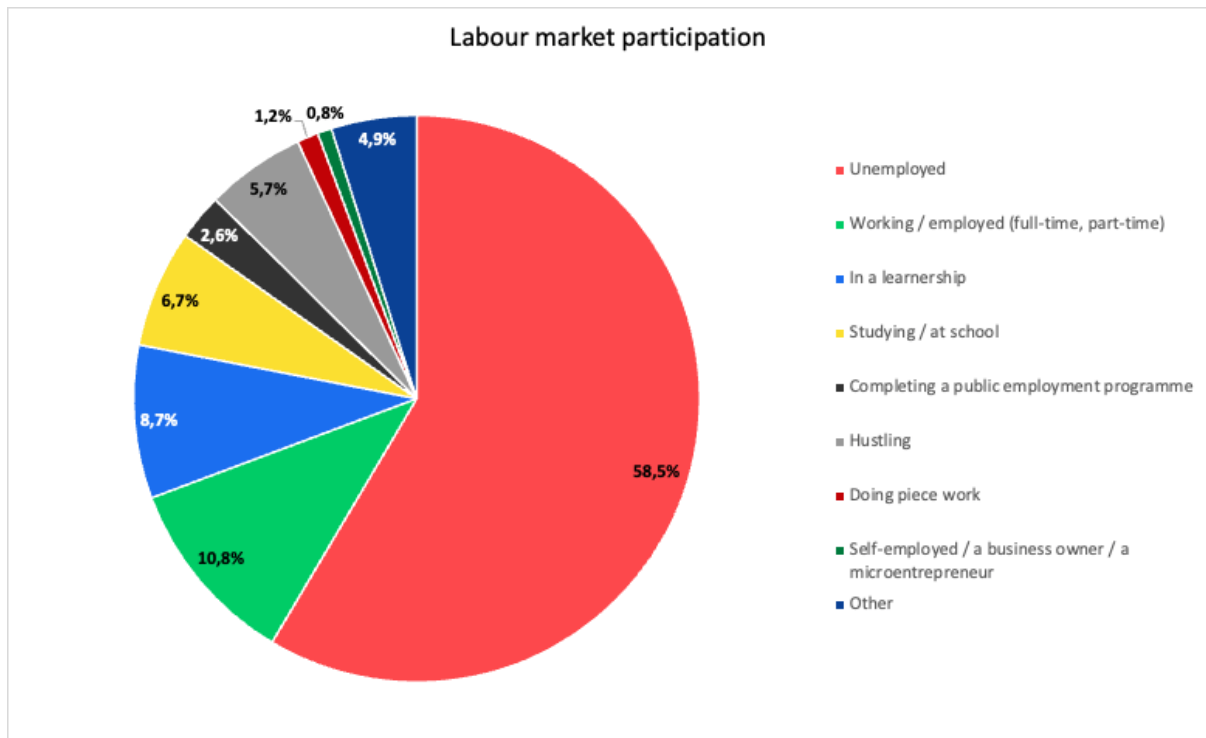


Figure 2: Labour market participation (Harambee survey)






4 Barriers to the employment and retention of youth with disabilities

South Africa has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world and young people face many barriers and challenges when seeking to enter the labour market. Youth with disabilities face a double burden as they contend with the barriers that all young people face when entering the labour market, as well as with additional barriers related to their disability and employer perceptions of persons with disabilities. This section outlines the common barriers and challenges faced by people with disabilities as found in the literature and reinforced by our interviews.

4.1 Barriers faced by youth with disabilities

Lack of access to quality education

In South Africa, the education system fails many young people, so much so, that one of the employers that was interviewed reported that they no longer use the Matric qualification as an indicator of ability, and rather use their own assessments. As with many barriers to young people, young people with disabilities are harder hit due to:

	A lack of accessible learning material
	Physically inaccessible school premises
	Costly or unavailable accessible transport
	Teachers in mainstream schools who are not well-equipped to teach learners with disabilities
	A misconception that persons with disabilities are unlikely to have thriving careers and so there is little incentive to focus on their skills and career development. ³⁶

The below figures, obtained from a range of different reports, provide a snapshot of the severity of the problem of accessing education for children with disabilities:

35,5%	Children between the ages of five and six with severe walking difficulties who were not attending school.
22,6%	Children with severe hearing difficulties attending school.
25%	Children with severe communication attending school. ³⁷
600 000	Estimate of children with disabilities who are unable to access formal education. Reasons for this are believed to be a lack of political will, ineffective implementation of South Africa's extensive legislation on inclusive education, and low budget allocation for inclusive education. ³⁸

³⁶ Botha et al., "In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities."

³⁷ "Study on the Elements and Economic Costs of Disability for Children with Disabilities and Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa, Part 2."

³⁸ "NCPD Calls for Urgent Action to Address Access to Inclusive Education."

The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities indicates that most people with severe difficulties aged 20-24 years were not attending any tertiary institution, with the highest attendance among white people and the lowest amongst black people.³⁹

The education levels of the unemployed respondents from the recent survey conducted by Harambee portray a similar picture.

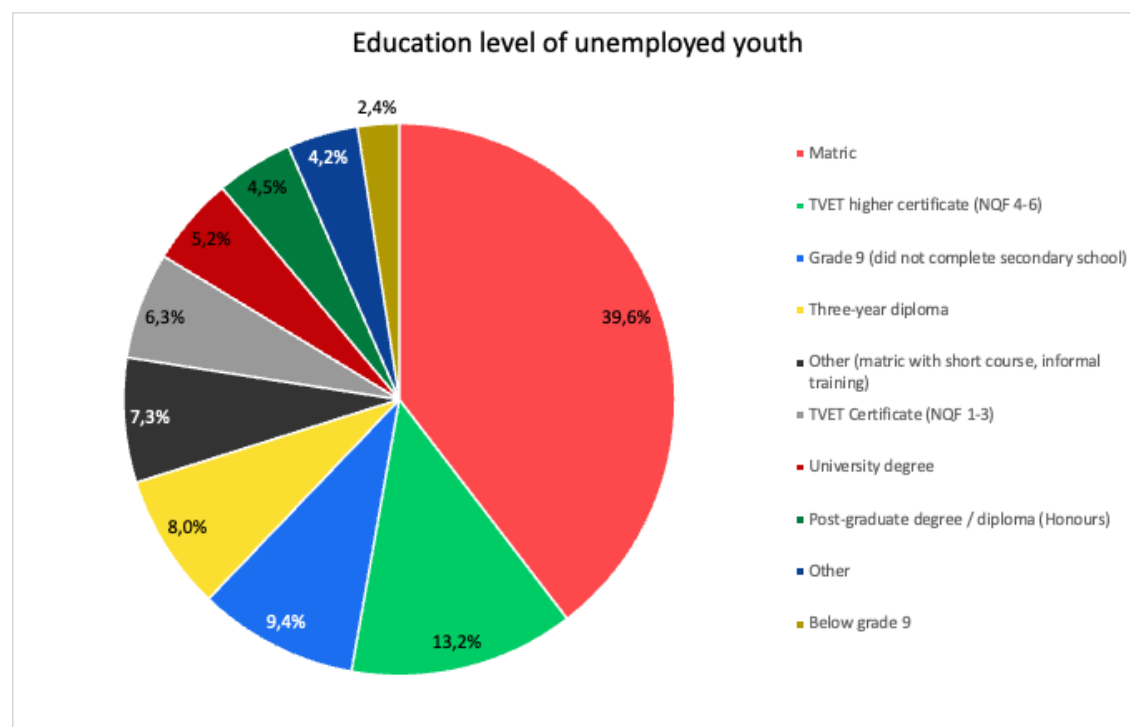


Figure 3: Education level of unemployed youth with disabilities (Harambee survey)

Worryingly, there were a number of unemployed youth with disabilities with some form of higher education who were still not able to access the labour market. Almost 8% had a three-year diploma, 5.2% reported having a university degree, and 4.5% had a post-graduate degree or diploma.

Almost all of our interviewees spoke about how South Africa's education system was failing young people and youth with disabilities, in particular, resulting in barriers to employment. Several cited the example of how many learnership opportunities require a Grade 12 (Matric) qualification. This is a key barrier when many so-called 'special schools' catering to children with disabilities only go up to grade nine, or many people with disabilities have only achieved a grade nine qualification. Interviewees noted that many 'special schools' do not adequately prepare learners for the work environment through curriculum not being aligned with ordinary schools, and a focus on nurturing and protecting learners rather than capacitating them and ensuring they have a competitive advantage.

One study notes that this failing of the educational system "gives employers justification for discrimination against"⁴⁰ youth with disabilities.

³⁹ "White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities."

⁴⁰ Engelbrecht, Shaw, and Van Niekerk, "A Literature Review on Work Transitioning of Youth with Disabilities into Competitive Employment."

Lack of requisite skills

A knock-on effect of the lack of access to quality education means that youth with disabilities are less likely to finish their schooling, move on to technical or vocational training, or be accepted into programmes that help them transition into the workplace. This results in a mismatch between their skills sets and those demanded by employers.⁴¹

Youth with disabilities also tend to have limited soft skills, or are perceived by employers to have fewer soft skills than other workers, particularly around social and communication skills. This also results in discrimination in the labour market.⁴²

Some studies find that persons with disabilities also have a lack of digital skills, often because of the inaccessibility of digital tools.⁴³

Inaccessible physical and digital infrastructure

Persons with disabilities often face multiple accessibility barriers at every stage in their search for employment and employment journeys, from inaccessible job advert postings, inaccessible digital platforms, lack of assistive technology, inaccessible public transport, and inaccessible workplaces. These barriers exacerbate the other existing barriers faced by many young people around access to basic digital hardware and software such as laptops, smart phones, and internet connectivity.



Inaccessible job adverts

Two of our interviewees highlighted the barriers of inaccessible job adverts or job adverts being placed on inaccessible digital platforms. One example was how people with dyslexia may not easily find a written job advert and so must rely on word of mouth. Another example was that the job application process can be particularly exclusionary for people with visual impairments as employers often assume the application must have been completed by a third party and so automatically disregard the application.



Lack of accessible public transportation

This is widely cited in the literature as an employment barrier for persons with disabilities.⁴⁴ Several interviewees explained the South African reality of the challenge with catching a minibus taxi during rush hour: taxi drivers often will not stop for a person in a wheelchair as they believe the person will slow them down. In instances where they do stop, the person using a wheelchair may have to pay a double fare as the wheelchair takes up space. To counteract this, an interviewee noted that the City of Johannesburg makes certain public transportation available for free for persons with disabilities, however, this is only after the rush hour period, which does not help people working in environments where the workday starts at usual times.

⁴¹ Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

⁴² Botha et al., "In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities."

⁴³ "An Inclusive Digital Economy for People with Disabilities."

⁴⁴ "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities."



Lack of assistive technology

Some workplaces are not accessible or do not have assistive technology devices to enable the person with a disability to function fully.⁴⁵ One interviewee noted that some assistive technology is prohibitively expensive, citing the example of screen-reading software to assist people with visual impairments that can cost R17 000 per license. A study conducted in South Africa also found that there is a general lack of awareness by both persons with disabilities and employers, of the reasonable accommodation support measures that could benefit the employment of people with disabilities.⁴⁶

A study conducted in South Africa also found there is a general lack of awareness among persons with disabilities (as well as employers) of their entitlement to reasonable accommodations in the workplace.⁴⁷ Research conducted with the SA Youth network found that youth with disabilities resist asking for accommodations because they do not want to be labelled as fussy.⁴⁸

Results from the recent Harambee survey show that of the unemployed youth with disabilities, the availability of workplace accommodations does not appear to feature as a factor in the job search for most individuals. Almost 86% of respondents indicated they look for whatever job they can get even if no support is provided, with only 12% saying they only look for jobs that provide support to persons with disabilities.

Regarding the survey respondents who indicated they were employed (110 people), most of them (59%) reported that their employers provide support to accommodate persons with disabilities, compared to 16% who said their employers do not provide support, and 15% who said they do not know. Details varied on the support that was offered, with several respondents pointing to the presence of psychosocial support, being treated with understanding, and time off for therapy, rests, or visits to healthcare facilities.

Discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions

Societal stigma, negative attitudes, and misconceptions about persons with disabilities is one of the leading barriers faced by persons with disabilities. Many employers have stereotypical misconceptions including that persons with disabilities are less productive or lessor citizens requiring charity. Some employers also erroneously believe that the workplace accommodations that may need to be made are prohibitively expensive. Employers may even assume that because a person has one type of disability, they are cognitively impaired.⁴⁹ Interviewees confirmed these experiences and explained that many people are not comfortable talking about disability in the work environment, associate persons with

⁴⁵ Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

⁴⁶ "Experiences of Persons with Disabilities in Learnerships, Higher Education Institutions and Public Entities. A Pilot Study."

⁴⁷ "Experiences of Persons with Disabilities in Learnerships, Higher Education Institutions and Public Entities. A Pilot Study."

⁴⁸ Harambee, "Improving SA Youth's Service for People with Disabilities."

⁴⁹ "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities"; Bradshaw, "Addressing Attitudinal Barriers through Awareness and Etiquette."

disabilities with low intelligence, or employers believe that it will be too much effort to employ persons with disabilities.

Another outcome of these negative attitudes is that persons with a disability are often expected to be underperformers and are consequently relegated to low-skilled and poorly-paid jobs. Their training and development is also neglected which leaves them with limited opportunities for career progression and promotion.⁵⁰

Misconceptions around the abilities and needs of persons with disabilities can also result in employers placing blanket bans on employing persons with certain disabilities as they believe them to be a safety risk or incapable of performing the job at hand. This stems from the assumption that all people with the same disability face the same risks and have the same needs.⁵¹ Several of the interviews confirmed this is an issue in South Africa with some employers believing that they can only accommodate certain disabilities – for example, expressing that the GBS environment is not currently equipped to accommodate people with a full visual impairment. There also appeared to be a stigma around certain mental health disabilities like schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder.

Some interviewees referred to a challenge called ‘disability-lite’ where employers prefer some disabilities over others, such as mild cerebral palsy, or someone using one crutch. The concern here was that this often precludes highly qualified people with other disabilities from being employed. Interestingly, some of the employers indicated that they have moved away from specifying lists of the types of disabilities they can, and cannot, accommodate and rather treat people on a case-by-case basis. Restrictions then tend to be around ensuring that prospective employees can handle the fast and stressful pace of the GBS industry.

Internal attitudes and lack of awareness of human rights

The reality of encountering these negative attitudes and misconceptions from an early age can also result in internalised oppression, learned helplessness and low self-esteem which creates a barrier to finding employment.⁵² This was reflected by our interviewees who said that persons with disabilities have been taught they have less value which manifests in a belief that they are not eligible for quality employment.

Research from the Harambee network found that youth with disabilities feel there are fewer jobs that could accommodate them. These young people have anxieties over losing an interview if their disability is listed on their CV, and they feel like they will not receive an equal chance against able bodied applicants.⁵³

Research from South Africa shows that the stigma associated with some disabilities can prevent people from disclosing their disabilities for fear of being judged or due to previous negative experiences. This lack of disclosure prevents people from asking for necessary

⁵⁰ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

⁵¹ Bradshaw, “Promoting Safety for All through Disability Inclusion.”

⁵² Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities.”

⁵³ Harambee, “Improving SA Youth’s Service for People with Disabilities.”

Box-ticking and maximising B-BBEE points

Diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and experience are increasingly seen as key drivers of innovation and successful companies. However, due to employer attitudes and misconceptions, disability is seldom included into the diversity mix.⁵⁴ Where persons with disabilities are employed, it is often part of a company box-ticking exercise, rather than true inclusion or placing value in the diversity they can bring to an organisation. This even reflects where policies and procedures that are supposed to ensure employees with disabilities are adequately catered for, are simply for compliance purposes rather than concern over the success of the individuals in the organisation.⁵⁵

Many of our interviewees reflected that in South Africa, the box-ticking exercise becomes about maximising B-BBEE points. In some instances, this results in little concern for ensuring that the workplace is adequately set up to support persons with disabilities to succeed and grow. In the GBS area, several interviewees explained that their clients are either interested in compliance or maximising B-BBEE points and so outsource the hosting of learnerships for persons with disabilities to external companies as they do not believe such individuals will perform adequately in the income-generating areas of business.

Regarding the GBS industry's international client appetite for employing persons with disabilities, there were conflicting views:

- Several employer interviewees said their international clients may talk about wanting to make a difference for persons with disabilities, however their intention was only around compliance rather than impact as they opted for the absolute minimum number of persons with disabilities.
- One opposing view indicated that there had been a recent shift towards diversity and inclusion but with a focus rather on whether call centre agents were adequately trained to handle customers with disabilities.

Fear of losing the disability grant

In the South African context, there are some who argue that the disability grant provides a level of comfort and security that acts as a deterrent to employment-seeking for persons with disabilities. People may also be concerned that if they start earning an income, they will lose their grant, and according to one interviewee, the process to be reinstated on the grant system is onerous and challenging. One interviewee also noted that due to the large number of barriers facing youth with disabilities seeking their first job, the barriers often outweigh the benefits of employment, especially in lower-paying entry-level jobs.

⁵⁴ Bradshaw, "8 Steps for Promoting Disability Inclusion in the Workplace."

⁵⁵ Bam and Ronnie, "Policy Brief: Inclusion at the Workplace: An Exploratory Study of People with Disabilities in South Africa."

The fear of losing the disability grant can also affect the career progression of persons with disability in employment. This is because if they are promoted and start earning an increased salary, the amount they receive from the disability grant starts to reduce. In practice, a person with disability may end up earning less with a promotion if their new role moves them just above the disability grant threshold and they can no longer access it as an income stream.

Outdated views locating persons with disabilities in the charity or state-dependent sphere also means “there are no clear pathways from receiving a government grant towards entering formal employment, and very little support for those making the transition.”⁵⁶

Overprotective families and the risk of violence

In some communities in South Africa, and other developing countries, some forms of disability, such as albinism, increase the risk of being a victim of violence. In some cultures in South Africa, having a family member with a disability can be considered taboo, or something to be ashamed of, which may result in families ‘hiding away’ family members with disabilities. These factors can prevent persons with disabilities from participating in skills development or job placement programmes. Overprotective families may shelter family members with disability and prevent them from accessing opportunities.⁵⁷

One of our interviewees provided a contradictory view to this as their company has experienced the opposite where family members will push a reluctant person with a disability into the workplace. This results in underperformance as the person involved often has no interest in the role.

Training and skills development unrelated to labour market demand or inaccessible

Youth with disabilities are often encouraged to join skills development programmes separate to mainstream skills development to gain skills that are not in demand by employers. Available training programmes are often developed following the misconception that persons with disabilities are less capable. One interviewee gave the example of how visually impaired people in South Africa are often pushed into learning basket weaving.

Other skills development or job placement programmes may inadvertently exclude youth with disabilities due to overly onerous entry criteria, locating training in inaccessible buildings or away from accessible transport, or using inaccessible assessments.⁵⁸

Pay gap

Where persons with disabilities are employed, the South African Census 2011 finds that “persons without disabilities generally earn a higher income than persons with disabilities [and] disability severity and type of disability determines one’s income. Persons with visual

⁵⁶ Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities.”

⁵⁷ “Mapping Learning to Earning Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa.”

⁵⁸ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

disabilities earn more compared to persons with other types of disabilities. Men with disabilities earn double what females earn, regardless of difficulty.”⁵⁹

Poorly enforced disability regulation and legislation

Although South Africa arguably hosts decent regulations and legislation to support and empower persons with disabilities, many of these are not well monitored or enforced and thus discrimination in the workplace is still the reality for many persons with disabilities.⁶⁰

Intersectionality of identities creates additional barriers

Barriers faced by youth with disabilities can be compounded through intersection with other identities such as ethnicity, gender, or migrant status:

- Young women with disabilities who are educated have been shown to take longer to find a job.
- Women with disabilities are more likely to experience gender-based violence than non-disabled women.
- Women are more likely than men to be responsible for unpaid care in the household.
- These realities may impact the ability of many women with disabilities to participate in any employment-related skills development or other employment programmes.⁶¹

4.2 Barriers faced by employers

Lack of disability confidence in employers

Several of our interviewees noted that one of the biggest barriers to employing youth with disabilities was the lack of disability confidence in employers:

- Several employers spoke about how they felt ignorant about the needs, wants and abilities of persons with disabilities, and how they had found it incredibly challenging to navigate the world of disability.
- Employers lamented the lack of disability experts along with there not being a universal understanding of disability to guide them.
- Employers reported that in many cases, where experts were located, they were often only experts in one disability type and often even doctors were not clear on what counted as a disability.

The result of this is that many employers either shy away from targeting persons with disabilities or outsource the recruitment, training and learnerships of persons with disabilities to other organisations. Those employers who have embedded the employment of persons with disabilities in their strategies have had to dedicate many resources, staff time, and expenditure on available experts, into trying to understand the disability landscape.

⁵⁹ “White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

⁶⁰ Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities.”

⁶¹ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

An important point raised by one of the employer interviewees is that even disability confident employers can face challenges recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities. These challenges occur in spite of employers understanding the needs and wants of persons with disabilities and implementing multipronged approaches to recruitment and retention. Such a finding points to the need to ensure adequate monitoring and evaluation of any employment programmes to understand any additional barriers that have not been reflected in research to date.

Lack of in-demand skills and employable persons with disabilities

A research paper coming out of South Africa notes that “the low skills levels of persons with disabilities are continuously identified as a challenge for employment, and employers argue that they cannot find persons with disabilities who have the needed skills.”⁶²




Many of the employers we interviewed confirmed this reality explaining the challenges they faced in finding the right people with the right skills to succeed in their working environment. One employer explained that despite using wide-ranging and diverse tools to recruit persons with disabilities they still had trouble recruiting enough persons with disabilities to meet demand.

From the interviews, there seem to be two issues at play:

- A challenge finding persons with disabilities with the right skills, employability and confidence to move away from the disability grant.
- High demand for persons with disability due to the B-BBEE scorecard and employee tax incentive – for learnerships, in particular.

Some workplace accommodations are perceived as too challenging to implement

Several of the employers we interviewed discussed the reality of many persons with disabilities requiring accessible transport, additional leave days, and potentially shorter working days. The most-mentioned accommodations that employers indicated would be difficult to implement were:

	<p><u>Absorbing the cost of accessible transport</u> With many GBS employers operating on a shift basis 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, safe accessible transport at all hours would be a requirement for many employees with disabilities. Most of the employers indicated that they would not be able to absorb the cost of accessible transport and would struggle to accommodate different start times where, for example, the city provides free accessible transport outside of the usual rush hour.</p>
	<p><u>Employing someone with a full visual impairment</u> All the GBS employers we spoke to indicated that given the current state of assistive technology, they would struggle to employ someone with a full visual impairment.</p>
	<p><u>Absorbing the cost of additional days off</u></p>

⁶² Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities.”

Many of our interviewees mentioned that some persons with disabilities require additional leave days or additional time off for doctors' appointments, hospital visits or days away from work due to mental health issues. Some employers indicated that the cost of these additional days cannot be absorbed by the company, however, other employers were able to provide access to unpaid special leave or gave employees the option of taking annual leave when allocated sick-leave days were exhausted. One employer noted that due to the shift schedule within the GBS environment, they would schedule days off around the shifts to make it easier for their employees with disabilities. There was some mention of abuse of the sick-leave system by some persons with disabilities and employers noted that this made it hard to manage productivity.

Several of the GBS employers spoke about the nature of the call centre environment being a naturally high-paced and stressful environment with shifts that often mean a working day of 9 or 10 hours, which is longer than many other job types. These employers indicated that the reality of the disadvantages faced by many persons with disabilities in their lack of access to quality education and skills development, and other internal issues, meant that there is a perception that youth with disabilities were not always a 'good fit' for call centre work.

4.3 Other challenges impacting employment

Learnership hopping

What is learnership hopping? Learnership hopping is a phenomenon where participants move between learnerships either on completion of the learnership or during the learnership. Participants do not necessarily move to a learnership on a higher NQF level, they may move to one at the same level or even a lower level.⁶³ Although there is little recent research conducted on the impact of learnerships in South Africa, and almost none on the impact of learnerships for persons with disabilities, the prevailing view from interviews was that people hop from learnership to learnership to retain access to a stipend and will often switch mid-programme for a slightly higher stipend. Employers noted that learnership hopping is not unique to persons with disabilities but is currently very prevalent among persons with disabilities especially in the call centre environment.

Why does learnership hopping occur? There are several, often related, issues at play:

Employer behaviour:

- Increased demand by employers for hosting persons with disabilities in learnerships due to benefits of increasing company B-BBEE scorecard points and accessing the Employee Tax Incentive. Most of our interviewees noted demand often outstrips supply.

Learner behaviour:

- Increased demand from employers has meant that persons with disabilities find it quite easy to learnership hop for a slightly higher stipend.

Lack of absorption:

⁶³ Botha et al.

- Unfortunately, for many employers the demand for persons with disabilities at the learnership level, does not equate to demand for persons with disabilities at the permanent employment level. Although some employers will look to absorb persons with disabilities into their workforce, many completely outsource the learnership to other companies and have no intention of retaining the participants beyond the learnership.
- The lack of absorption prospects is well understood by persons with disabilities who know and understand their value to employers in terms of B-BBEE points and tax incentives, but are also aware that they are unlikely to be correctly valued from a skills perspective by prospective employers. This leads to the perception amongst persons with disabilities that call centre learnerships do not lead to careers and they are “just being used as a token” and then “will be dumped in the bin”. Loyalty to an employer is therefore low, learnerships are then viewed as merely access to a stipend and so persons with disabilities will not feel bad for moving around for higher stipends. Some people will even sign on to multiple learnerships at the same time.

Lack of regulation and monitoring:

- One factor leading to the persistence of this behaviour is that there are no regulations preventing people from signing up to multiple learnerships simultaneously or to spending years moving from one learnership to another at the same NQF level. The National Learner Record Database is supposed to keep track but does not currently do so.⁶⁴
- In addition, several employers we spoke to noted that there seems to be no monitoring or regulation to ensure that multiple companies do not receive the Employee Tax Incentive and B-BBEE points for the *same* learner in the *same* period. We even heard about training academies being formed with the specific purpose of gaming the system and signing up one learner to multiple learnerships.

What is the impact of learnership hopping? Learnership hopping has negative effects on employers *and* persons with disabilities. Employers we interviewed said that due to the high demand for persons with disabilities, even those employers who are genuinely interested in diversity and retaining persons with disabilities find it hard to do so. The stipend associated with learnerships is often “easier money” than working for a salary in a performance-managed, often-shifted, call centre environment – some employers gave examples of persons with disabilities being placed in permanent employment, only to leave for another learnership.

Although some persons with disabilities may benefit from the learnership system in the short-term through access to the stipend, one of the only studies on this topic finds that “learnership hopping is counterproductive for the career development of persons with disabilities and wastes resources [...and] contributes to keeping persons with disabilities held in a cycle of training and poverty.”⁶⁵ One of the problems is that learnerships seem to be failing to provide access to the open labour market as the skills imparted are often not at the level demanded by employers. Thus, when a person with a disability becomes too old to access learnerships, they are left without in-demand skills and work experience. Interviewees noted

⁶⁴ Ariefdien, “Learnerships: Enabling Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities into Employment.”

⁶⁵ Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities.”

that persons with disabilities in learnerships become a numbers game with little thought to ensuring they are provided with meaningful work and the opportunity to build a career.

Fraudulent disability certificates

Interviewees spoke about another unintended consequence of the learnership model being an increase in fraudulent disability certificates where an able-bodied person will purchase a fake disability certificate (most usually for an invisible disability such as epilepsy or bi-polar disorder). As a result, some employers have “blacklisted” certain disabilities due to the high level of fraud and so persons with these disabilities are unable to access learnerships. The prevalence of fake disability certificates takes opportunities away from people with genuine disabilities.

Verification process for persons with disabilities

The governance processes to verify a disability, for the purposes of B-BBEE scorecard points and employment equity requirements, poses a challenge for both employers and employees with disabilities. Interviewees reported that the verification process can be overly onerous with companies having to pay large sums of money for disability certificates. Some verification agencies even state that new medical disability certificates are required each year which means the person being verified has to relive any associated trauma. One interviewee explained that this process has resulted in some employees with disabilities asking to be removed from being classified as an employment equity hire as they do not want to undergo such a process annually. Interviewees also raised the concern that this fixation on the medical definition of disability from verification agents can perpetuate the medical approach to disability and hinders the transition to the social model of disability.

5 Employment strategies

Harambee's extensive experience with 'pathwaying' young people into employment affirms the research indicating better success with a multipronged approach addressing multiple barriers across both supply and demand.⁶⁶ The following two sections outline a range of supply and demand-side approaches to address the barriers experienced by youth with disabilities and the employers wishing to employ and retain them.

The World Bank's Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework introduces the twin-track approach of advancing disability inclusion which involves:

1. **Mainstreaming of disability:** This track focuses on systematically including disability-related issues in a program. This would mean that all planning, communications, activities, and events take measures to ensure persons with disabilities are included on an equal basis with others. Disability-specific components can be part of such activities. Benefits of the mainstreaming approach are that mixing youth with and without disabilities can help build the confidence and communication skills of persons with disabilities while increasing the disability awareness of their nondisabled peers.⁶⁷
2. **Disability-specific:** This track involves independent projects that are specifically targeted to benefit and empower persons with disabilities. In many cases, specialised programs can be a step towards developing more inclusive mainstream programs.⁶⁸

It is worth keeping the twin-track approach in mind when designing any employment programmes for persons with disabilities.

Rapid advances in assistive technology can increase the available work opportunities for persons with disabilities, and better support them entering the labour market. An important strategy is to improve the availability of, and access to, these assistive devices, while encouraging employers to use accessible digital technology in the workplace. This includes encouraging websites to be compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0⁶⁹ so that they are compatible with assistive technologies.⁷⁰ There are several different technological solutions, examples of which are outlined in the appendix.

5.1 Employment strategies for youth with disabilities (supply-side strategies)

Technical and digital skills training

To address the failures of the education system as well as the lack of marketable and in-demand skills of many persons with disabilities, extensive upskilling of technical and digital skills is likely to be necessary. It is essential that any training is focused on skills that are in-

⁶⁶ Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

⁶⁷ Lamichhane et al.

⁶⁸ "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities."

⁶⁹ Part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Institute of the World Wide Web Consortium, the main international standards organisation for the internet.

⁷⁰ "Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities"; Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

demand with employers rather than based on perceptions or stereotypes of the abilities of persons with disabilities. Spending additional time and resources training persons with disabilities in in-demand or scarce skills can assist them to earn greater starting salaries and thus overcome some of the barriers associated with entry-level positions. Persons with disabilities should also be given autonomy to choose their own career path, rather than be coerced into a certain line of employment.⁷¹

Soft skills and work-readiness training

Similarly, soft skills and work-readiness/employability training is likely to be important to help provide persons with disability with the confidence, agency, self-determination, and resilience to transition into the labour market. Young women with disabilities are likely to require additional support to gain confidence. In addition, soft skills training on critical thinking, communication, collaboration, initiative, and flexibility has been shown to benefit both youth with and without disabilities.⁷²

Several of our employer interviewees highlighted the importance of soft skills and work-readiness training to prepare youth with disabilities for careers in the GBS sector. Success in the GBS sector often requires an individual to be extremely motivated, self-driven and extraverted, and thus soft skills preparation is essential.

Our employer interviewees also spoke about the benefits of bridging and work-readiness programmes that specifically target the mindsets and behaviour they may have learned due to negative societal attitudes. Examples include unlearning any ‘bad’ behaviours developed through learnership hopping; educating and capacitating participants to show how they add value to the economy and how they have power and control over their future; peer mentoring; training on self-determination; and how to request workplace accommodations.

Transition to work programmes where prospective employees experience a live work setting and learn on the job can also be particularly effective.⁷³ One employer indicated that the best recruits they received were those who came through the Harambee bridging programme after receiving targeted soft skills and work-readiness training designed specifically for persons with disabilities.

Ongoing support and training once in the workplace

Many people with disabilities will require ongoing support to remain in the workplace. We discuss this in more detail in section 5.2 as a strategy that can be implemented by employers to assist with the retention of people with disabilities. However, some tools include adjustment of work tasks, review of, and addition to, workplace accommodations, flexibility,

⁷¹ Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities.”

⁷² “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities”; Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities”; Botha et al., “In Search of a Landing Place for Persons with Disabilities.”

⁷³ Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities.”

working jointly, coaching and mentoring, access to focused developmental programmes and training, and access to wellness programmes.⁷⁴

All training needs to be accessible and disability sensitive

Where new training programmes are being designed, or where mainstream training seeks to include persons with disabilities, it is essential that the following design elements are included to ensure skills training is designed to be inclusive:

- Accessible training venue
- Reasonable accommodation adjustments to be made on an individual basis for each person with a disability
- Accessible training materials including online and offline materials and information
- Trainers and facilitators who have received disability awareness training.⁷⁵

Jobs and skills match

Employment programmes, such as those successfully run by Harambee for years, to help match the skills of candidates with relevant jobs, have also been effective tools to pathway youth with disabilities into employment. Examples include internship programmes and entrepreneurial support programmes which help youth with disabilities find careers that suit their interests and skills.⁷⁶

We received a few cautions from some interviewees who said that although there is high demand for people to work in the GBS sector, not every young person is the ideal GBS employee or will thrive in a call centre environment, and thus one needs to be careful about placing people in positions that do not match their interests. We were also told that due to the prevalence of GBS learnerships, there may be a lack of appetite among youth with disabilities as they most likely would already have completed one (or several) of them and may be disillusioned by the perceived lack of absorption prospects and corresponding career opportunities.

Debunking family and community misconceptions

To address long-held stereotypical attitudes and misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities, working with families to show them that persons with disabilities can succeed in the workplace may help them to encourage their family members with a disability to enter training and internship opportunities.⁷⁷

Disability benefit system that supports labour market participation

Designing a disability benefit system that provides incentives and opportunities for persons with disabilities to transition into the labour market, or timeously return to the labour market

⁷⁴ Lamichhane et al.

⁷⁵ "Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities."

⁷⁶ Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

⁷⁷ Lamichhane et al.

for those who become incapacitated while they are employed, is widely seen as a large challenge facing governments. For people who lose capacity while working, particularly those with mental health conditions, early intervention is seen as critical to avoid people losing contact with the labour market for too long. Policy instruments such as 'participation packages' could be investigated where each person with a disability is entitled to a package containing cash and other benefits, together with rehabilitation and vocational training and a range of employment support.⁷⁸

5.2 Employment strategies for employers (demand-side strategies)

Develop disability confident employers

Several of our interviewees, supported by available literature, pointed to the need to develop disability confident employers to make an impact with 'pathwaying' and retaining youth with disabilities in employment. There are several components making up a disability confident employer:

- They see disability as just another form of 'normal' diversity, such as diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion etc.⁷⁹
- They know that persons with disabilities do not come from a homogenous group and understand that people with the same disabilities may not necessarily have the same needs or wants.
- They know how to engage with persons with disabilities on an individual basis to make the required workplace accommodations to enable employees and remove disabling barriers.⁸⁰
- They are aware that ongoing support measures and targeted development programmes may be required to attract and retain persons with disabilities and that ongoing support measures and workplace accommodations are likely to require dedicated budgets for every department.

According to our interviewees, there is likely to be an ongoing process to become a disability confident employer. The process often includes:

- Undergoing a journey to understand the disability landscape which may involve engaging with disability experts, disability awareness organisations, and persons with disabilities.
- Learning while doing.
- Sharing learning between employers and employment organisations on how to pathway different persons with disabilities into employment.

Additional tools and methods are discussed in more detail in the following few sections.

Embrace a fully inclusive workplace culture led by senior management

For the employers we interviewed who were successfully employing and retaining persons with disabilities, a central factor was that they embedded inclusivity and diversity into their

⁷⁸ "Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities."

⁷⁹ Bradshaw, "Addressing Attitudinal Barriers through Awareness and Etiquette."

⁸⁰ Knipprath and Cabus, "Integration of Disabled Persons into the Competitive Labour Market."

workplace culture. There appeared to be two approaches: those who felt that it was their mission to make an impact by employing persons with disabilities, and those who created a people-first culture which embraced diversity and inclusivity. Some employers held a combination of the two. Equally important was that this approach started through a commitment to disability inclusivity at the leadership level – this angle is also reflected in the literature.⁸¹

Disability training

Addressing the barrier of discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions is unlikely to be straightforward. However, in the workplace, one tool is disability inclusion training for employees and management. This can help employers to realise the potential of persons with disabilities and to understand that it is unlikely to be prohibitively expensive to make the necessary workplace accommodations to ensure they can thrive in their roles. This training can also help equip employees without disabilities to better work alongside persons with disabilities.⁸² Although several of our employer interviewees alluded to disability training, one specifically mentioned an internal socialisation training programme to help colleagues and leaders better understand persons with disabilities. This employer made the module compulsory for all leadership training. Another employer indicated that there is often a need to upskill one's customer base to help them understand how to appropriately interact with staff with disabilities.



Strategic and targeted approach to recruit persons with disabilities

A strategic and targeted approach to recruiting persons with disabilities came through strongly in most of our interviews with employers. The employers outlined their various approaches which included:

	<p><u>Embed the hiring of persons with disabilities into company strategy, combined with associated targets</u></p> <p>One employer spoke about how their strategy was driven by leadership and involved an inclusive culture of acceptance. Setting targets for the percentage of employees comprising persons with disabilities was also a key associated measure. Targets varied from 2% to 10%, although several companies conceded that targets were often driven from a B-BBEE perspective.</p>
	<p><u>Multipronged approach to sourcing persons with disabilities</u></p> <p>One employer mentioned their strategy involved engagement with disability-oriented non-profit organisations, disability networks, specialist recruiters, WhatsApp groups, the Department of Labour, and even hosting tables at disability grant collection sites. Another employer has an internal referral programme where employees are paid a placement fee for referring a person with a disability who is subsequently employed. This employer also found this approach helped to change the narrative that persons with disabilities are shameful to families.</p>

⁸¹ Maznorbalia, Ismail, and Hussein, "The Inclusion Initiatives for Persons with Disabilities in the Mainstream Employment: A Systematic Literature."



⁸² Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities."

	<p>Many employers use specialist agencies when sourcing persons with disabilities, and some even fully outsource the hosting of learnerships to specialist agencies. This was often due to the belief that the company was not expert enough to source, and adequately support, persons with disabilities.</p>
	<p><u>Signal inclusivity through company branding and job advert posting</u></p> <p>Interviewees mentioned the importance of company marketing and branding that shows the company supports and employs persons with disabilities. Signalling on job adverts that persons with disabilities were encouraged to apply was also deemed important. Similarly ensuring that job adverts were accessible to persons with a disability was also an important consideration for employers.</p>
	<p><u>Ensure entry criteria for jobs is non-discriminatory</u></p> <p>Ensure that entry-criteria for job positions does not inadvertently discriminate against persons with disabilities through overly onerous educational or work experience requirements. This applies especially to many learnerships that require candidates to have a Grade 12 qualification.</p>

Intentional development programmes to provide ongoing support and career development

Most of the interviewees spoke about the need for ongoing support and intentional development programmes for employees with disabilities to assist with retention, help them thrive in the workplace, promote good attendance and performance, and develop a culture of loyalty and reward for excellence. Additional budget would be required to fund these programmes and companies need to make annual provision as part of the normal financial cycle. One employer mentioned that they spend R80 000 to R100 000 per annum on learning and development initiatives per employee with a disability.

Some examples of the types of initiatives mentioned by employers are listed below. Many employers offer a combination of measures:

	<p><u>Ongoing coaching and mentoring programmes</u></p> <p>These may include a personal coach. Activities include goal-setting, personality profiling, career trajectory support etc. Evidence from the literature also supports the efficacy of ongoing mentoring and coaching programmes, “effective mentorship programmes tend to last more than six months, have a structured curriculum, tailor content to the program’s specific objective, address key elements of youths’ environment, address the transition from post-secondary education to employment, and include group as well as one-on-one components.”⁸³</p>
	<p><u>Career development opportunities</u></p> <p>This could include additional training to develop into a new role and employed learnership opportunities. Interviewees stressed the importance of demonstrating to employees with disabilities that career progression and a meaningful career in the industry is possible. This was particularly pertinent for the GBS sector where learnerships often left persons with disabilities feeling like they were being “dumped in a corner and used for B-BBEE points.”</p>

⁸³ Lamichhane et al.



Constant coaching to deal with difficult customers

Employers also mentioned support measures related to the GBS sector which included constant coaching and training to deal with challenging customers, combined with on-the-floor support. Dedicated scripts to support certain disabilities were also mentioned, for example, if an employee is slower at typing, they would tell the customer that their system is a bit slow. One GBS employer also indicated that although their business focused purely on international clients and customers, they started their employees with disabilities with domestic clients and customers as it is thought that dealing with familiar South African accents and cultures would ease the transition into call centre work.



Employee wellness programmes

These were generally available for all employees with counsellors or psychologists and other medical support on hand. This was thought to be particularly needed in the call centre environment which is a pressurized, driven environment with targets.

On a cautionary note, one employer mentioned that they tended to experience a backlash when introducing dedicated initiatives for persons with disabilities. The backlash tended to come from individuals who thought they might also benefit from the dedicated initiatives and questioned why they were limited to persons with disabilities.

Create accessible work environments through workplace accommodations

Accessibility means “to ensure persons with disabilities can access and use, on an equal basis with others, the physical environment, transportation, [and] information and communications.”⁸⁴ One employer spoke about implementing an accessibility strategy that was all encompassing and not only focused on physical building accommodations. This was key if persons with disabilities were to feel safe at work and remain in the business. Other tools and approaches that were mentioned by interviewees are listed below:



Determine required support on a case-by-case basis

Put processes in place to learn and understand what is required to support existing and incoming employees with disabilities. Employers stressed that this was not about having a list of disabilities and associated accommodations, but rather support requirements needed to be determined on an individual level and on a case-by-case basis.



Environmental accessibility audits

These help employers determine any barriers to inclusion or safety risks. “Audits should include practical, cost-effective solutions to removing or minimising these risks in the short, medium and long term in order to be realistically implemented.”⁸⁵



Physical accommodations

Examples included accessible buildings; accessible restroom, canteen, and parking facilities; and assistive devices, technology, and equipment such as desks and chairs to accommodate certain disabilities.

⁸⁴ “An Inclusive Digital Economy for People with Disabilities.”

⁸⁵ Bradshaw, “Promoting Safety for All through Disability Inclusion.”



Flexibility accommodations

Examples include flexible work hours (which can assist with transportation issues where employees can avoid traveling at peak traffic and thus access dial-a-ride initiatives provided by the state); a shorter working day; time off to take medication and attend medical check-ups; and additional breaks during shifts.

Interestingly, some of the GBS employers we interviewed explained that historically, the call centre industry would not have been able to accommodate people with auditory impairments, however with omnichannel support now being provided, such disabilities can be accommodated as the employees can work on chats and email support. One caveat is that people with auditory impairments often require a sign language interpreter for them to be trained and to provide ongoing management and support. Some employers indicated that this could be a potential barrier.

Although not directly related to the workplace, accessible transport (the lack thereof a key barrier) also needs to be available in order for persons with disabilities to access the labour market.

Internships and work-based training

Internships, apprenticeships, and work-based training are regularly cited in the literature as useful tools for both young work seekers and employers. These initiatives provide potential employees with opportunities to develop their skills and work experience, while allowing employers to see the abilities and better understand the needs of persons with disabilities in their work environment. This can also help to address any misconceptions or negative stereotypes that employers may have regarding the abilities of persons with disabilities.⁸⁶

Notwithstanding the challenges already mentioned with South Africa's learnership model, several of the employers we interviewed confirmed the benefits of this 12-month screening and training opportunity. They explained that the learnerships can be designed to allow persons with disabilities to enjoy a longer learning curve while assessing if the business is physically ready to accommodate the candidate and if the candidate is a good fit for the environment and company culture.

Move towards the social model of disability regarding verification of disability

To address some of the challenges around verification of disability, employers need to be capacitated to push back against verification agencies who have overly onerous and potentially unnecessary disability verification requirements that prevent progress in the transition to the social model of disability.

⁸⁶ Knipprath and Cabus, "Integration of Disabled Persons into the Competitive Labour Market"; Lamichhane et al., "Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities"; "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities."

Showcase the business case for employing persons with disabilities

As a result of discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions, several of our interviewees indicated that employers may not see the return on investment or value of employing persons with disabilities. This may in turn lead to a reluctance to make the investments to accommodate and support persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Thus, another tool to encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities is to showcase the advantages:



Disability is key to capturing the full benefits of diversity

Companies increasingly understand the value of a diverse workforce which can include improvements to problem solving and innovation, as well as benefit brand reputation. Helping employers to see disability as a key part of a diverse workforce may encourage them to include persons with disabilities in their employment targets.⁸⁷ In addition, many workplace accommodations and support measures are likely to also benefit the entire employee base.



Disability inclusive companies breed innovation in products and services

Hiring youth with disabilities can add to the competitive advantage of companies through better innovation with products and services and increasing the company understanding of how to best serve their customers with disabilities.⁸⁸ One of our employer interviewees explained how inclusivity in GBS companies could open up a revenue stream where employees with disabilities can better enable call centres to cater for customers with disabilities. Once expertise has been developed in this area, these inclusivity insights could be outsourced to the international market.



Tapping disability human resources can benefit the economy

There are potential benefits to the economy from increasing employment of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities as a group are one of the largest untapped pools of human resources and International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates show that “if the employment of persons with disabilities, as a group, could be raised to the level of persons without disabilities, then economies could benefit from between three to seven per cent increase of GDP.”⁸⁹

Many of our interviewees also spoke about the resilience of persons with disabilities as they have often had to overcome many challenges in life and find creative ways of solving these challenges – although one needs to be cautious about making sweeping statements about such a heterogenous group.

Employer incentives

Section 2 discusses some of South Africa’s employer incentives to employ people with disabilities such as B-BBEE scorecard points and Employee Tax Incentive. There is a debate in the literature about wage subsidies as a tool to increase hiring of persons with disabilities. Wage subsidies usually cover a portion of employee wages for a limited time. In theory, wage

⁸⁷ “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

⁸⁸ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

⁸⁹ “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

subsidies provide compensation to employers to offset some of the costs of making workplace accommodations, to counteract any reduced work capacity or productivity, and thus reduce the perceived risk of hiring persons with disabilities. There is some concern that wage subsidies may send a signal that subsidised employees are ‘second class employees’ which may have negative consequences for the subsidised employee as well as exacerbate the misconception that persons with disabilities are associated with lower productivity.⁹⁰

One employer we interviewed mentioned that providing access to additional tools and resources (such as access to a free sign language interpreter or a monthly educational and development programme) for employers who reach a certain percentage of employees with disabilities may act as an incentive to hiring persons with disabilities.

Quotas

There are few studies on the efficacy of quotas for promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. However, a quota-levy system, (where employers pay a levy if they do not meet the quota, and that levy is used for a special fund to promote employment of persons with disabilities) is believed to be an effective measure.⁹¹

Entrepreneurship programmes

Self-employment and entrepreneurship can be viable opportunities for persons with disabilities as they allow for more flexible work schedules, locations, and workloads. However, these activities usually provide less secure income and persons with disabilities face both the barriers that all entrepreneurs experience, along with additional barriers such as challenges identifying funding opportunities or persuading investors that their business will be successful. In addition, those who may have been socially isolated may also not have the necessary social capital and networks to support their fledgling businesses.⁹² Entrepreneurial programmes catering for persons with disabilities will thus need to ensure barriers are reduced and additional support is provided.⁹³ One employer we interviewed spoke about an entrepreneurial academy that they host as an alternative pathway for persons with disabilities who have completed a learnership at their company.

In addition to opportunities in the GBS sector, the gig economy, the impact sourcing model, and digital entrepreneurship can also provide earning opportunities for young people with disabilities. Ensuring that digital gig platforms are designed using accessibility guidelines can help youth with disabilities to access opportunities according to their own schedules and from home.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities”; Knipprath and Cabus, “Integration of Disabled Persons into the Competitive Labour Market”; Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities.”

⁹¹ Lamichhane et al., “Approaches to Increasing Employment and Quality of Employment Among Youth with Disabilities”; “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

⁹² “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

⁹³ “Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

⁹⁴ “Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities.”

6 Conclusion and recommendations

This report has shown that although South Africa boasts fairly progressive legislation, policy and regulations specifically designed to support the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, for the vast majority of persons with disabilities, this has not yielded the desired results. Much of this lack of progress can be explained through the multiple, and often compounding, barriers faced by both the supply- and demand-side of the labour market equation. The key barriers are summarised below:

Supply-side barriers faced by persons with disabilities:



Lack of access to quality education

- Lack of accessible learning material
- Inaccessible school premises
- Inaccessible or costly transport
- Teachers who are ill-equipped to address their needs.



Lack of requisite soft, technical, and digital skills to succeed in the workplace



Inaccessible digital and physical infrastructure at every stage of their employment journey

- Inaccessible job postings
- Inaccessible digital platforms
- Lack of assistive technology at workplaces
- Inaccessible or costly public transport
- Inaccessible workplaces.



Discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions

- Which can lead to internalised impression, learned helplessness, and low self-esteem.



Box-ticking and maximisation of B-BBEE points

- Instead of pursuing the employment of persons with disabilities for the benefits to company diversity, persons with disabilities are often seen as a numbers game which results in little concern for ensuring the workplace is adequately set up to support them to succeed and grow.



Fear of losing the disability grant

- People may be concerned that if they start earning an income, they will lose their grant.
- There are also no clear pathways from receiving a government grant towards entering formal employment and very little support for those making the transition.



Overprotective families and the risk of violence

- Due to the risk of violence against some disabilities, families may shelter family members with disability and prevent them from accessing opportunities.



Training and skills development unrelated to labour market demand or inaccessible

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- Youth with disabilities are often encouraged to join skills development programmes for skills that are not in demand by employers (for example, basket weaving for people who are visually impaired).
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Intersectionality

- These barriers can be compounded through intersection with other identities such as ethnicity, gender, race or migrant status, and young women with disabilities are particularly harder hit.

Demand-side barriers which face employers seeking to employ youth with disabilities:



Lack of disability confidence in employers

- Some employers find it challenging to navigate the world of disability and feel ignorant about the needs, wants, and abilities of persons with disabilities.



Lack of, and perceived lack of, in-demand skills and employable persons with disabilities

- As a result, many employers find it challenging to source the desired number of persons with disabilities to meet their requirements for B-BBEE related learnerships.



Some workplace accommodations are perceived as too challenging to implement

- Specifically, those around absorbing the costs of accessible transport, additional leave days or time off, or shorter working days.

There are also other challenges creating barriers for both employers and potential employees:



Unintended consequences of the learnership system and associated B-BBEE scorecard points and Employee Tax Incentive:

- The high demand for persons with disabilities created through this system, along with stipends that can be similar or higher to many entry-level positions, can reduce the incentive for persons with disabilities to seek permanent employment opportunities which are often also shifted, performance managed and more pressurised.
- Persons with disabilities can also feel like they are only being used for B-BBEE points, this leads to more gaming of the system and hopping around for higher stipends.
- These factors also negatively impact those employers who are genuinely seeking to recruit and retain persons with disabilities in their workforces.



Fraudulent disability certificates

- There has been an increase in fraudulent disability certificates which take opportunities away from people with genuine disabilities.



Verification process for persons with disabilities

- The verification process to verify a disability can be overly onerous, often too frequently to be fit for purpose, and creates additional trauma for the person with a disability and additional expenditure and administration for the employer.

Programmes that seek inclusive ‘pathwaying’ of youth with disabilities into employment, will thus need to focus on alleviating both the above supply- and demand-side barriers. This report has outlined several available strategies to facilitate this.

Our recommendations for how to create these inclusive pathways are as follows:

Key principles:



Focus on the disability specific component of the twin-track approach to disability, however, put plans in place for concurrent mainstreaming:

- Given the lack of comprehensive research around successful strategies to pathway youth with disabilities into employment, starting with disability-specific programmes may be necessary, however, there need to be coherent plans in place to transfer any insights learned to existing mainstream pathways into employment together with associated monitoring and evaluation frameworks.



Be realistic about the scope and reach of employment programmes:

- Be aware that employment programmes are unlikely to be able to address all the barriers and resulting consequences for persons with disabilities who may have experienced a lifetime of socio-economic deprivation, and skills development barriers from early childhood development, through to education.



Be cognizant of the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and other identities to ensure that those groups facing harder barriers are adequately accommodated.



Ensure suitable social protection and reduce social and emotional isolation:

- Digital jobs programmes, especially those making use of platform-based micro and gig work, need to be aware that wages on these platforms may be lower than in traditional jobs, and there may also be a lack of adequate social protection. Digital jobs that promote remote working also need plans in place to reduce social and emotional isolation.



Follow a **multipronged approach** to addressing barriers through a combination of demand- and supply-side strategies to provide support both persons with disabilities and those employers seeking to employ them.

Recommended supply-side strategies:



Intensive and extended technical, digital, soft skills, and work-readiness training components:

- When compared to other youth-focused employment programmes, programmes to support young people with disabilities will require a more intensive focus on skills development to address failures of the education and training systems.
- Training needs to be accessible and disability sensitive especially where mainstream training programmes seek to include persons with disabilities.



Include a job and skills match element:

- To help match the skills of persons with disabilities with relevant jobs and help them to find careers that suit their interests and skills.



Provide **ongoing support, training, and development** for persons with disabilities placed in the workplace.



Facilitate internships and work-based training

- This has been shown to benefit both young work seekers and employers. These initiatives can provide potential employees with opportunities to develop their skills and work experience, while allowing employers to see the abilities and better understand the needs of persons with disabilities in their workplace.



Debunk family, community, and employer misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities:

- Play an advocacy role to share positive stories about:
 - The careers of youth with disabilities
 - The various pathways into employment for youth with disabilities
 - Employers who are successfully employing persons with disabilities

Recommended demand-side strategies which involve working with employers and senior leadership at employers to assist them to:



Become disability confident employers.

- See disability as just another form of 'normal' diversity, such as diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, for example.
- Understand that persons with disabilities do not come from a homogenous group and understand that people with the same disabilities may not necessarily have the same needs or wants.
- Understand how to engage with persons with disabilities on an individual basis to make the required workplace accommodations to enable employees and remove disabling barriers. This involves moving away from having lists of disabilities that an employer feels they can and cannot accommodate.
- Understand that ongoing support and targeted development programmes may be required and will need dedicated budgets for every department.



Embrace a fully inclusive workplace culture.



Send leadership and employees for disability awareness training.



Implement a strategic and targeted approach to recruit persons with disabilities:

- Embed the hiring of persons with disabilities into company strategy, combined with associated targets.
 - Use a multi-pronged approach to sourcing persons with disabilities which may involve specialist agencies and recruiters.
 - Signal inclusivity through company branding and job advert posting.
 - Ensure entry criteria for jobs is non-discriminatory.
-



Develop intentional development programmes to provide ongoing support and career development:

- Ongoing coaching and mentoring programmes
- Career development opportunities
- Constant coaching to deal with difficult customers, and scripts to support certain disabilities (for those in the GBS sector)
- Employee wellness programmes

**Create accessible work environments through workplace accommodations:**

- Determine required support on a case-by-case basis
- Conduct environmental accessibility audits
- Physical accommodations include: accessible buildings; accessible restroom, canteen, and parking facilities; and assistive devices, technology, and equipment such as desks and chairs to accommodate certain disabilities.
- Flexible working arrangements include: flexible work hours (which can assist with transportation issues where employees can avoid traveling at peak traffic and thus access dial-a-ride initiatives provided by the state); a shorter working day; time off to take medication and attend medical check-ups; and additional breaks during shifts.

**Move towards the social model of disability regarding verification of disability**

- Capacitate and empower employers to push back against overly onerous, and often unnecessary verification processes.

**Showcase the business case for employing persons with disabilities:**

- Disability is key to capturing the full benefits of a diversity.
- Disability inclusive companies breed innovation in products and services.
- Tapping disability human resources can benefit the economy.

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8 Appendix

Technology solutions for different types of disability⁹⁵

Solution	Description and examples
Visual disabilities	
Braille integrated technology such as braille enabled keyboard for typing or braille smartwatch	The Dot Watch helps blind users access digital information (SMS, emails) in Braille through touch sensors. The Dot Watch alarm consists of vibrations, which are very useful for individuals with complete hearing and visual impairments.
Speech-to-text software	Enables persons to use their voices to enter text into a word processing document like Google speech-to-text.
Screen readers	TalkBack—Android screen reader software—reads aloud screen content on touch and swipe gestures.
Talking apps and talking glasses	Microsoft's Seeing A.I. app describes people, text, and objects for people with low vision. It can read a handwritten text, describe colours and scenes. Aira, an MIT Solver, provides descriptions of surroundings in real-time. With Aira, a blind user wears smart glasses, which connects to an active video feed. An AI-based system routes the call to an agent who sees the blind user's surroundings through the video and describes it to them in detail.
Physical disabilities	
Hands-free navigation and gesture-controlled interfaces which assist persons with severe mobility issues to use digital devices.	IntelliGaze is a tool that allows persons with mobility disabilities to operate their computer using eye control. Windows Hello enables users to access devices with fingerprint, iris scan, or facial recognition rather than passwords, giving people with learning and physical disabilities greater ease to access while remaining secure.
Voice recognition and speech generation	Dragon NaturallySpeaking and Google Voice Access, are useful for those people with physical disabilities who cannot enter instructions intended for computers with keyboards or touch screens.
Sip-and-puff systems	Useful for people with paralysis or fine motor skill disabilities. With these, the user can operate a computer, a mobile device, or a wheelchair.
Cognitive disabilities	
Smart glasses to help understanding social-emotional cues	Brain Power's smart glasses help people with autism better understand emotions and social cues. The wearer of the Google glass type device sees and hears special feedback geared to the situation, such as coaching on facial expressions of emotions, looking at people, and even feedback on the user's emotional state.
Voice-control systems to support those with learning disabilities	These systems, such as Nuance, allow users to dictate messages to be typed on computers and phones, particularly beneficial to people with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. It lets them express their ideas in papers without the frustration of written assignments.
Auditory disabilities	

⁹⁵ "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities."

Specially designed alarm clocks, smoke detectors, doorbells, timers, baby monitors, and phone alerting	Devices to help individuals alert to sound using visual support or in the form of vibrations.
Captioning	Assists individuals with auditory disabilities to access the media. TVs include settings for the user to enable closed captioning of programs that offer this feature. Closed captioning is also provided on many media devices. Logos with “cc” provided in TV guides or directly within the media program (i.e., YouTube) indicate when something is closed captioned. For example, Google’s DeepMind Division is using AI to generate closed captioning for users with hearing impairments.
Speech disabilities	
Apps to assist with pronunciation in exportable audio and text	Voiceitt is an app for people with speech disabilities, including those recovering from a stroke and brain injury and those with cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s, Down syndrome, and other chronic conditions. It learns speakers’ pronunciations over time, normalizing any impediments