International Labour Organization | GLOBAL BUSINESS AND DISABILITY NETWORK

▶ **Disability inclusion in company responses to COVID-19:**

Results of a survey among National Business and Disability Networks and their members

Contents

Cover photo: A wheelchair user wearing a facemask who is passing hand sanitizer to two persons wearing masks on a motorcycle (copyright: Center for Disability in Development, Bangladesh)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY COVID-19 crisis survey
## Infographic summary of report's main findings

International Labour Organization | **GLOBAL BUSINESS AND DISABILITY NETWORK**

In May 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Global Business and Disability Network conducted two surveys - one for National Business and Disability Networks and one for those networks' company members - to identify good practices and gaps in responding to the COVID-19 crisis in a disability-inclusive way.

159 companies

19 National Networks

Percentage of companies helping to protect employees with disabilities by providing

Telework	69%
Flexible working hours	56%
Paid leave	32%

These responses help employees without disabilities, too

Out of business continuity plans from 122 companies

69% included issues related to mental health

88% were inclusive of persons with disabilities

Most companies underlined a need for
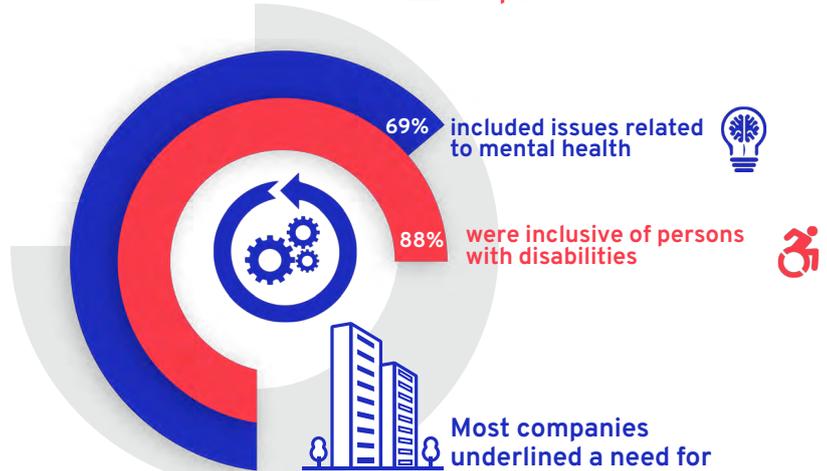
Both companies and National Networks **noted the importance of consultation** with organizations of persons with disabilities.
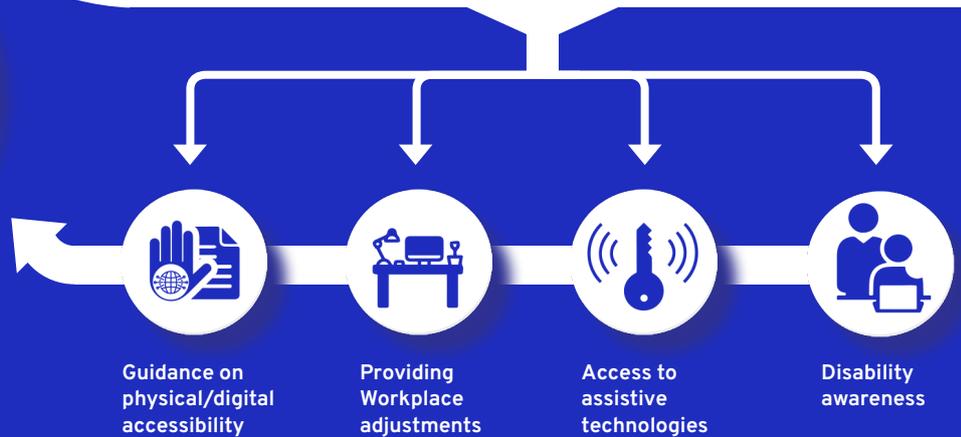
- Guidance on physical/digital accessibility
- Providing Workplace adjustments
- Access to assistive technologies
- Disability awareness

"Do you think that your future disability inclusion activities will be affected by COVID-19?"

159 Companies

- Yes 31%
- No 38%
- Don't Know 31%

Impact of COVID-19

"Do you think the COVID-19 crisis poses a threat to the existence of your Network?"

National Networks

4 out of 19 responded

Yes

▶ 2. Introduction: The ILO GBDN Surveys on Disability Inclusion in the COVID-19 Response

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations with a mandate to promote social justice and labour rights. As part of this mandate, the ILO promotes rights of persons with disabilities at work, and, in this capacity, it coordinates the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN). A leading voice in disability issues at work, the GBDN is composed of multinational businesses, civil society and National Business and Disability Networks (NBDNs), that bring together companies that work for disability inclusion at the national level.

With the recent onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the ILO wanted to understand how National Business and Disability Networks, and the companies that compose them, were addressing disability inclusion in their responses to the crisis. As such, in May 2020, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network conducted two surveys: one directed at NBDNs; and one directed at company members of those NBDNs.

In total, 159 companies from 22 countries (representing four regions) participated in the company survey, and 19 national networks participated in the NBDN survey.

Figure 1: Percentage of respondent companies by region

- 24% — Asia and the Pacific
- 23% — Europe and Central Asia
- 5% — Africa
- 48% — Latin America and the Caribbean
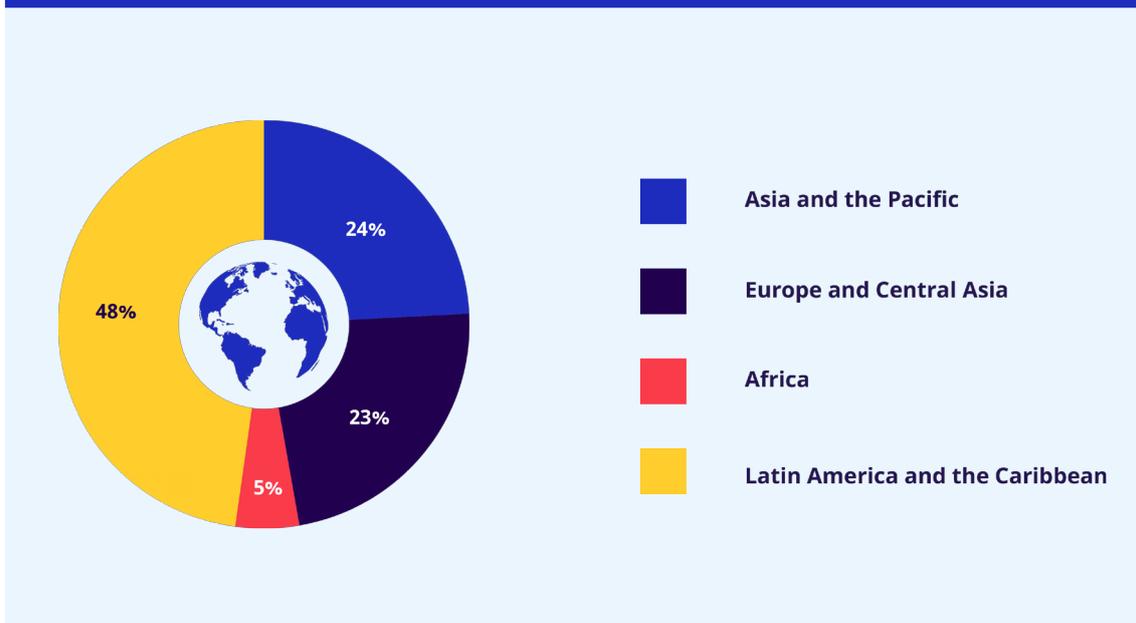
The companies varied in size (in terms of number of employees), and the networks varied in size (in terms of their member companies), as noted in the figures below.

Figure 2 : Number of respondent National Business and Disability Networks (NBDNs) grouped by number of member companies

Number of respondent NBDNs

More than 50	21-50	6-20	1-5
8	6	4	1

Number of member companies

Figure 3: Number of respondent companies grouped by number of employees

Number of respondant companies

1-10	11-100	101-250	251+
16	18	12	113

Number of employees
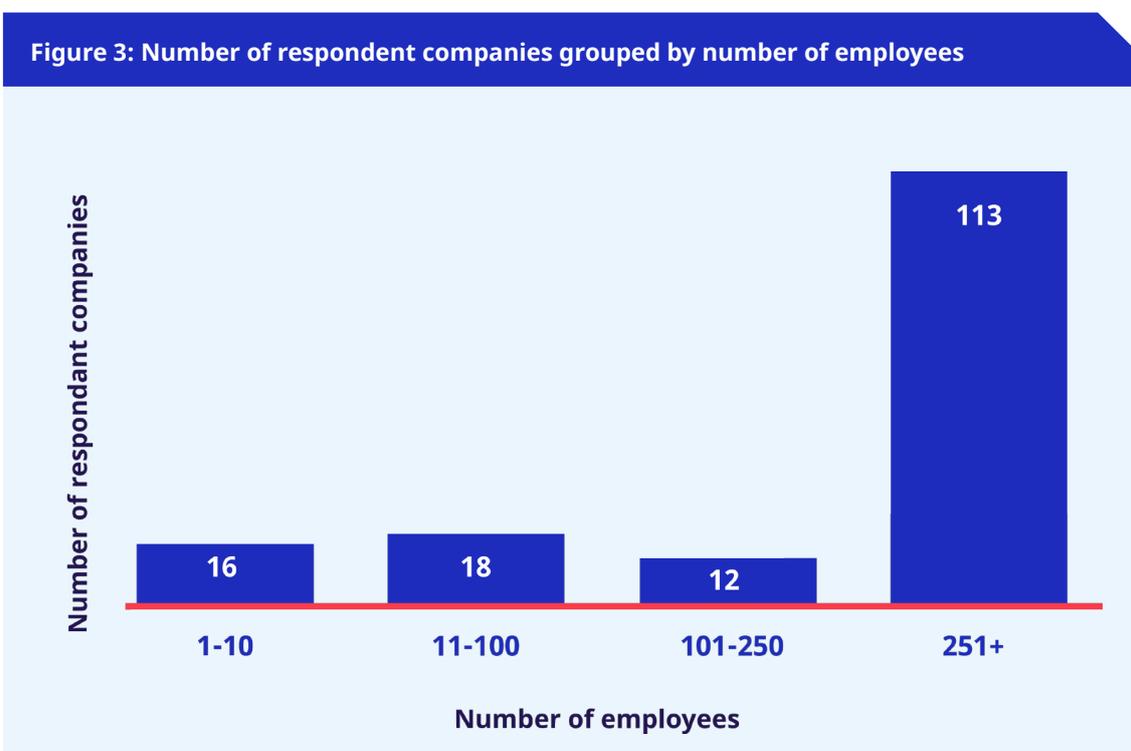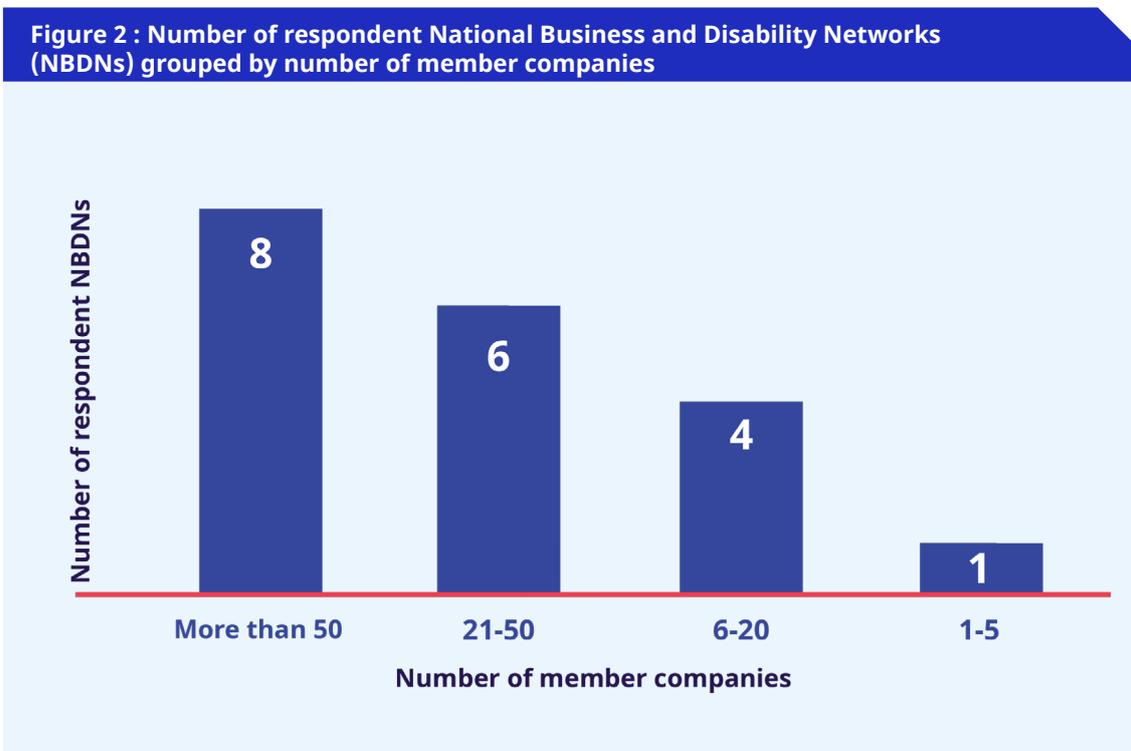
The survey for member companies contained a total of 26 questions, with 24 closed questions and two open-ended questions. It was conducted online using the Qualtrics platform. The survey for NBDNs had 10 questions, 8 of them closed and two of them open-ended. It was conducted online using the Survey Monkey platform. Both surveys were conducted in English and Spanish.[1]

The present report provides a summary of the surveys' main findings, in the form of quantitative results and as examples of action taken by companies and NBDNs during the COVID-19 crisis. Given the relatively small sample size, the results are not representative of all NBDNs or companies active in disability inclusion. However, the results are indicative of the challenges networks and companies face in making their responses to COVID-19 disability inclusive, and they point to good practices that, if replicated, can help the post-COVID-19 world of work build back better.

▶ 3. Findings

3.1. Survey of company members of National Business and Disability Networks

3.1.1. General or disability-specific practices to prevent COVID-19 infections of employees with disabilities

From a list of five options, the survey asked companies to identify which practices they had implemented to protect their employees with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis. (These options were not exclusive, so companies could choose more than one practice.) As shown in the figure below, the three most-selected practices were to provide: telework; flexible working hours; and paid leave. These are excellent examples of promoting an equality rights response that is relevant for employees with and without disabilities.

Responding companies also mentioned additional practices, including:

▶ Having personal protection equipment in place where a service is provided;

▶ Monitoring the company's medical services;

▶ Providing reasonable accommodation and facilities to persons with disabilities to work from home;

▶ Promoting safe rules of conduct at work;

▶ Ensuring hygiene and safety measures, including social distancing;

▶ Contacting their employees periodically, to find out about their welfare;

▶ Generating accessible material on COVID-19 through online training.

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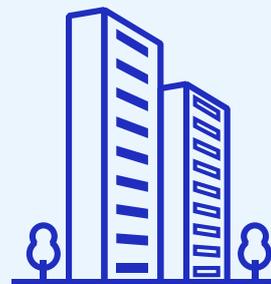
1. The survey of companies received 82 responses in English and 77 in Spanish. The survey of NBDNs received 11 responses in English and eight in Spanish. The Disability Team of the ILO's Gender, Equality and Diversity & ILOAIDS Branch translated the Spanish-language answers to the open-ended questions into English.

Figure 4: Respondent companies' general and disability-specific practices during the COVID-19 pandemic

Horizontal axis: Percentage of respondent companies (0% to 80%)
Vertical axis: Respondent companies' practices

- Unpaid leave: 8.18%
- Not applicable: 10.06%
- Other: 13.85%
- Specialized Transportation Services: 15.72%
- Paid leave: 32.08%
- Flexible working hours: 55.97%
- Telework: 69.18%
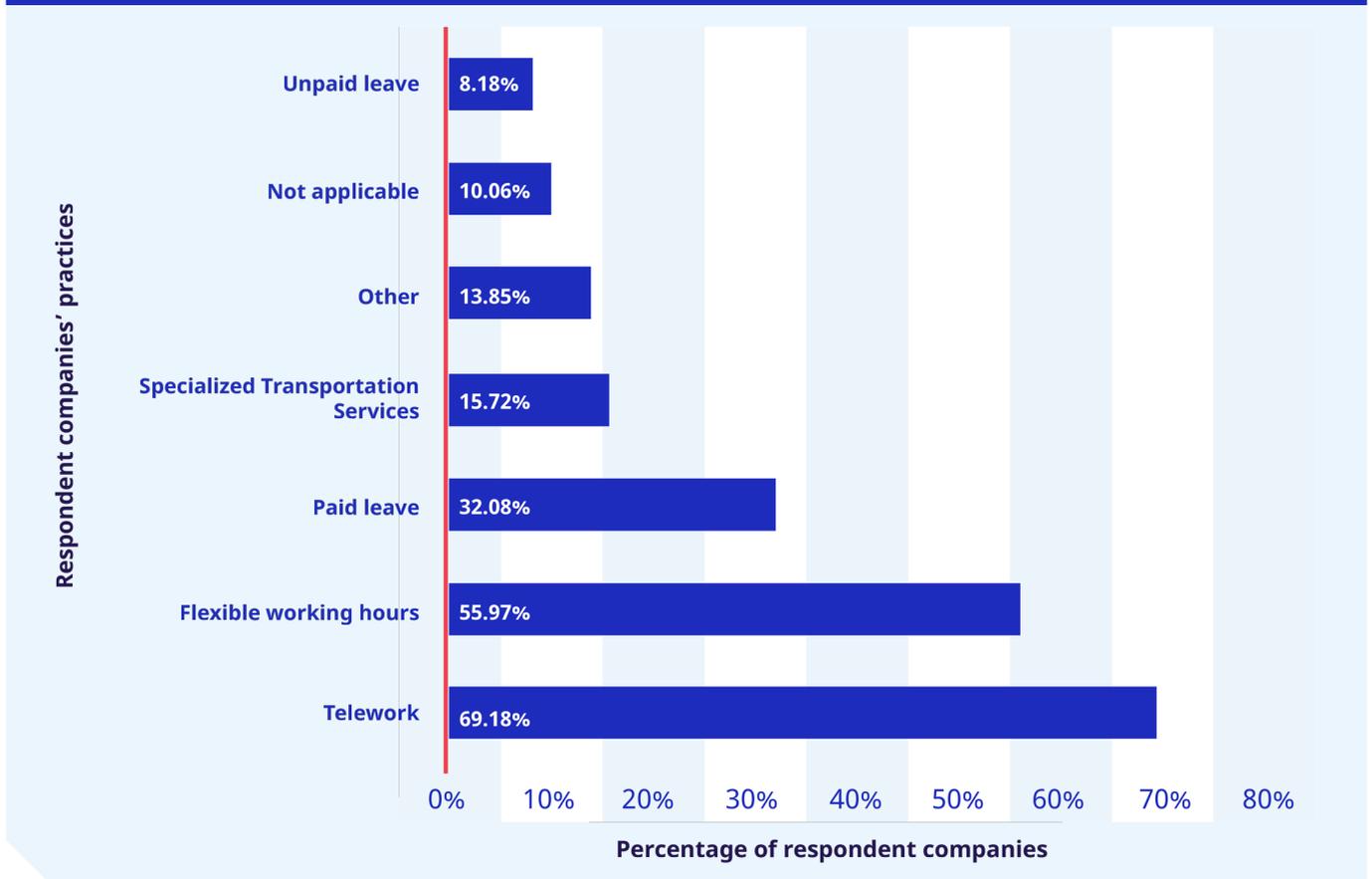
3.1.2. Disability inclusion and mental health issues addressed in business continuity plans

Companies were asked whether they had a business continuity plan. One hundred twenty-two companies responded positively. Of those, 107 (88 per cent) reported that their plan was inclusive of persons with disabilities. A potential follow-up to this initial survey could be to analyze these business plans, to understand how this inclusivity was achieved, and to compare similarities and differences in the companies' approaches.

Closely related to the question on disability inclusion was one on mental health. Of the 122 companies with business continuity plans, 84 (69 per cent) reported that their plans included issues related to mental health. All workers, with or without disabilities, benefit from their mental health needs being met, before, during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, like providing telework or flexible working hours, including mental health issues in a business continuity plan helps everyone at work.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondent companies whose business continuity plans are inclusive of persons with disabilities and/or mental health issues (grouped by number of employees)

Percentages within respondent companies with business continuity plans

Company size per number of employees	Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities	Inclusive of Mental Health
1-100	89%	42%
101-250	88%	75%
251 or more	87%	74%
TOTAL	88%	69%

Company size per number of employees

■ Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities   ■ Inclusive of Mental Health
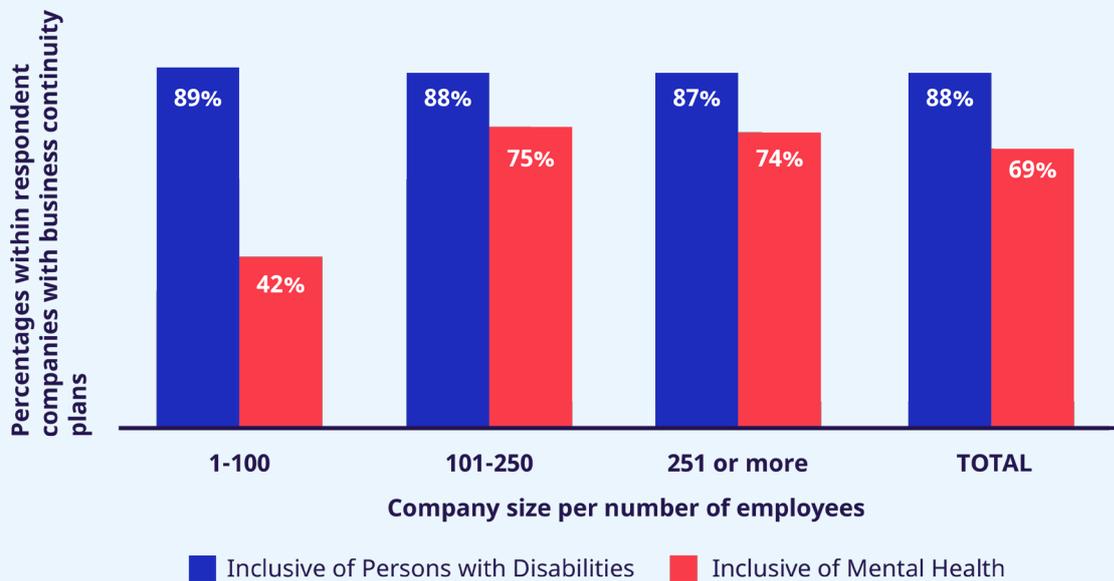
3.1.3. Consultation with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

The disability movement's slogan, "nothing about us without us", continues to be highly relevant during the COVID-19 crisis. Consulting with organizations of persons with disabilities is essential if companies want to promote a truly-inclusive response. Of all companies surveyed in the sample, 47% reported that they had consulted, or were planning to consult, organizations of persons with disabilities on their COVID-19 response.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondent companies who consulted/were planning to consult organizations of people with disabilities (grouped by number of employees)

Percentage of the respondent companies that consulted/were planning to consult

Company size per number of employees	Percentage
1-100	35%
101-250	33%
250 or more	51%
TOTAL	47%

Company size per number of employees
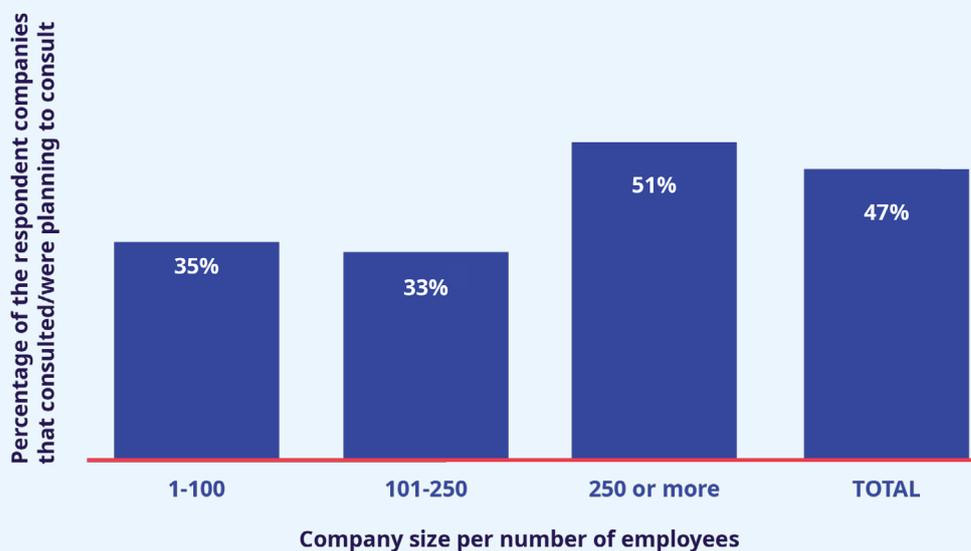
Within the survey sample, the results indicate regional differences in terms of consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities. Companies within the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, represented the highest percentage of such consultation (57 per cent and 53 per cent respectively).

Figure 7: Percentage of respondent companies that consulted, or were planning to consult, with organizations of persons with disabilities per region
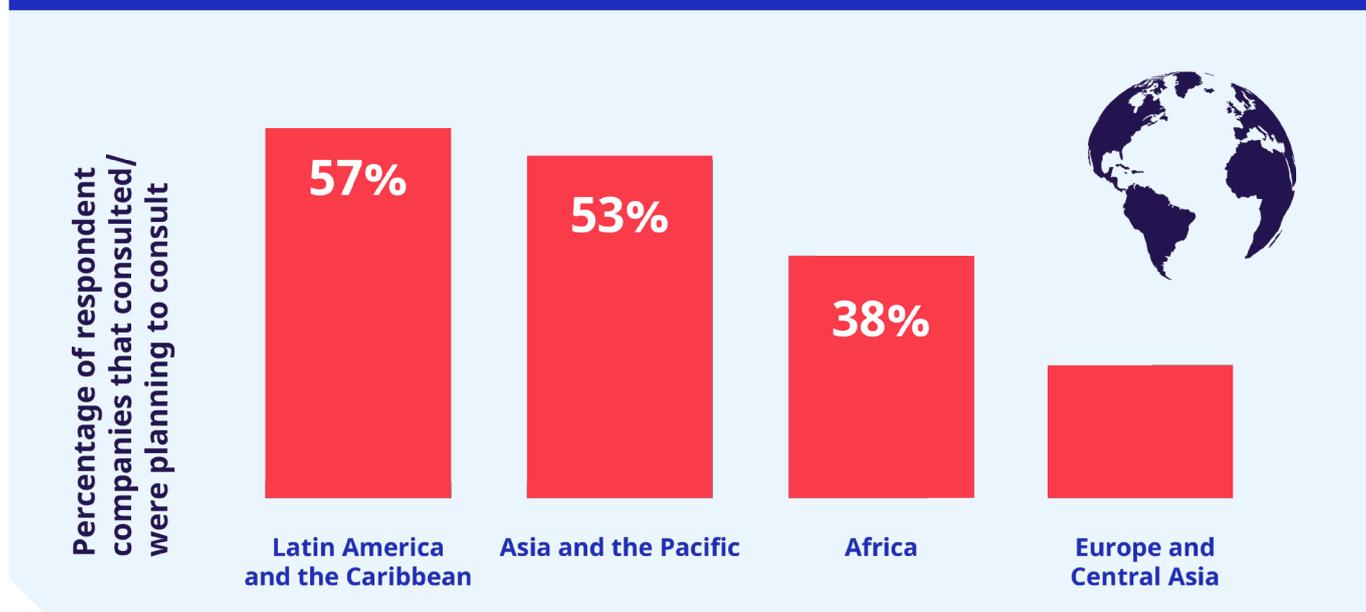
3.1.4. Companies' expressed needs to strengthen disability inclusion in their responses to COVID-19

The survey asked companies to rate the importance of four pressing needs to ensure a disability-inclusive response: disability awareness; access to assistive technologies; capacity in providing workplace adjustments; and guidance on physical and digital accessibility.   On a four-point scale that ranged from one ("not needed") to four ("much needed"), at least 60 per cent of the respondents ranked all four options at the highest two steps of the scale. Awareness raising about disability, and capacity in providing workplace adjustments, stood out as the most pressing needs identified, by 65 per cent and 64 per cent of the respondent companies respectively.

In a separate question, companies also identified governmental support as an important need for their COVID-19 responses. Overall, 51 responding companies (32 per cent of the total) had requested, or were planning to request, support - including funds - from governments. Out of these 51 companies, 35 (69 per cent) were planning to use this support, if obtained, to safeguard the employment of persons with disabilities.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondent companies, grouped by number of employees, that have requested, or intend to request, government support to mitigate the COVID-19 impact.

Percentage of respondent companies requesting/intending to request governmental support

- **1-100**: 44%
- **101-250**: 42%
- **251 or more**: 27%
- **Total**: 35%
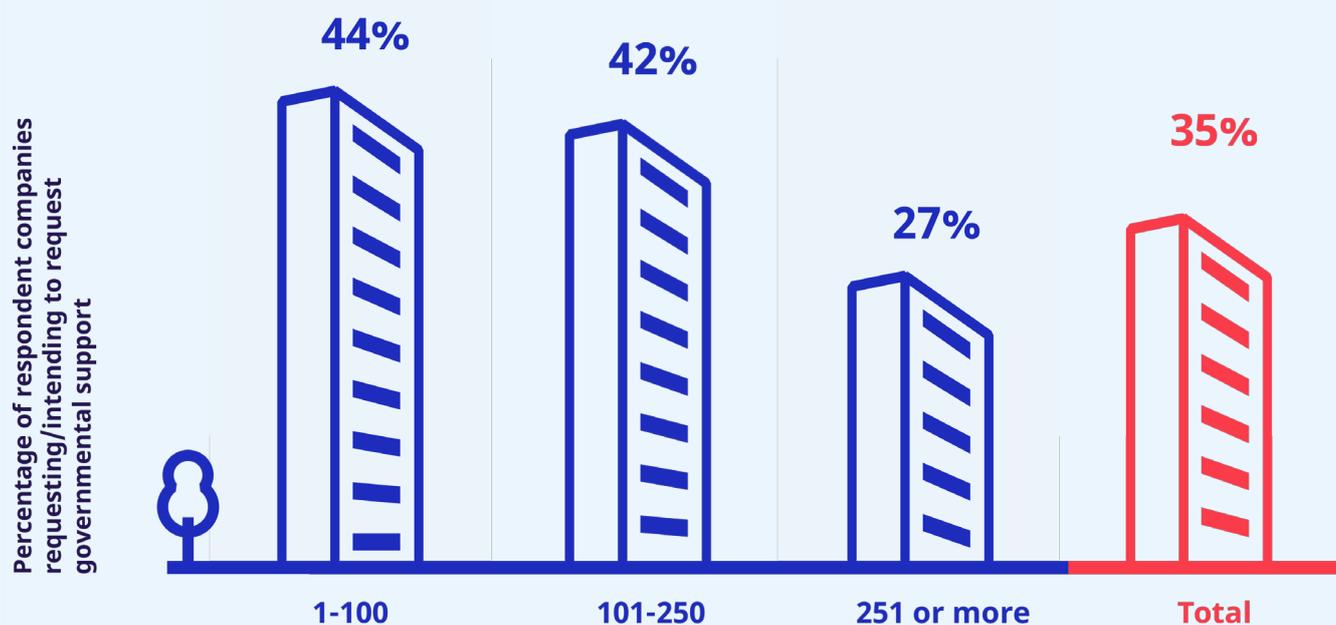
3.1.5. Companies' disability inclusion activities threatened by COVID-19

When asked if they anticipated that their disability inclusion activities would be affected by COVID-19, 31 per cent of companies answered "yes", 38 per cent answered "no", and 31 per cent "don't know". That approximately one third felt that their disability inclusion activities would be affected, and the same amount did not know, indicates the difficulties and uncertainties companies are facing during the crisis. In previous crises, persons with disabilities were often amongst the last ones hired and the first ones to be dismissed. Responding to this current crisis begins with ensuring that gains made in disability inclusion are not undercut, and building back better will require a strengthened emphasis on disability inclusion.

3.2. Survey among National Business and Disability Networks

3.2.1. Support to company members

The survey results indicate that the National Business and Disability Networks (NBDNs) are supporting their company members through a variety of ways to respond to COVID-19 and to include persons with disabilities. The survey asked networks to report whether they had provided support through technical assistance, webinars or advice on how to seek government support. As shown in the following figure, technical guidance and webinars tied for the most-reported answer, at 84 per cent of the networks surveyed.

Figure 9: Type of support provided by NBDNs to their members

84% — Technical guidance (for example on telework, mental health)

84% — Webinars

42% — Advice on how to seek government support

Percentage of NBDN respondents

Type of support provided
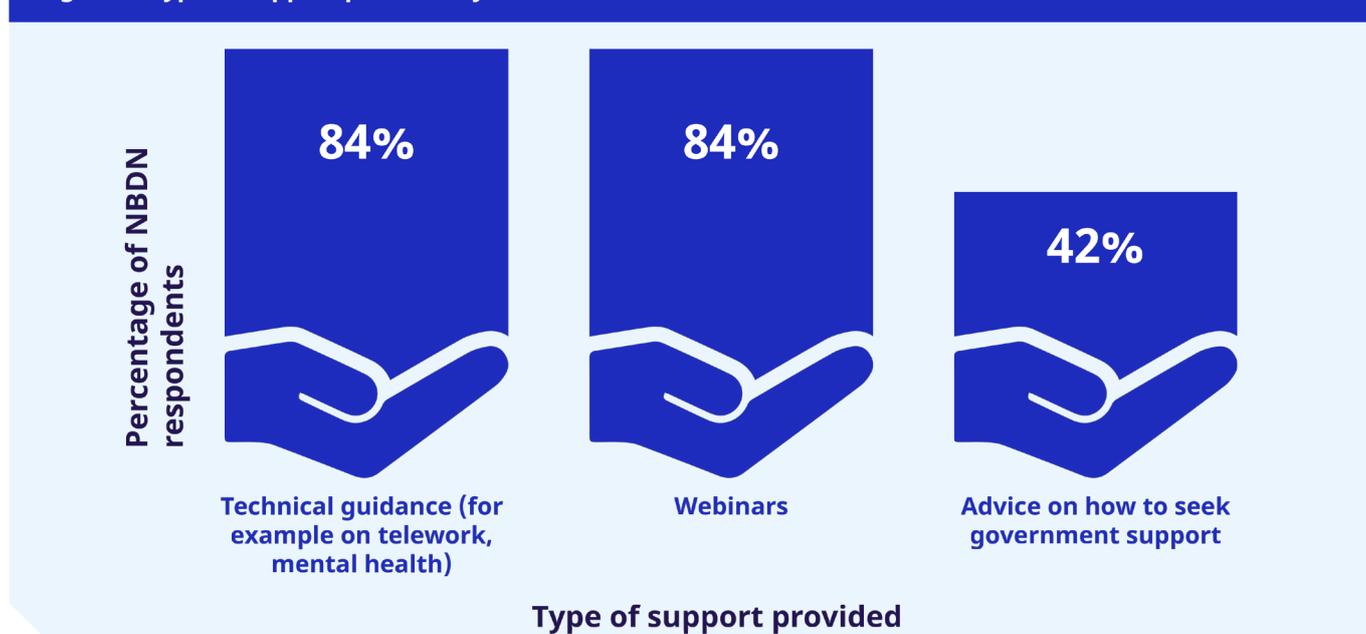
Furthermore, through fill-in answers, 47 per cent of networks indicated that they had provided other types of support to their company members. This included:

▶ Development of a COVID-19 toolkit and online platform to share best practices regarding employees and customers with disabilities (United Kingdom NBDN);

▶ Linking company members with people with disabilities (Bangladesh NDBN);

▶ Drafting of manuals and development of videos (Mexico NBDN).

3.2.2. Examples of NBDN initiatives

In addition, 11 out of 19 NBDNs responded that they were supporting training and employment of persons with disabilities and 11 also responded they were carrying out advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. Examples of these initiatives include the following:

▶ The Philippine Business and Disability Network launched an initiative to help persons with disabilities acquire skills for the "new normal" of work;

▶ The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network switched their initiative of facilitating job matching services to an online platform

3.2.3. Collaboration with stakeholders

The results of the survey suggest that NBDNs value collaboration with stakeholders on disability issues as an important part of the COVID-19 response. Out of a total of 19 NBDN respondents, 13 reported that they were collaborating with governmental authorities to promote a disability-inclusive perspective in response to COVID-19. Also, within their response to COVID-19, 12 NBDNs reported that they were collaborating with organizations of persons with disabilities, which, as mentioned previously, is essential for any fully-inclusive response.

3.2.4. Support from the ILO Global Business and Disability Network

In the survey, national networks were asked to list the sorts of support they felt they most needed from the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN). A summary of types of support requested appears in the box below. The most common, single request (from eight NBDNs) was for the ILO GBDN to provide information about practices and strategies being implemented by other NBDNs and companies. These networks responded that they felt this information would help them address challenges to disability inclusion posed by COVID-19.

Box 1: Summary of types of support requested by the NBDNs to the ILO GBDN

- ▶ **Exchanging good practices from countries on employment of persons with disabilities during and post COVID-19 economic recovery;**
- ▶ Sharing innovative measures of other Networks' good practices;
- ▶ Developing strategies to attract new companies to include persons with disabilities in COVID-19;
- ▶ Developing communication and awareness strategies to promote the labour inclusion of persons with disabilities in crisis-affected economies;
- ▶ Sharing information and training options with company members and persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Carrying out trainings and workshops, including on the necessity of retaining employees, and how to switch to remote work;
- ▶ Sharing case studies of small and medium enterprises;
- ▶ Involving companies more closely to underline the seriousness of the subject;
- ▶ Providing consultations;
- ▶ Sharing inclusive guidelines on COVID-19 responses, and brochures on workplace safety measures when opening up companies during the pandemic;
- ▶ Continuing to gather data and making them action-oriented;
- ▶ Building capacity and support in fundraising through networking;

3.2.5. Networks' existence threated by COVID-19

Out of 19 NBDN respondents, 4 anticipated that the COVID-19 crisis posed a threat to the existence of their networks. This is a telling response of the strains produced by the current crisis and a signal that, if this threat is not properly addressed, the private sector response to disability inclusion might be weakened. This occurs in the same context, as mentioned previously, in which 31 per cent of companies responded that their disability inclusion activities would be affected, and 31 per cent did not know. For future research, it will be important to investigate the particular reasons these networks feel their existence is being threatened, and to take remedial moves to address them.

Annex I:

Questionnaire for company members of National Business and Disability Networks

Location of your enterprise (Country)

Australia

Austria

Bangladesh

Brazil

Chile

China

Costa Rica

Egypt

El Salvador

Ethiopia

Germany

India

Indonesia

Kenya

Mexico

New Zealand

Paraguay

Peru

Philippines

Poland

Saudi Arabia

South Africa

Spain

Sri Lanka

Switzerland

Uganda

United Kingdom

United States

Uruguay

Other.

Year of establishment

Type of ownership

Private capital   State capital   Foreign capital   Joint venture   Other

1. Total number of workers before COVID-19 hit (full-time, part-time, and temporary):

1-10   11-100   101-250   251 or more

2. Sector(s) of operation:

agriculture/farming/fishing

chemicals and plastics

construction

education

electronics and electrical equipment

financial or insurance activities

food and beverage

forestry/wood/paper products

health

information and communication

hotel/tourism

metal fabrication and machinery

mining and refining

oil and gas

real estate activities

restaurants

retail/sales

textile, leather and apparel

transportation and transportation equipment

Other, please specify

3. Is your enterprise currently in operation?

Fully on site

Fully but remotely (teleworking)

Partially

Not operating

4. Have you dismissed or do you plan to dismiss any workers due to COVID-19?

Yes   No

4.1 If yes, what is the percentage of workers released? Check the percentage of workers laid off compared to your total workforce.

1-10%   21-30%   Over 41%

11-20%   31-40%

4.2 If yes, would you know whether persons with disabilities were among those workers released?

Yes   No   Don't know

5. Does your enterprise have a written business continuity plan?

Yes   No

5.1 If you have a business continuity plan, is it inclusive of persons with disabilities?

Yes   No   Not applicable

5.2 If you have a business continuity plan, does it include issues related to mental health?

Yes   No   Not applicable

6. Are any of your workers or their families infected by COVID-19?

Yes   No

7. Did you change your business operations or service delivery to protect your enterprise against COVID-19?

Yes   No

7.1 If yes, would you consider that the changed business operations or service delivery are inclusive of persons with disabilities?

Yes   No   Don't know

8. Do you think that your future disability inclusion activities will be affected by COVID-19?

Yes   No   Don't know

9. Which are the main challenges your enterprise currently faces resulting from COVID-19?

Cash flow to maintain staff and business operations is inadequate.   Yes   No

Workers are absent from work due to illness or government orders.   Yes   No

Raw materials are not in supply or have become very expensive disrupting operations.   Yes   No

Suppliers are unable to provide inputs.   Yes   No

Business partners have been badly affected and are not operating normally.   Yes   No

Customers / clients have been affected and demand is lower than normal.   Yes   No

Others, please specify.

10. Which general or disability-specific practices do you use to prevent COVID-19 infections of employees with disabilities? Please select all that apply.

Specialised transportation services

Flexible working hours

Telework

Paid leave

Unpaid leave

Not applicable

Other. Please describe.

11. Did you or are you planning to consult organizations of persons with disabilities on your COVID-19 responses?

Yes   No

12. What has been the level of financial impact (revenue or sales) on your business and disruption to business operations (high, medium, low, not applicable)?

High   Medium   Low   Not applicable

13. Did you or are you planning to request government support, including funds, to mitigate the COVID-19 impact on your company?

Yes   No

13.1 If yes, are you planning to use government support to safeguard the employment of persons with disabilities, for example subsidies for workplace adjustment and wage subsidies?

Yes   No   Not applicable

14. How long would it take your enterprise to fully restore operations?

Less than 7 days   Between 91 and 180 days

Between 8 and 30 days   Over 181 days

Between 31 and 90 days   I am considering closing temporarily or permanently.

15. What are your most pressing needs to ensure a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19 in the short and long term? Please scale your needs from 4 to 1, with 4 being much needed and 1 being not needed.

Awareness about disability issues among managers and co-workers

Guidance on physical and digital accessibility

Capacity in providing workplace adjustments

Access to assistive technologies

16. Do you have any good examples of disability inclusion/mental health practices, including on teleworking, mental health issues, of how your enterprise is responding to COVID-19? Please describe or share a link of your work.

17. Are there any other issues/concerns/recommendations you would like to raise to ensure a disability inclusive COVID-19 response?

Annex II:
Questionnaire for National Business and Disability Networks themselves

Location of your enterprise (Country)

Australia

Austria

Bangladesh

Brazil

Chile

China

Costa Rica

Egypt

El Salvador

Ethiopia

Germany

India

Indonesia

Kenya

Mexico

New Zealand

Paraguay

Peru

Philippines

Poland

Saudi Arabia

South Africa

Spain

Sri Lanka

Switzerland

Uganda

United Kingdom

United States

Uruguay

Other (Please specify)

2. How many member companies does your Network have?

Up to 5

21-50

6-20

More than 50

3. How is the Network supporting its member companies in their responses to COVID-19 and the inclusion of employees with disabilities?

Technical guidance (for example on telework, mental health)

Webinars

Advice on how to seek government support

Other (Please specify)

4. Is the Network undertaking any initiative to support the training and employment of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example by offering job matching services or online skills training?

Yes   No

4.1 If yes, can you provide some details:

5. Is the Network planning to do any advocacy or awareness raising campaign related to the employment of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes   No

6. Is the Network collaborating with government authorities to promote a disability inclusion perspective in responses to COVID-19?

Yes   No

7. Is the Network collaborating with organizations of persons with disabilities in its response to COVID-19?

Yes   No

8. Please share with us any national public measures, policies or statistics on the employment of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please provide a website link, if possible.

9. Do you think the COVID-19 crisis poses a threat to the existence of your Network?

Yes   No

10. What kind of support would you appreciate from the ILO Global Business and Disability Network?