

# Disabled people and the labour market

## Study summary

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### **PRESENTATION**

The goal of this study<sup>1</sup> was to better understand disabled people's labour market situation so as to support the development work of the Stratégie nationale pour l'intégration et le maintien en emploi des personnes handicapées and lay the groundwork for follow-up in the years to come. Among the various data sources available, we gave precedence to Statistics Canada's 2003 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) but also used two other surveys: 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) and 2002 Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The original document may be consulted at:  
[www.mess.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca)

<sup>2</sup> See: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), L'incapacité et les limitations d'activités au Québec. Un portrait statistique à partir des données de l'Enquête sur la participation et les limitations d'activité de 2001 (EPLA) at:  
[http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/publications/sante/limitations2001\\_pdf.htm](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/publications/sante/limitations2001_pdf.htm)

## **SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

### **One person in five reported having a disability.**

According to SLID, the disability rate among 16-64 year olds was 20.3% in 2003, and slightly higher among women (21.4%) than men (19.2%). PALS cited a disability rate of 6.6% for people aged 15 to 64. Due to the methodology used, this latter survey underestimates the number of people with a slight disability. The higher SLID estimate is due partly to the fact that it records all disabilities regardless of severity or duration.

**The disability rate rises sharply with age**, from 11.2% for 16-34 year olds to 22.1% for 35-54 year olds and 35.1% for 55-64 year olds. The age structure of the disabled population is significantly higher than the non-disabled population. The rise in the disability rate in the higher age groups reflects the rise in certain types of disability with age, notably those linked to agility, mobility, pain, hearing and vision.<sup>3</sup> We also observe an increase in severe disabilities with age. Close to one in five persons aged 55 to 64 suffers from a severe or very severe disability, making labour market participation much more difficult.

<sup>3</sup> Data on the nature and severity of the disability are taken from SLID.

**Disabled people have considerably less schooling than others**--28.7% have only an elementary education compared to a mere 17.1% for non-disabled people. This disadvantage is linked partly to the higher age structure among the disabled population. However, it is not age-specific. Even among 16-34 year olds, more disabled people

have an elementary education (17.9%) than non-disabled people (14.9%). The comparative disadvantage of younger disabled people is significantly less pronounced than among older groups.

**Disabled people are over-represented among low-income earners**—46.1% earn less than \$15 000 compared to 32.1% for non-disabled people. Having a disability affects men's and women's earnings comparably. An age-based analysis, however, shows that after age 35, disabled people are at a greater disadvantage due to the fact that those in the 35-64 age group are often less likely to have work as their main income source. However, they are three times more likely to count on government transfers, notably social aid, CSST and Régie des rentes benefits.

## **LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION**

**Disabled people's labour market participation is much lower than non-disabled people.** The activity rate of disabled people aged 16 to 64 is only 61.3%, compared to 79.3% for non-disabled people. The employment rate for disabled people (54.1%) is also much lower (75.2%).

**The comparative disadvantage regarding the employment rate is similar for disabled men and women.** For both, the employment rate is slightly under three-quarters among persons of the same gender. (Disabled men: 57.2%; non-disabled men: 79.3%) (Disabled women: 51.3%; non-disabled women: 70.9%).

**Disabled people's comparative disadvantage regarding the employment rate increases with age.** The employment rate for disabled 16-34 year olds (68.1%) is very close to that

for non-disabled young people (72.3%). The difference among persons with or without a disability is significantly higher among 35-54 year olds (62.8% vs. 85.0%) and 55-64 year olds (29.4 % vs. 51.2%), due partly to the greater prevalence of moderate or severe disabilities among persons aged 35 or over.

**The discrepancy in the employment rate for disabled people and non-disabled people is higher among those with less schooling.** The employment rate for disabled people with an elementary education (32.6%) is just over half (59.0%) the rate for non-disabled people with less schooling. The disparity among persons with or without a disability is lower among secondary school graduates (52.9% vs. 71.3%) and among those with a college or university education (68.9% vs. 82.4%).

**The unemployment rate for disabled people is twice as high as for non-disabled people.** According to SLID,<sup>4</sup> the unemployment rate for disabled people is 11.8% compared to only 5.9% for non-disabled people aged 15 to 64.

- 4 According to SLID, the unemployment rate among non-disabled people is lower than the usual unemployment rate taken from the Labour Force Survey, due to differences in methodology.

**The comparative disadvantage among disabled men in terms of the unemployment rate is higher than among women.** The unemployment rate for disabled men (15.4%) is two and a half times that of non-disabled men (6.4%) while that for disabled women (7.8%) is one and a half times that of non-disabled women (5.2%).

**Disabled people's comparative disadvantage in terms of the unemployment rate increases with age.** Among 16-34 year olds, the unemployment rate for disabled people (9.9%) is 1.4 times that for non-disabled people (7.2%). Among 35-54 year olds, the rate for disabled people (11.5%) is 2.4 times that of non-disabled people (4.9%). Among 55-64 year olds, it (15.5%) is almost three times higher than for non-disabled people (5.3%).

**The average unemployment period is longer for disabled people, especially men.** In 2003, it was six weeks longer (23.3 weeks) than for non-disabled people (17 weeks). At more than 28 weeks, the average unemployment period for disabled men was ten weeks longer than for non-disabled men. Posting significantly lower unemployment rates (16.8 weeks), the figure for disabled women was less than one week higher than for non-disabled women (15.9 weeks).

**The average unemployment period for disabled people increases significantly with age.** Among 16-34 year olds, it is only one and a half weeks (16.3 weeks) longer than for non-disabled people of the same age (14.9 weeks). This difference is five and a half weeks for 35-54 years (disabled: 25.4 weeks; non-disabled: 19.9 weeks) and more than ten weeks for 55-64 year olds (disabled: 29.5 weeks; non-disabled: 19.4 weeks). Among men, the difference in unemployment periods rises sharply after age 35, to more than 11 weeks. For women with or without a disability, unemployment periods remain similar until age 54. There is a six-week difference for women aged 54 to 64.

## EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

**The share of part-time work in overall employment is lower for disabled people than for others**—16.7 % for disabled people aged 16 to 64 compared to 18.3% for non-disabled people. We observe the lowest share of part-time work among disabled men, notably young ones, due, in part, to the fact that fewer of them continue their studies. Among women, part-time work is as common among disabled women as non-disabled women. It is more common among disabled women aged 55 to 64.

**People reporting a disability are over-represented in certain activity sectors**, notably those with a relatively old work force: forestry, fishing, mines, oil and gas, construction, transportation and storage, business management and administrative services and, finally, other services.

**Disabled people are over-represented in certain occupations**, notably those with a relatively old work force: primary-sector occupations, construction trades, family support and daycare workers, accommodation staff, travel, sports and recreation and heavy equipment operators.

**Overall, the hourly wage for disabled people is slightly higher than for others**--\$18.26 (age 16 to 64) compared to \$17.81. This slight advantage is linked to the phenomenon observed among disabled 55-64 year olds, whose hourly wage is \$1 higher. For both genders, the hourly wage for disabled people is higher. However, the difference is greater for disabled women (\$0.97 more) than men (difference of \$0.14).

**Overall, the unionization rate is the same for disabled people and non-disabled people.** Disabled or not, the

unionization rate for those aged 16 to 64 years was 39% in 2003. For disabled men, this rate (39.3%) was slightly lower than for non-disabled men (41.1%). The opposite is true for women (disabled: 38.8%; non-disabled: 36.8%). Disabled people aged 55 to 64 showed a lower unionization rate (38.5%) than for other the same age (44.7%).

**Job-related training activities are less frequently offered to disabled people<sup>5</sup>**

--both with regard to formal job training and employer-sponsored training. Only 19% of disabled people aged 25 to 64 received formal job training in 2002 compared to 32.8% of non-disabled people. They were twice as unlikely to benefit from employer-sponsored training (12.7% vs. 26.4%). In the latter case, disabled men seemed to benefit even less than disabled women.

- <sup>5</sup> This data is taken from the 2002 Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS). Job training includes both formal and informal activities. Training is employer-sponsored if it is planned, carried out or supported in some manner by the employer (payment of tuition costs, freeing up employee during work hours, etc.).

**DISABLED PEOPLE'S LABOUR MARKET DIFFICULTIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS<sup>6</sup>**

- <sup>6</sup> All data in this section come from the ISQ study based on PALS data.

**The employment rate decreases significantly with the severity of the disability.** In 2001, the employment rate for people with a slight disability was 52.1%. It dropped to 40.2% for people with a moderate disability and to only

20.8% for people with a severe or very severe disability. The employment rate seems to vary with the type of disability, although less so.

**Just over half (55.1%) of workers had to change jobs, type of job or amount of time worked due to their disability.** Surprisingly enough, the lowest figure (40.9%) was among workers aged 55 to 64, due to the fact that these people are more often affected by disabilities related to aging, which may have fewer repercussions on job changes. However, they more often result in earlier retirement.

**Just over half (53.8%) of disabled workers reported requiring special services or adapted workplaces.** These needs are more common among women (57.9%) than men (50.3%) and more frequent for people aged 35 to 54 (57.4%). They affect the vast majority (80.5%) of people with a severe or very severe disability.

**Just under one-third of disabled people reported that at least one of their needs was not met in their current job.** Among those requiring special services or adapted workplaces, 68.1% reported that these need were met in their current job while 31.9% reported that at least one need was not met.

**The vast majority of disabled unemployed and inactive people<sup>7</sup> estimate that their condition limits the amount or type of work they can do--**78.9% for the former and 85% for the latter. Among the inactive, the largest percentage (92.3%) is among 35 to 54 year olds. The smaller percentage observed for 55 to 64 year olds (75 %) might be due to the fact that these people simply do not want to work.

<sup>7</sup> These people are not looking for a job but are not unable to work.

**Among disabled unemployed and inactive people, more than two-thirds would require special services or adapted workplaces if they returned to work.** Some 68.5% of unemployed people reported such needs—more women (74.4%) than men (63.5%). Among the inactive, the figure is slightly lower (62.8%) than for the unemployed. The highest percentage (74.9%) is among the youngest, apparently because they are most likely to consider labour market participation. The proportion of people who feel that they have such needs increases with the severity of the disability.