

# International Policy Scan of post-pandemic Interventions Supporting People with Disabilities in Employment and the Workplace

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered major shifts in labour markets globally, forcing significant economic disruption and job losses across major industries. Post-pandemic, countries continue to face the critical task of rebuilding and revitalising their economies. There has been an increasing focus globally on [expanding and diversifying workforces](#), as well as facilitating the participation of underutilised groups in the labour market, and people with disabilities (PWD) are one of the key groups of interest. Improving the inclusion of PWD in employment has social and economic benefits beyond reducing workforce shortages. Equitable employment opportunities are key to ensuring social inclusion for PWD, as well as to addressing the economic disparities that exist between those with disabilities and those without. Disability continues to be a [significant driver of poverty globally](#), including across [most OECD countries](#). Analysis of country trends indicates that the [widening disability poverty gap](#) causes an increase in poverty risk among PWD, while the poverty risk for individuals without disabilities remains unchanged. Finally, from the economic point of view, a [review of available evidence](#) on employing individuals with disabilities in Australia found significant advantages for employers in hiring and training PWD, including cost and productivity benefits for businesses, improved productivity, and better employee retention.

Well before the pandemic EU and OECD nations' efforts to address skill and labour shortages have led to [growing recognition of PWD](#) as a potential source of labour. Yet, while disability prevalence stands at [around 18% across OECD](#) (varying greatly across countries), only 40% of PWD on average across OECD have a job. While levels of employment have [improved among PWD](#) across OECD countries over the past decade, overall employment rates remain low compared to the general population. Over the same period, the employment gap between PWD and people without disabilities has remained

the same, with [PWD approximately 40% less likely to be employed](#) compared to those without disabilities. The [absence of an increase in employment rates](#) for PWD despite major progress in the upskilling and levels of educational attainment of PWD in the last decade highlights a need for improved policy initiatives aimed at addressing the disability employment gap.

Globally, PWD [continue to encounter barriers](#) when it comes to obtaining and securing meaningful employment post-pandemic. Remote and teleworking opportunities [may not always lead to greater inclusion](#) of PWD in employment, unless they are provided with appropriate support and accommodations to undertake their work safely. Automation, assistive technologies, and remote work facilitated by technology can help reduce physical barriers for PWD engaging in work, enabling disabled individuals to participate in a wider range of job opportunities. However, the mainstreaming of new technologies and AI stands to negatively impact rather than benefit PWD's employment prospects if they are not ensured equitable and accessible opportunities for work and skills development.

In this report, the team at INGSA reviews a broad range of policy responses globally aimed at improving employment opportunities for PWD, and supporting their accessibility and inclusion in the workplace. We acknowledge the input of the Latin America INGSA chapter.

## Methodology

This report utilised a desk research approach to gain insights into the range of disability employment policies across a selection of countries. Countries were selected through a process that gave priority to those with strong social policies, high levels of development, and readily accessible and reliable online information related to disability and employment. This selection was also undertaken with the aim of compiling disability employment policies across comparable contexts. The chosen countries included OECD member states, several Asian nations with medium to high levels of development, and Brazil.

Data collection primarily involved online research using search engines to identify official government sources, international reports, academic literature, and reputable news articles related to disability employment policies in the selected countries.

## Limitations

The approach undertaken in this report may have resulted in potential bias in country selection and data collection. Further, the scope of this report is limited to countries with well-documented information online, which may not provide a comprehensive review of disability employment policies globally.

# Targets of policy intervention: From education to workplace support

## 1. Vocational and Career Support

Many countries have implemented policies and programs designed to provide individuals with disabilities the necessary guidance, education and training to develop their vocational skills and enter into employment. Across the countries reviewed, the vast majority of the policies identified, and their corresponding programs were introduced prior to the 2020 pandemic. Several of these programs and their formats are detailed below:

In Taiwan, local government services [offer personalised assistance](#) to individuals with disabilities transitioning into employment.<sup>1</sup> Through one-on-one consultations and assessments, the scheme provides individual plans, exploring each person's employment needs, employability, and career development. The service also connects individuals with relevant resources to support them in their career journey.

In the Netherlands, [the government provides assistance to individuals with disabilities](#) to support them in their job search and help maintain employment. This includes covering expenses related to home modifications, sign language interpreting services, job coaches, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

The Australian government provides PWD with [employment-related assessment and counselling](#), as well as specialised school leaver employment support for PWD transitioning into work.<sup>3</sup>

In Singapore, the community provider SG Enable (founded in 2013) offers up to [one year of recruitment and job support services](#) to employers, alongside community partners, to ensure greater employment options for PWD and promote retention of employees with disabilities.

Since the passing of the [Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities](#) in 2016, employers in Brazil are [legally obligated to provide training opportunities for individuals with disabilities](#) who may lack previous work experience.

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<sup>1</sup> These employment services are guaranteed under Articles 33-47 of the amended [People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act](#) (1997).

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch social security system was overhauled in 1987. [Several measures](#) were introduced to encourage greater participation of PWD in the labour force. The [1998 Disability \(Re\)integration Act](#) passed additional provisions into law for the (re)integration of disabled workers in employment.

<sup>3</sup> The [most recent reforms](#) aimed at improving employment outcomes for PWD were introduced in 2018.

## 2. Inclusive Hiring Practices

A range of policies exist that encourage businesses and organisations to adopt inclusive hiring practices, which not only diversify their workforce but also tap into the potential of people with disabilities. Prior to the pandemic, around [100 countries](#) globally had introduced national legislation for disability employment quotas, including [China, India, Japan, Argentina, Austria, Chile, France, Germany, and Luxembourg](#), among others.<sup>4</sup> There is no standard employment quota approach and as a result there is variation in company hiring requirements for different countries, as well as provisions for which sectors are included or excluded from quota obligations. In addition, compliance monitoring and penalties differ from country to country.

Few studies have evaluated the long-term impacts of employment quotas for PWD. A 2018 assessment of disability employment quotas across several countries in Asia found that they have [mixed success](#).

Some jurisdictions have legally enforceable quotas. In some cases, these quotas are limited to particular sectors. In Taiwan, companies with a workforce of over 67 employees are [legally required to hire at least one individual with disabilities](#) (or a minimum of 1% of the company workforce). Alternatively (in lieu of meeting this requirement), local companies have the option to contribute to local employment funds for people with disabilities, equivalent to the monthly minimum wage per number of vacant positions. In Brazil under the 2016 Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, [local companies with more than 100 workers are required to ensure 2% to 5% of their employees are PWD](#). Further, to comply with the quota, employers must ensure that each employee hired under the scheme holds a valid disability certification.

A number of countries do not use employment quotas, preferring other forms of policy interventions to improve outcomes for PWD in the labour market. For instance, several jurisdictions such as Singapore and Hong Kong, have [opted to introduce incentives](#) for employers rather than quotas to encourage the hiring of disabled employees by companies.

## 3. Business Incentives

Several countries have introduced incentives for businesses to increase their hiring and retention of employees with disabilities. A few such initiatives are detailed below:

### ***Singapore - Inclusive Business Programme***

The Singaporean government launched an [inclusive business programme](#) in 2019 that directly allocates shop spaces to businesses with a workforce where at least 20% employees are PWD. Small-to-medium enterprises are also able to access a 30% rental discount for their first three years of tenancy, with the option of renewing for another 3 years.

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<sup>4</sup> The use of quotas to improve opportunities for PWD in employment was reinforced with the adoption of the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which outlined obligations for states to improve employment outcomes for PWD through affirmative action measures.

### ***Singapore - Enabling Employment Credit and Wage Offset for New Hires***

In Singapore, employers of persons with disabilities aged 13 and above, are entitled to receive [Enabling Employment Credit \(EEC\)](#) for each employee earning under \$4,000 SGD a month. This scheme was [introduced in 2020](#), and is planned to be extended until 2025. Employers who hire an individual with a disability who has been unemployed for the previous six months will be eligible for an extra wage offset during the initial nine months of employment.

### ***Australia - COVID-19 support payment to registered employment providers***

In 2022, the Australian National Disability Insurance Agency provided a [one-off payment to registered service providers providing Specialised Supported Employment](#) to disabled individuals, totalling \$514 million AUD. The payment was in recognition of the costs of keeping participants safe, particularly during COVID, as well as significant overhead costs incurred by providers in the previous year.

## **4. Workplace Accessibility: Reasonable Accommodations, Special equipment, and Workplace Modifications**

A number of countries globally have adopted policies that ensure workplaces are equipped to accommodate the diverse needs of employees with disabilities in the workplace. This includes policies that facilitate access to specialised equipment and assistive technologies that enable individuals with disabilities to perform their job duties effectively and independently.

### **Workplace accessibility subsidies for employers**

In Taiwan, the government provides [employers with a subsidy](#) for making workplaces more accessible and supporting the needs of employed people with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> This subsidy covers costs associated with assistive aids, special equipment and devices, interpreting services, job assistance, and job redesign. Eligible employers include public and private institutions, government agencies, and schools, as well as organisations and vocational training institutions that employ people with disabilities. Self-employed operators with disabilities are also entitled to apply for the subsidy.

In Singapore, grants are provided to [cover expenses related to redesigning jobs](#) to make work more accessible for PWD, as well as covering expenses related to special equipment or workplace modifications for disabled employees.

The Swedish government [provides an allowance for assistive devices](#) to employers when an employee needs help to return to work after a long period of sick leave, or an employee

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<sup>5</sup> These employment services are guaranteed under Articles 33-47 of the amended [People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act](#) (1997). The law outlines that authorities at all levels are required to undertake occupation counselling, job redesign and entrepreneurship counselling in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Article 33 of Occupational Counselling Evaluations.

with a permanent disability needs additional help to manage their work.<sup>6</sup> The allowance can be used to purchase, rent, or repair assistive devices, as well as for the purposes of undertaking an assessment to find what assistive device the employee needs.

In Sweden, [workplace rehabilitation support](#) is accessible to employers for supporting employees with disabilities. This is a government grant that covers the costs of assessing, planning, implementing and following up on workplace measures for the employee. It may include finding appropriate assistive devices or adapting the workplace premises to enable employees with disabilities to work.

The Australian government administers the [Employment Assistance Fund](#), which provides financial assistance to individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions as well as employers to purchase work-related modifications, equipment, interpretation services, and workplace assistance and support services. This fund is accessible to eligible individuals who are commencing a job, are self-employed, or are already employed. It is also available to those with disabilities who require interpreting assistance or specialised work equipment to search for employment opportunities and prepare for job-related tasks. It includes funding for:

- The cost of modifications to a physical workplace or work vehicles
- Special equipment for the workplace
- Information and communication devices
- Interpreting services for deaf, blind and hard-of-hearing individuals
- Specialist services for employees with specific learning disorders and mental health conditions
- First aid training

The [New Zealand](#) and [Australian](#) governments fund disability awareness training for the workplace to ensure smooth integration for both disabled and non-disabled employees. In Australia, this extends to mental health awareness.

Under the 2000 New Zealand Disability Strategy, New Zealand has committed to supporting more PWD obtain employment through vocational services and ensuring genuine employment opportunities for PWD.<sup>7</sup> The New Zealand government covers expenses related to [implementing workplace modifications](#) to accommodate the needs of disabled employees, including procuring special equipment to accommodate specific disabilities, arranging interpreting services. Funding is also available to provide special

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<sup>6</sup> The [Assistance and Services for Individuals with Specific Functional Disabilities Act](#) (LSS) took effect in Sweden in 1994. This legislation aims to provide individuals with significant disabilities improved prospects for independent living. It guarantees equitable living opportunities for PWD, ensuring they have the right to personal support largely funded by taxes.

<sup>7</sup> The Strategy is reviewed on an annual basis.

induction training tailored to the employee's disability or assisting with modifying the standard induction program to make it accessible for new disabled employees.

Beginning 2023, New Zealand employers of PWD can apply for a government funded [Productivity Allowance](#) to bridge any productivity gaps resulting from employing a PWD. Each allowance is customised according to the individual's needs.

### **Disability supports for work**

The Norwegian government funds [disability aids for work activities](#) and [participation in working life](#), including items intended to help a person take part in all aspects of a job, a business area, a profession or a subject, or vocational training. This includes machines, equipment, vehicles, tools, software for computers, equipment for use in production and in the office, furniture, as well as devices and materials for vocational assessment and vocational training.

In Australia, The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) enables individuals to [access funding for different assistive technologies](#) to support their ability to work.<sup>8</sup> This includes items such as communication and information devices, costs associated with programming and/or customising electronic equipment (e.g. communication devices) to meet an individual's disability-specific needs, specialised furniture and home modifications, as well as medical, personal care and safety equipment.

The New Zealand government [provides job coaching](#) for a short period to aid the disabled person in learning a new job, particularly if their disability necessitates additional assistance or alternative learning formats.

The Norwegian government [provides allowances and loans for cars](#), modification of cars, and special equipment for use in cars are available for disabled individuals. This specifically includes grants for people who cannot use public transport due to their disability and are in work or education. Similar funding is provided by the New Zealand government for PWD to [cover extra transportation and parking costs related to work](#) that exceed those typically incurred by individuals without disabilities.

In Norway, PWD who require apps or software specially developed for various functional impairments that are not already available can apply for [special grants](#) from the government to have them custom developed.

In New Zealand, the New Zealand government [funds a support person for employed PWD](#) to offer on-the-job guidance and instructions..

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<sup>8</sup> The 1986 Disability Services Act provides the basis for disability support in Australia, alongside the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which was adopted and ratified by the Australian government in 2008.

## Rehabilitation and physical support

The New Zealand government funds services [providing additional physical support to employees with disabilities](#), such as on-the-job physiotherapy or attendant care, to meet the demands of the job.

## Workplace assessments

In Australia, the government funds [free workplace assessments](#) by a qualified professional to help employers assess what modifications or equipment will best meet the needs of the disabled employee. The assessor conducts an examination of the workplace, identifying any barriers that may be affecting the employee. The assessor then discusses potential solutions with the employee and the employer to enhance the workplace's flexibility and accessibility.

Similarly in New Zealand, [employers are able to access funding to cover costs of conducting workplace assessments](#) to determine the necessary level of support required for employees with disabilities.

In the Netherlands, the Employee Insurance Agency [provides assessments for work](#) for PWD and serious illnesses. If an insurance doctor determines that an individual might still have the ability to work (partially) at present and/or in the future, a subsequent interview will be conducted with an occupational expert. The degree of incapacity for work is determined by the occupational expert who assesses the individual's potential for work by considering the tasks they can still perform.

## Legal mandates

Since 2016, under the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Brazilian companies are [legally required to make reasonable accommodations](#) and ICT accessible for employees with disabilities.

## 5. Self-employment and Entrepreneurship support

Globally, a range of policies exist aimed at supporting PWD in self-employment or entrepreneurship. This includes specialised business support services, as well as general disability support funding. In most countries, these programs have been in operation since before the pandemic.

In Taiwan, the government offers a [range of support services](#) for PWD interested in self-employment or starting a business. Services include access to entrepreneurial counselling and skills development, business risk management assessment, business loans, interest subsidies for start-up loans, and subsidies for rent and equipment expenses. In Sweden, PWD who face reduced work capacity due to their disability are eligible for a '[Special Business Start-up Grant](#)' to support them in establishing their own businesses.

In the Netherlands, [support is available to PWD](#) who are interested in running their own business or are already operating a business. This includes covering expenses related to hiring a job coach to assist in establishing a business, workspace and vehicle adaptations, interpreting services, among other costs.



Self-employed disabled workers in Sweden can access [government funding for occupational aids](#) until the age of 68.

## 6. Home-based employment support

Some countries have a suite of existing policies and initiatives designed to support PWD in undertaking work from home. In general, countries with established social security support for PWD provide for home-based disability supports that are not specifically intended to support home-based employment, but enable PWD to undertake job-related tasks in a home environment. For instance, the Norwegian government [provides funding for a range of disability aids](#) such as assistive devices for daily life, including specific provisions for individuals undertaking skills training, and communication devices or services. Other general policies, including working from home allowances, such as that [introduced by the Netherlands](#), allow disabled employees working from home to be reimbursed tax-free for costs incurred while not present in the office setting, such as higher costs for heating, water, electricity, as well as expenses for tea, coffee, and toiletries.

The Taiwan government offers specific services for people with disabilities who have difficulty in general workplaces to [support them in home-based employment](#). These services include assessment for home renovation or modification needs, as well as assistance in procuring relevant equipment or modifications. Eligible individuals are also able to access employment service plans for home employment, providing ongoing employment support and supervision. The service also aims at providing a platform for individuals to apply for home employment skills study and counselling services.

## 7. COVID-19 Support

### COVID-19 support for PWD

The Australian government continues to provide additional COVID-19 support for PWD as well as disability support workers who have been seriously impacted by COVID-19.

As of July 2023, the Australian National Disability Insurance Agency is [providing additional COVID-19 funding support](#) in the following instances:

- Where an individual has tested positive to COVID and where no provider support is available, the individual may employ family members to provide ongoing support for a limited time.
- Low-cost assistive technologies, such as programs, therapy, physiotherapy or interpreting.
- Individuals may purchase equipment (such as an air purifier) if they have a disability that compromises their breathing (lung capacity) and/or puts them at increased risk of contracting or becoming very unwell if they do contract Covid-19.

### Support for disability-support workers

Under a [new Australian Government initiative](#), disability workers providing close personal support to NDIS participants (i.e., in home based settings) and who contract COVID-19 without having leave entitlements can receive financial

assistance through their employers. The funding will be provided at a flat rate of \$450 per worker if they have lost between 8 and 20 hours of work, and \$750 per worker if they have lost more than 20 hours of work. A similar policy in Australia allows [providers of assistance for PWD to access financial support](#) in the event they incur additional costs in providing support to disabled individuals where the participant is required to self-isolate in accordance with COVID health advice. These costs may include but are not limited to additional staffing costs, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for support workers, professional laundering, and any other costs directly related to the participant's diagnosis such as alternative accommodation costs provided to the participant by the provider.

## Levels of policymaking

### Supranational level

#### United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 was significant in enshrining protections for PWD in employment at the international level. The treaty is one of the most globally endorsed international conventions, counting 164 signatories and 187 parties that have formally ratified its provisions.

The treaty recognises and upholds the right of PWD to work under equal conditions as others, emphasising access to inclusive and accessible work environments. Article 27 specifically mandates that countries take active measures to prevent discrimination based on disability in all aspects of employment, including recruitment, work conditions, career advancement, and remuneration. It highlights the importance of providing reasonable accommodations to enable individuals with disabilities to thrive in the workplace. The article also encourages governments to promote vocational training, entrepreneurship, and self-employment opportunities for disabled individuals.

#### The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

[The European Pillar of Social Rights \(EPSR\)](#) is a set of formal documents published in 2017 outlining 20 key principles and rights for the development of a fairer and more inclusive European society. Principle 17 of the EPSR highlights the right to income support for PWD, as well as the right of PWD to dignified living and services that allow them to participate in society and employment that is adapted to their needs.

Building on the guiding principles of the EPSR, the [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) was developed by the European Union in consultation with key EU stakeholders, EU institutions and bodies, regional and local authorities, civil society and EU citizens. The Action Plan outlines various actions that the Commission is dedicated to implementing during its current term. The Action Plan has an explicit focus on [creating and](#)

[investing in employment opportunities in the long-term](#), especially for workers currently outside of the job market.

The European Commission [adopted a new Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities](#) for the period 2021-2030, [as part of the Action Plan](#).

## **EU Disability Employment Package**

In 2022, the EU Commission launched a new [Disability Employment Package](#) specifically aimed at improving labour market outcomes for PWD. The package covers six action areas, focused on providing practical tools and guidelines between 2022-2024. These areas include strengthening the inclusiveness of employment services, promoting inclusive hiring practices, ensuring reasonable workplace accommodations, preventing disabilities related to chronic diseases, establishing effective vocational rehabilitation guidelines, and enhancing job opportunities through alternative employment models. The package includes various initiatives, ranging from guidance for employment services to manuals on disease prevention and vocational rehabilitation.

## **National level policies and mandates**

Globally, a number of national-level regulations and mandates have been established with the aim of promoting and protecting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. This includes high level policy frameworks and requirements enshrined in law that encourage companies and organisations to adopt inclusive practices and provide equal employment opportunities for PWD.

In Brazil, the 2016 Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities means [employers must guarantee equal pay for equal work](#) between employees with disabilities and employees without disabilities.

In the United States, [employers are required to follow federal disability rights laws](#) outlined in the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under this Act, employers cannot reject a request from an employee to make a reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodations may include providing or adapting equipment or devices; flexible or part-time work schedules; adjusting examinations, training materials, or policies; providing interpreting or reading services; ensuring accessibility in the workplace.

In Sweden, [the 2008 Act on Social Insurance](#) covers various disability and sickness-related benefits, pensions, and support systems in Sweden. It outlines specific measures for assisting individuals who are unable to work due to disability or long-term medical conditions, offering support and rehabilitation programs to facilitate their return to employment.

In the Netherlands, under the provisions of the [Flexible Working Act amended in 2023](#), employees who have been working with their employer for over six months have the right to request changes to their work hours as well as changes to their workplace. They are able to request flexible work accommodations for health conditions. A similar New Zealand law ensures all employees have a [“right to request” flexible working arrangements](#) for any purpose or reason under the [2000 Employment Relations Act](#), which includes reasonable accommodations for health and disability conditions. This includes flexible work patterns

(e.g., shift self-selection, where employees assist with the development of shift work schedules and choose their own shifts) and telework options. Employees are also able to request to make changes in their work hours, location or job responsibilities in the event of health limitations.

As part of its 2023 Budget, the New Zealand government recently introduced an initiative to provide a [wage supplement](#) that replaces Minimum Wage Exemption permits. Minimum Wage Exemptions permit New Zealand employers to pay disabled employees less than minimum wage. The wage supplement will replace MWE permits and protect existing jobs, ensuring disabled people are paid at least the minimum wage when the supplement is considered.

## **Private sector initiatives**

Globally, private companies and organisations have engaged in voluntary efforts to promote disability inclusion in employment, often through professional bodies and networks.

### ***Norway - Work and Inclusion Professional body Services***

Work and Inclusion is a professional body representing the interests of 110 member companies engaged in vocational rehabilitation across Norway. Collectively, these member companies annually [provide vocational rehabilitation services](#) to around 35,000 disadvantaged individuals. Service provision is tailored to meet each individual's needs, taking into account their work capacity. This includes assessing work and education abilities of the individual; providing qualifications to individuals through tailored training and skills development; providing permanent work suited for individuals who are unable to undertake employment in the general labour market; providing support in getting regular employment or further education as appropriate.

### ***aiLæring - Digital Learning Platform for Employers and Employees***

[aiLæring](#) is a digital learning platform developed in Norway for employers and prospective employees with disabilities. The platform serves as a tool for training, allowing managers or job consultants to administer courses for employees and job-seekers, including monitoring and reporting progress. The platform also provides targeted training for employers and managers working or preparing to work with PWD, including best-practice guidelines for workplace inclusion. A working group with representatives of companies that are part of the network develops and updates relevant content for the platform.

Several Norwegian employers have published reviews on their successful use of the aiLæring platform. Norway-based company Jobbintro found that the online modules were helpful during the pandemic for [providing training support](#) to prospective employees in preparation for employment. The company plans to continue to use the platform for onboarding, conducting interviews, and professional development learning for both job supervisors and employees. Norway's largest vocational rehabilitation company Fønix [uses the platform to help job specialists support job seekers](#) in finding employment. Job seekers are able to develop a candidate profile, which job specialists are able to use to provide vocational support to participants. Participants are also able to receive important

information on an ongoing basis about the vocational support scheme through the online platform.

### ***Brazil - Rede Empresarial de Inclusão Social (REIS) Entrepreneurial Network for Social Inclusion***

Founded in 2012, the [REIS Network for social inclusion](#) provides a platform for Brazilian businesses to support the inclusion of PWD in employment. Activities undertaken by the network include knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices, as well as collaborating on initiatives to promote the hiring and retention of employees with disabilities.

## **Public sector initiatives**

### ***Brazil - Training courses for PWD***

The National Service for Industrial Training (SENAI) Program of Inclusive Actions (PSAI) [provides PWD access to specialised professional courses and e-learning resources](#) aimed at skills training and development. [SENAI is the largest provider in Latin America](#) dedicated to industry-centric technical and vocational education, technological assistance, and innovation.

## **Collaboration between public, private and non-profit sectors**

Several jurisdictions have successful partnerships between government entities, private enterprises, and non-profit organisations in order to create pathways for people with disabilities to enter and thrive in the workforce.

### ***Employment support initiatives***

#### ***Singapore - SG Enable Local Employment Hubs***

The Singaporean government offers a range of employment support services administered by SG Enable, a disability services and support organisation aimed at increasing the employability of people with disabilities in Singapore. In 2023, SG Enable is planning to launch [the first of several business hubs alongside industry partners](#), aimed at industry-specific training and supporting employment needs for disabled people. Located across different regions, the hubs will be staffed by an Employment Support Team providing employment-related services including vocational assessments, skills and job training, job-matching and post-placement job support. The services are intended to help match individuals with disabilities to jobs in their region based on their skills and interests, as well as to support them in their career journeys.

### ***The United States - 'Ticket to Work' Employment Support Scheme (1) (2) (3)***

Under the 'Ticket to Work' scheme introduced in 1999, disability beneficiaries aged 18 to 64 are entitled to free job support from various service providers. Employment Networks (both public and private organisations) and State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies operate as service providers. State VR agencies provide services including vocational counselling, skills training, job coaching, interpreter services, assistive and rehabilitation technologies, and transport. Employment Networks offer similar services including benefits counselling, goal setting, employment coaching and placement, training, and long-term employment support.

### ***Australia - Disability Enterprises***

The Australian government funds [Australian Disability Enterprises \(ADE\)](#), which are not-for-profit organisations providing employment for PWD who would otherwise not be able to work. The earliest ADEs operated in the 1950s. Since the 2000s, ADEs have been run as social enterprises that provide goods or services to the public, primarily employing individuals with intellectual disabilities and offering employees on the job support.

### ***Australia - Supports in employment policy (1)***

The Australian National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) funds supports in employment, which provides day-to-day assistance for PWD in the workplace to maintain employment. The policy provides individuals with significant support needs who would like to work appropriate support to do so. Since 2020, eligible individuals supported by the NDIA are able to use these supports in any workplace they choose, including government and non-government organisations, an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE), social enterprises, micro-businesses, or in self-employment or a family run business. This gives individuals greater choice and control about where and how they work, and who provides their supports. The new policy allows participants working in ADEs to move into new types of work or create a combination of work options to suit them, with the aim of increasing the number of working-age individuals in paid work.

### ***New Zealand - Employment Trial Services Programme (Oranga Mahi) (1) (2)***

The New Zealand Government has allocated an investment of \$36.262 million towards six health and employment trial services that support disabled New Zealanders and those with health conditions to find and retain work. This funding extends an existing programme from 2023-2025. The aim of the Oranga Mahi programme is to develop, implement, and evaluate evidence-based health and employment services specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities and health conditions. These services are delivered through collaborative partnerships between health agencies and community organisations. Services are expected to decrease participants' time out of the labour market by addressing health and wellbeing related challenges and support people to access, remain in, or return to work following a health-related absence or displacement.

## Rehabilitation support services

### ***New Zealand - Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Musculoskeletal Pain***

In 2023, New Zealand Government is piloting [vocational rehabilitation and pain management services](#) for 150 individuals who are living with musculoskeletal pain or impairments across the country. These services aim to support individuals in maintaining or transitioning into employment through close collaboration between the person receiving assistance, rehabilitation professionals, employment specialists, and employers. As part of this, the government will also undertake an evaluation of existing rural vocational rehabilitation services to assess needs.

### ***Sweden - Vocational Rehabilitation and training support programmes***

PWD in Sweden are able to access [support and rehabilitation programs to facilitate their return to employment](#) under the amended [2008 Act on Social insurance](#). The law provides the basis for several schemes involving collaboration among the Social Insurance Office, Public Employment Services, employers, and regional healthcare agencies to support individuals in returning to work.

## Job reskilling

### ***Thailand - Vulcan Coalition initiative supporting PWD in AI employment (1)***

Vulcan Coalition is a social enterprise founded in Thailand in 2020 aimed at supporting PWD in attaining AI jobs by developing AI services in the Thai language. Funded by Microsoft, Vulcan partnered with the Thai government to develop and execute a reskilling program for PWD, involving an online training portal for potential candidates. The initiative demonstrated how it was possible to employ PWD in labelling and training AI using visual data.

## Conclusion

As this review has shown, efforts to bring people with disabilities into the workforce and help them stay employed have been ongoing for decades, supported by legislation and policies at all levels of policymaking. The Covid-19 pandemic has made this complex issue even more challenging: while people with disabilities (PWD) faced disproportionately higher health risks due to the pandemic along with other marginalised groups, labour market shortages have also intensified the demand for their greater inclusion into workforce. As shown above, some governments, such as Australia, responded with policies that were explicitly supporting PWD in employment at a time of heightened health risk. Others (EU as a whole, New Zealand, the Netherlands) have introduced a range of subsidies, allowances, accommodations and other types of support that does not explicitly refer to the pandemic, although it may be assumed to respond to pandemic-related questions.

Yet, at this point, [recent research](#) suggests the effects of these policies pandemic on disability employment are unclear. The pandemic-driven transition to remote work and increased flexibility in work schedules may have been beneficial for PWD in opening new employment prospects. In the United States for example, PWD have made a [substantial re-entry into the labour force](#), surpassing even levels observed before the pandemic. Between April 2020 to August 2021, the employed population for PWD aged 16 and above increased by 11.49%. Yet in many countries – including the U.S. – 2021 was the year of worse pandemic morbidity and mortality than the initial wave in 2020 and it is not clear if this increase was sustained into 2022 and 2023. Importantly, for most of the policies – including those introduced before the pandemic – we lack implementation and evaluation data to understand what impact they might have had on the PWD workforce participation. Further research both at global but also national and regional level, assessing the impact of specific policies, is needed.