



The Employment Quality of Persons With Disabilities Findings From a National Survey

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Key Questions

How does the employment quality of persons with disabilities differ from that of persons without disabilities?

Is low employment quality a barrier to workplace communication and support among persons with disabilities?

Key Findings

- There are large and persisting inequities in employment quality between persons with and without disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be in a precarious employment situation relative to persons without disabilities.
- Precarious employment may act as a major barrier to workplace communication and support among persons with disabilities.
- Inclusion does not guarantee equity. In fact, labour market inclusion can come at a cost to employment quality for persons with disabilities.

Disability and Employment in Canada

6,250,000

Canadians aged 15 and above
living with one or more disabilities.

2,200,000

Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64
who are actively employed.

650,000

Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64 who
are not employed but have the potential to work.

Disability and Employment Equity in Canada

- The right to an open and inclusive labour market for persons with disabilities is upheld by employment equity legislation and international law.
 - *Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)*
 - *Accessible Canada Act (2019)*
 - *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008)*
- Despite numerous protections, persons with disabilities face persisting inequities in the labour market due to discrimination, stigma, and other structural barriers they face in various facets of life, including employment.

Labour Market Situation of Persons With Disabilities

Figure 2: Employment Rate by Education Level and Severity, Adjusted for Age

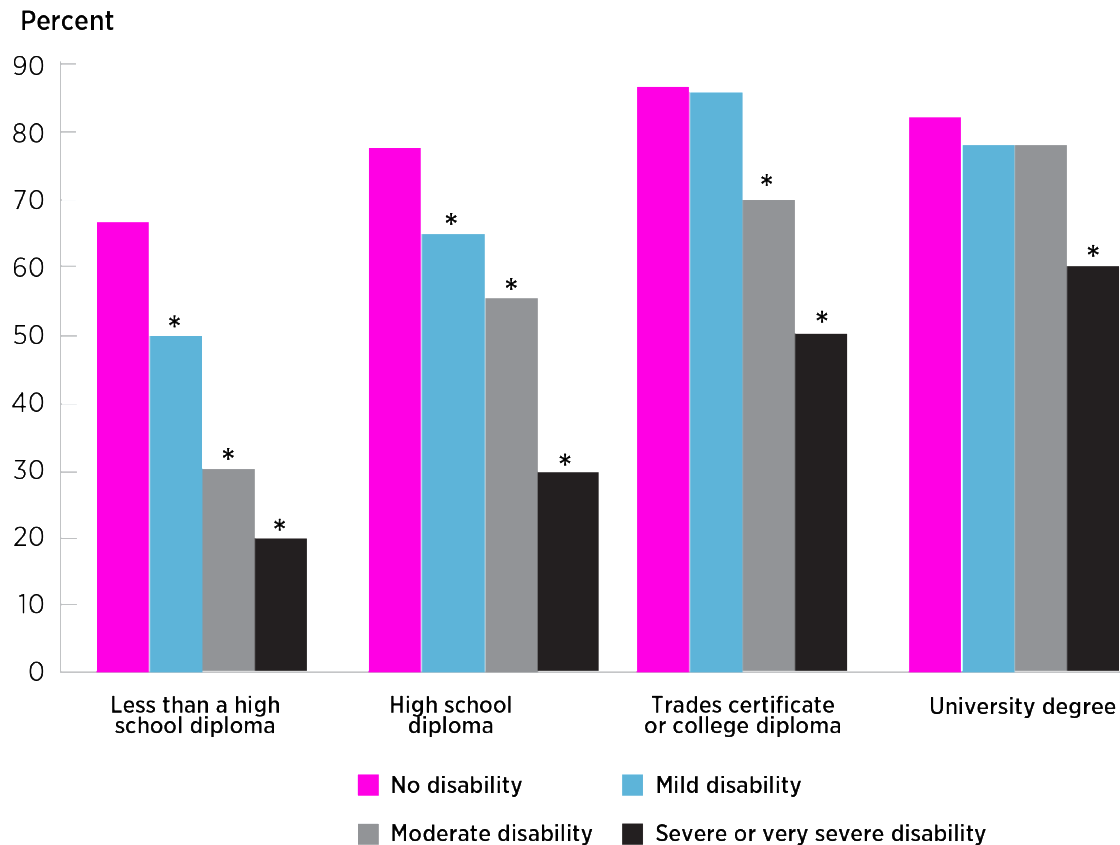


Table 4: Median Employment Income by Disability Status

DISABILITY STATUS	AGED 15 TO 64 YEARS*	
	Women	Men
	Dollars	
Persons without disabilities	\$33,882	\$47,256
Persons with disabilities		
Milder	\$31,109	\$45,031
More severe	\$22,867	\$28,336

Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

- Labour market integration is seen as a promising strategy to improve the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Strong emphasis on closing the overall employment participation gap (e.g., by enhancing the employability of persons with disabilities and reducing barriers to participation).
- Less emphasis on understanding and improving the employment quality of persons with disabilities once they obtain a job.
- Labour market participation does not guarantee meaningful, sustainable, and gainful opportunities for employment.

Why Does Quality of Employment Matter?

- Not all jobs are created equal, and there are prevailing concerns that the quality of jobs in Canada is in decline.
- Having a bad job has been shown to be as harmful to physical and mental health as having no job at all.
- Job insecurity and other indicators of low job quality can act as a barrier to disability disclosure and accommodations.
- Employment equity is only meaningful if it exists across the employment cycle – from training and recruitment, to retention and advancement.

Research Problem

Employment Participation \neq Employment Quality

Closing the employment participation gap is not the same as closing the employment quality gap.

Research Problem

The Labour Force Survey – our principal tool for understanding employment quality in Canada – **does not collect information on disability status.**

As a result, we lack a comprehensive portrait of employment quality among persons with disabilities.

Study Objectives

1. To evaluate and compare the employment quality of persons with and without disabilities in Canada.
2. To examine the relationship between employment quality and workplace communication and support among persons with disabilities in Canada.

Data Source

Design:

Online cross-sectional survey administered in June 2020

Eligibility:

At least 18 years of age

Currently employed at least 12 hours per week

Comfortable completing a questionnaire in English or French

Recruitment:

National panel of ~100,000 Canadians

Purposive sampling for persons living with disabilities

Achieved a response rate of 26.5%

Key Measures: Disability Status

Questions were adapted from a shortened version of the Disability Screener Questionnaire (DSQ) used by Statistics Canada.

- *Do you have any [physical; mental or cognitive; other] health problems or conditions expected to last at least six months that can make working difficult at least some of the time?*

We created five groups:

- No disability
- Any disability
 - Physical disability
 - Mental disability
 - Both a physical and mental disability

Key Measures: Employment Quality

We adopted a multidimensional view of employment quality comprised of 16 unique indicators.

1. Job insecurity
2. Employment insecurity
3. Income insecurity
4. Wage theft
5. Long hours
6. Irregular hours
7. Unpredictable hours
8. Flexible hours
9. Temporary contract
10. Gig work
11. Job lock
12. Job mismatch
13. Training opportunities
14. Positive safety climate
15. Union membership
16. Pension benefits

Key Measures: Workplace Communication and Support

We asked a series of questions related to workplace communications and the availability of workplace accommodations and supports.

- *Have you talked to [your supervisor or manager; your coworkers; others in the workplace (e.g., human resources, union representative)] about any limitations you have that might affect your work that are related to your health or disability?*
- *If you were to experience difficulties in your ability to work because of personal needs, how willing would you be to share your personal situation with [your supervisor or manager; your coworkers; others in the workplace]?*
- *To what extent are you free to ask for [accommodations to support family needs; accommodations to support health needs] without fear of retaliation or punishment?*
- *Which of the following workplace accommodations [modified job duties; modified workstation; work from home] do you need to use but not have available?*

Other Variables

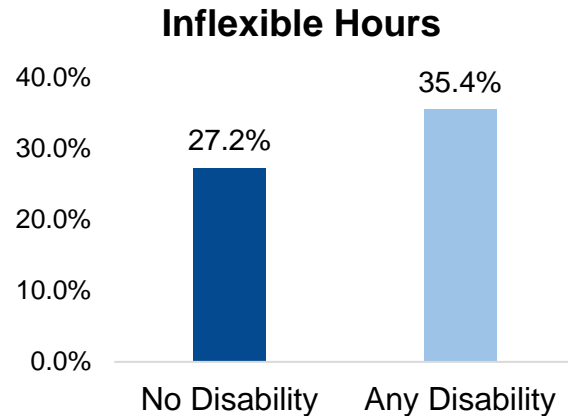
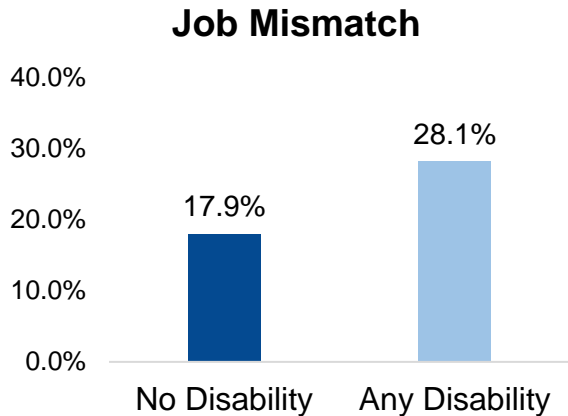
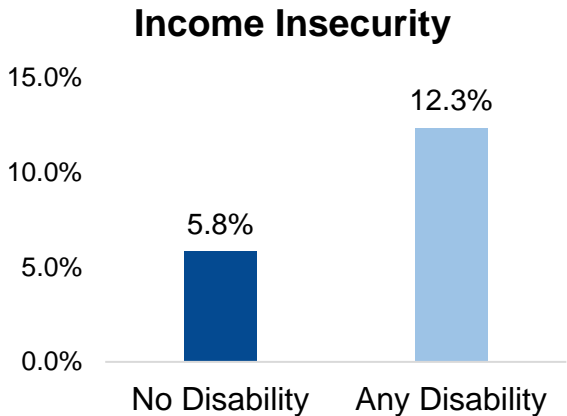
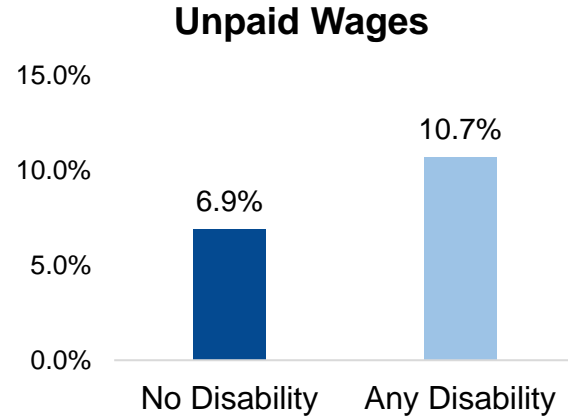
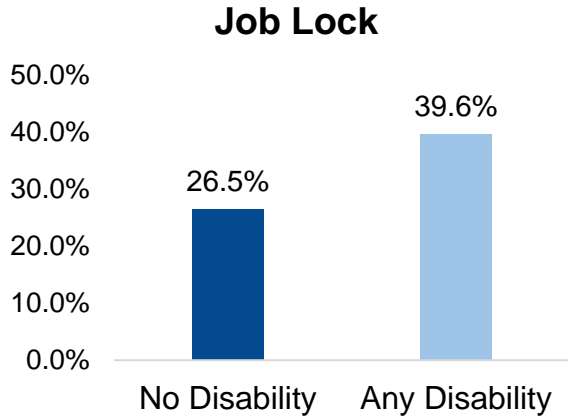
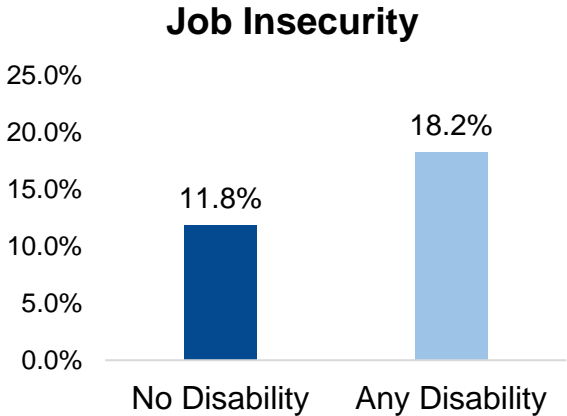
All results are statistically adjusted for the following characteristics:

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Immigration Status

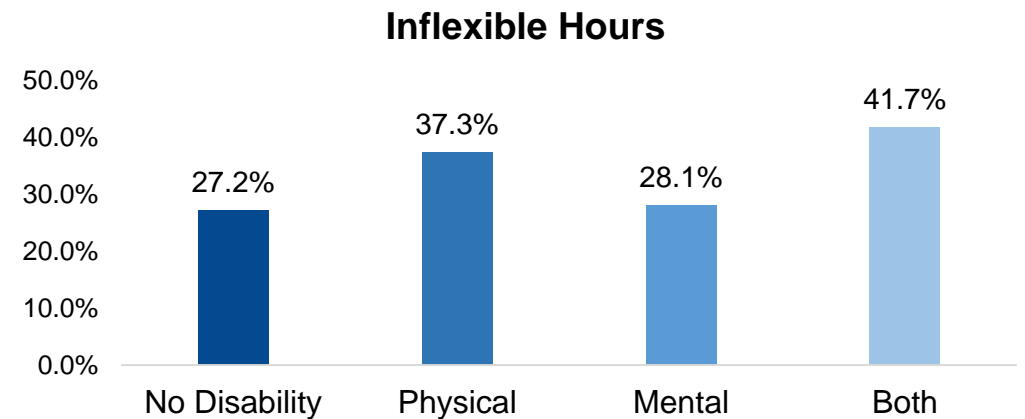
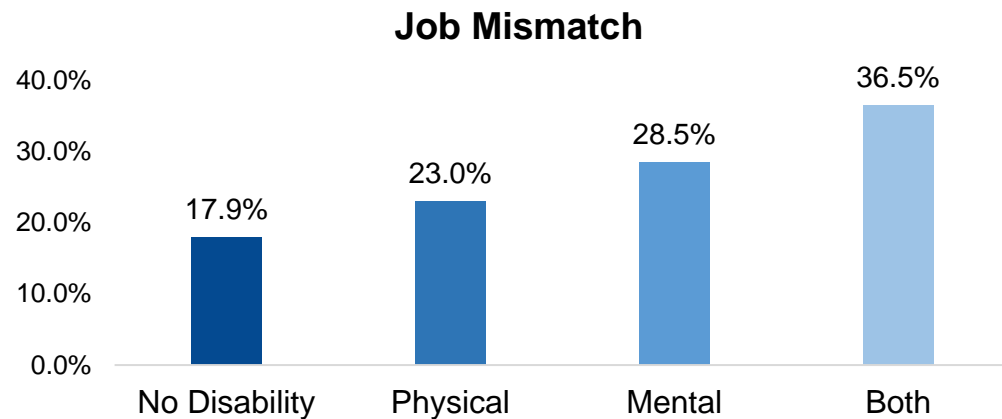
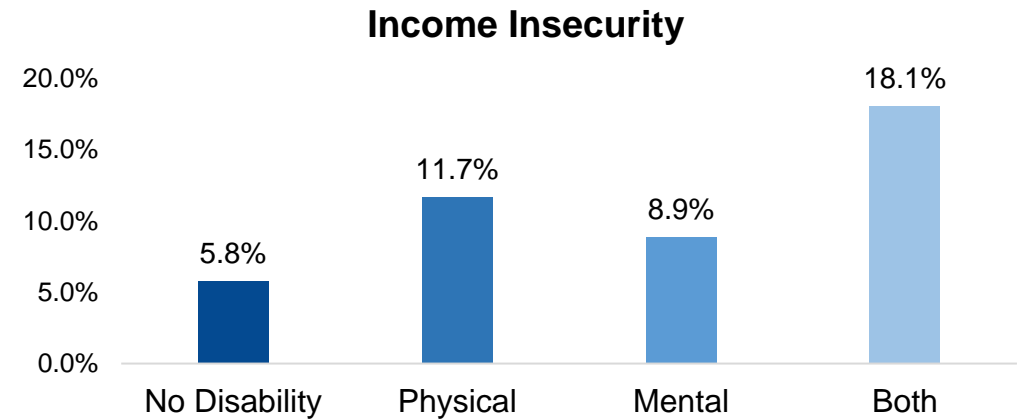
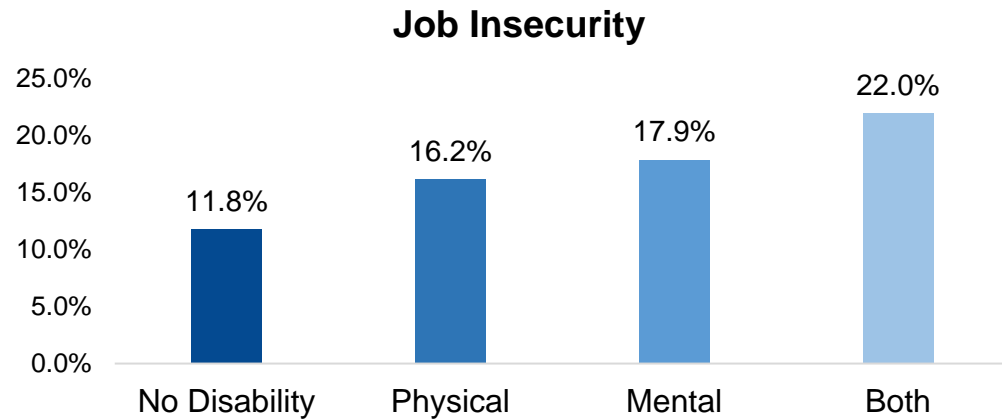
Study Sample

Characteristic	No Disability n (%)	Any Disability n (%)	Disability Type		
			Physical n (%)	Mental n (%)	Both n (%)
Observations	1,809 (64.8%)	985 (35.2%)	415 (14.8%)	326 (11.7%)	244 (8.7%)
Age					
18 to 34	642 (35.5%)	320 (32.5%)	80 (19.3%)	151 (46.3%)	89 (37.5%)
35 to 49	615 (34.0%)	355 (36.0%)	130 (31.3%)	130 (39.9%)	95 (38.9%)
50 or above	552 (30.5%)	310 (31.5%)	205 (49.4%)	45 (13.8%)	60 (24.6%)
Gender					
Men	990 (54.7%)	468 (47.5%)	218 (52.5%)	148 (45.4%)	102 (41.8%)
Women	819 (45.3%)	517 (52.5%)	197 (47.5%)	178 (54.6%)	142 (58.2%)
Immigration Status					
Born in Canada	1,505 (83.2%)	889 (90.2%)	377 (90.8%)	293 (89.9%)	219 (89.8%)
Not born in Canada	304 (16.8%)	96 (9.8%)	38 (9.2%)	33 (10.1%)	25 (10.2%)
Education					
Postsecondary degree	1,417 (78.3%)	690 (70.0%)	286 (68.92%)	242 (74.2%)	162 (66.4%)
Some postsecondary	266 (14.7%)	193 (19.6%)	77 (18.6%)	63 (19.3%)	53 (21.7%)
Secondary degree or less	126 (7.0%)	102 (10.4%)	52 (12.5%)	21 (6.4%)	29 (11.9%)

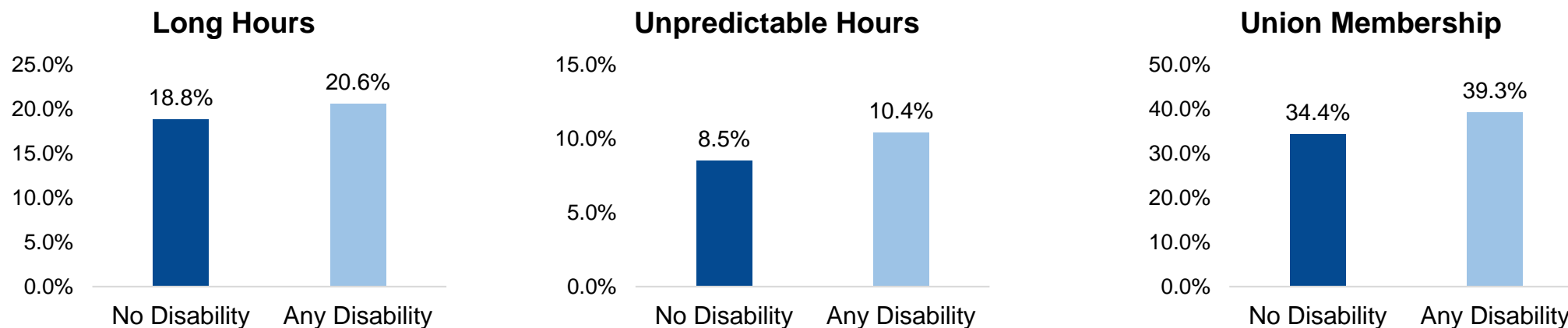
Persons with disabilities reported consistently worse employment conditions than persons without disabilities.



Persons with both physical and mental disabilities often reported the worst employment conditions of all groups.



Persons with disabilities reported comparable (or better) employment conditions along a subset of dimensions.



We identified four overarching “types” of employment in the Canadian labour market.

Standard Employment

Workers in this group report favourable employment conditions across virtually every dimension of employment quality.

“SECURE AND REWARDING”

Portfolio Employment

Workers in this group report generally positive employment conditions, though their work involves longer and less predictable hours.

“SECURE BUT DEMANDING.”

Instrumental Employment

Workers in this group report employment conditions that are secure, but offer little else in the way of rewards and benefits.

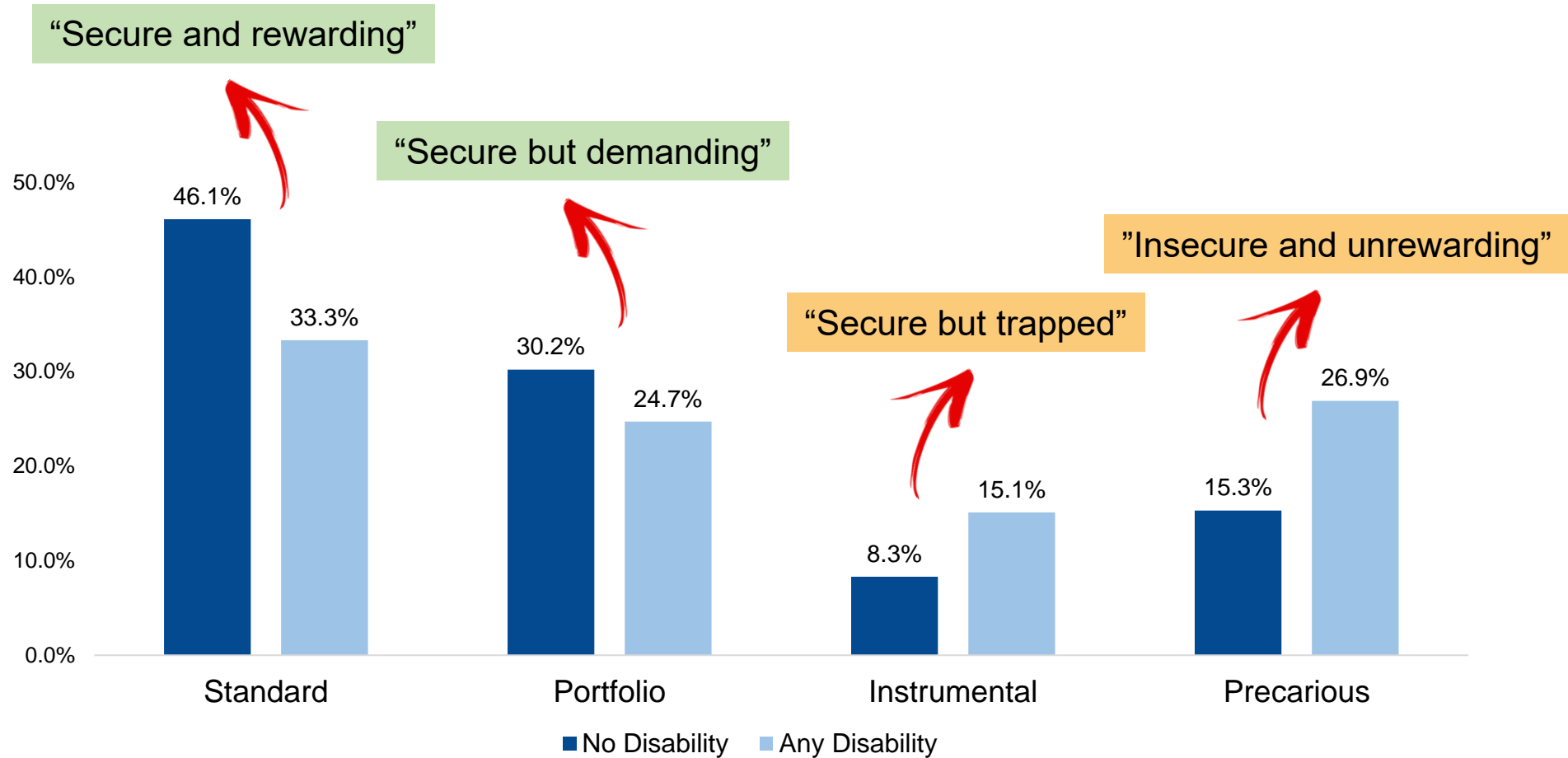
“SECURE BUT TRAPPED.”

Precarious Employment

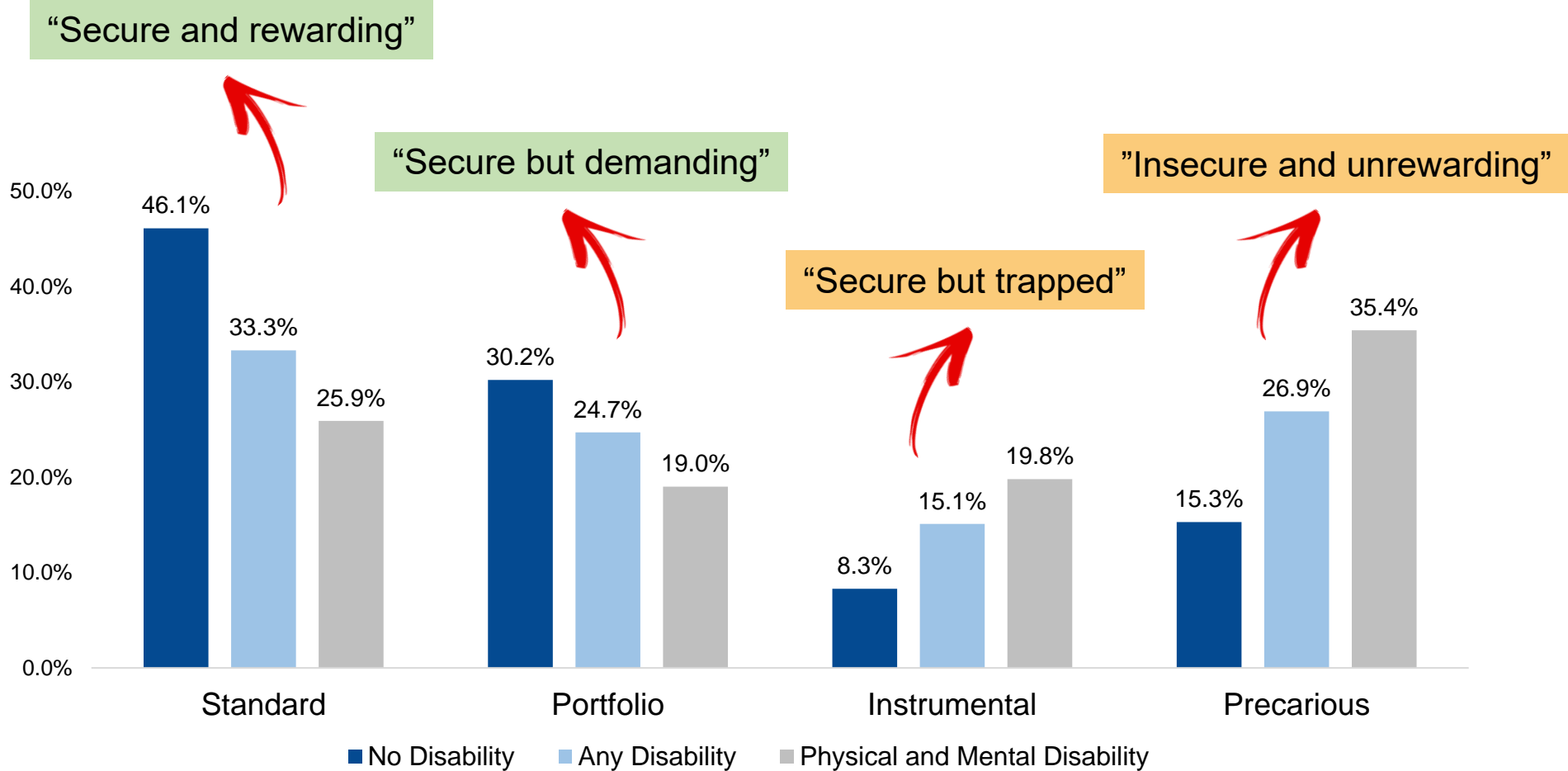
Workers in this group report overwhelmingly negative employment conditions across most dimensions.

“INSECURE AND UNREWARDING”

Persons with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to be in a precarious or instrumental employment situation.

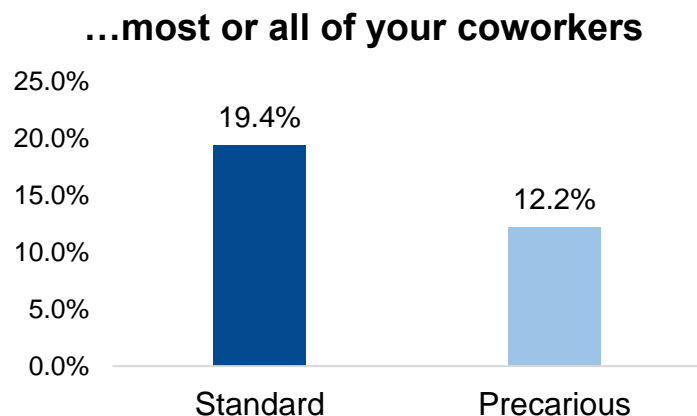
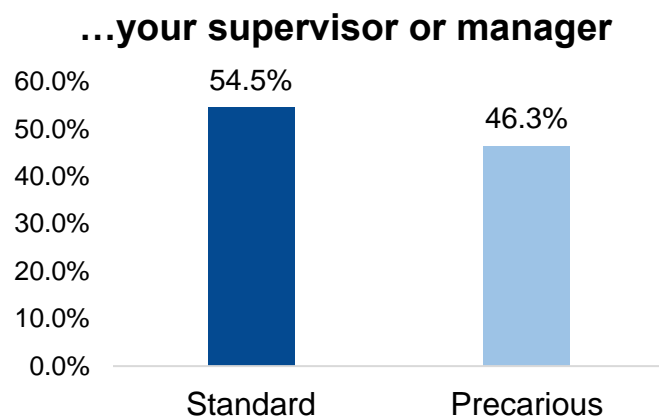


The employment quality gap was largest for persons with both a physical and mental disability.



Persons with disabilities in a precarious employment situation were less likely to disclose information about work limitations.

Have you talked to [...] about any limitations you have that might affect your work that are related to your health or disability?



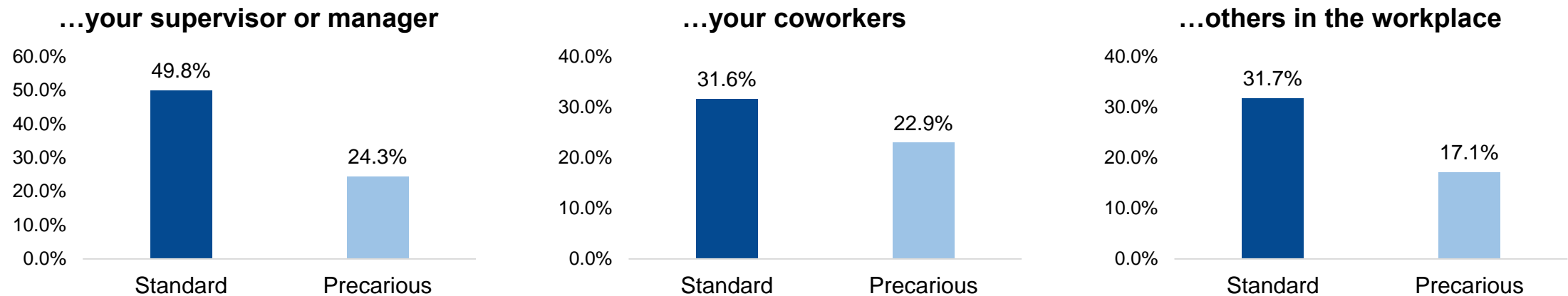
...others in the workplace

No significant difference.

Persons with disabilities in a precarious employment situation were less willing to communicate about personal needs.

If you were to experience difficulties in your ability to work because of personal needs, how willing would you be to share your personal situation with [...]?

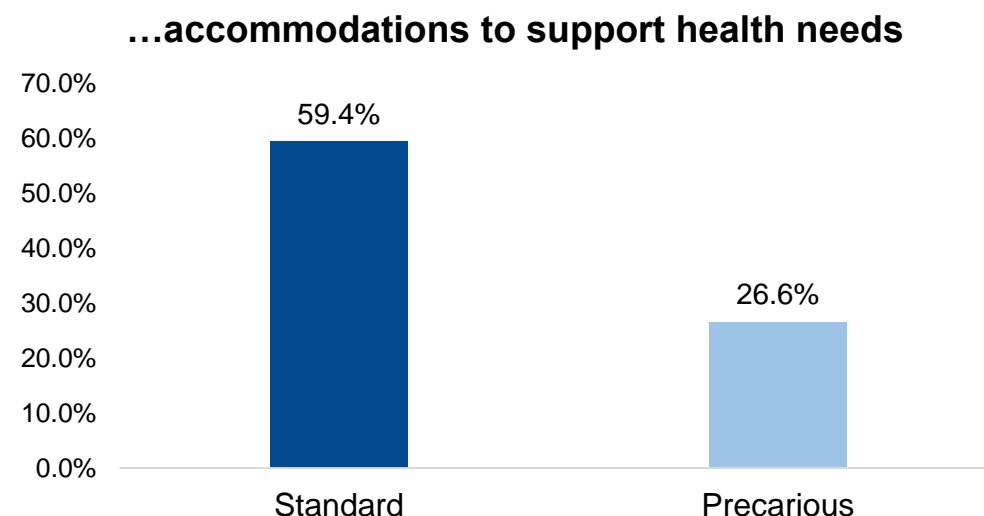
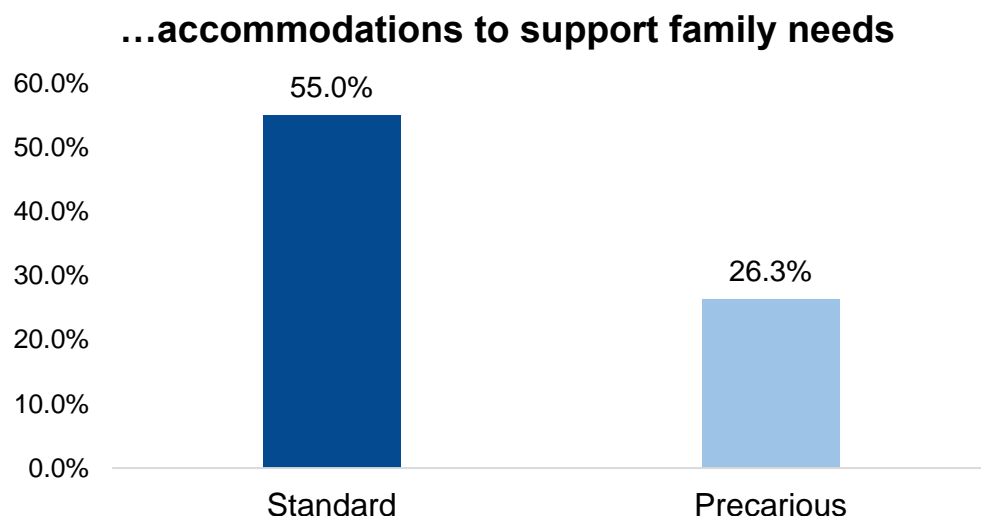
“Quite a bit” or “A great deal”



Persons with disabilities in a precarious employment situation were less likely to feel safe asking for accommodations.

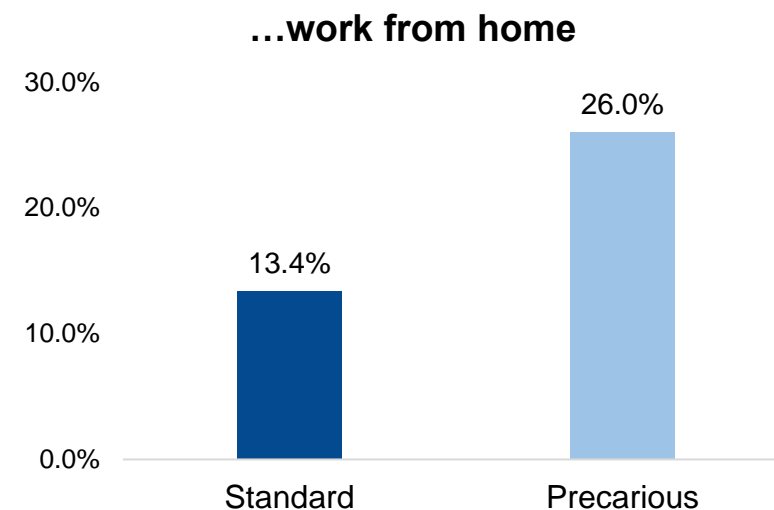
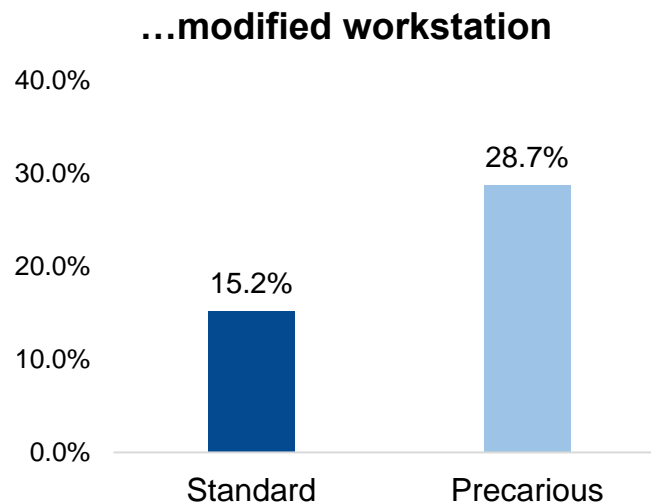
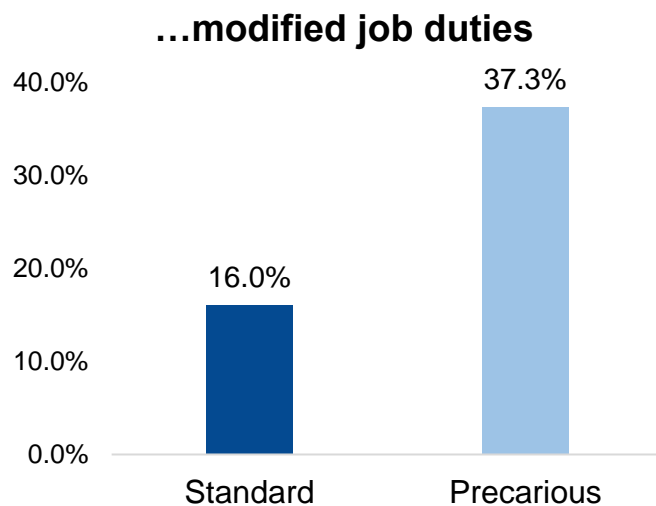
To what extent are you free to ask for [...] without fear of retaliation or punishment?

“To a large extent” or “To a very large extent”



Persons with disabilities in a precarious employment situation were more likely to report unmet accommodation needs.

Which of the following workplace accommodations do you need to use but not have available?



Summary of Findings

- Persons with disabilities report consistently worse employment conditions than their counterparts without disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be in an instrumental or precarious employment situation.
- The gap in employment quality is largest for persons with both physical and mental disabilities.
- Precarious employment appears to be a major barrier to workplace communication and support among persons with disabilities.
- These findings are consistent with the notion that persons with disabilities experience inequities across the entire employment cycle – not just with respect to participation, but also the terms and conditions of participation.

Limitations

- We used cross-sectional data collected at a single point in time.
- The sample was only “broadly” representative, with strong indication of selection for more higher educated workers.
- In June 2020, the unemployment rate was 12.3% and provinces had only just begun to relax public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We have not considered how disability status interacts with other identities, and often lacked the statistical power to do so.

Key Messages

- **Inclusion is not equity.** In fact, labour market inclusion can come at a cost to employment quality for persons with disabilities.
- **Labour force participation is not a panacea.** The terms and conditions of employment matter. The goal should be to create opportunities for meaningful, sustainable, and gainful employment.
- **A major gap in the Labour Force Survey** prohibits the systematic and routine assessment of employment quality among persons with disabilities.
- **Building back better (jobs)** means attending comprehensively to the full range of labour market experiences of persons with disabilities.

Thank you!

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Employment Conditions

1. **Job insecurity** (Are you worried about becoming unemployed?)
2. **Employment insecurity** (Are you worried about it being difficult for you to find another job?)
3. **Income insecurity** (Do your current wages or salary allow you to cover unexpected expenses?)
4. **Unpaid wages** (In the past 12 months, were you always paid in full for the work you did?)
5. **Long hours** (Working 45 hours or more per week.)
6. **Irregular hours** (In the past year, which of the following best describes your work schedule?)
7. **Unpredictable hours** (Do you know your work schedule at least 1 week in advance?)
8. **Inflexible hours** (Yes, I need a flexible work schedule, but it is not available.)
9. **Temporary work** (Do you have a permanent position with your employer or are you on a contract?)
10. **Gig work** (Would you say that your job is part of the “gig economy”?)
11. **Job lock** (Do you feel "locked in" your current job (i.e., trapped and unable to look for other work)?)
12. **Job mismatch** (How much do you believe your current job makes use of your skills and training?)
13. **Training opportunities** (Do you have the possibility of learning new things through your work?)
14. **Positive safety climate** (Would there be negative consequences if you raised a health/safety concern?)
15. **Union membership** (Do you belong to a union or professional/managerial society?)
16. **Pension benefits** (Does your job or employer provide you with a pension?)

Employment Quality

Employment Quality Indicator	Employment Quality Type			
	Standard n = 1,176 (41.6%)	Portfolio n = 778 (28.3%)	Instrumental n = 311 (10.7%)	Precarious n = 529 (19.4%)
Job Insecurity	3.6%	4.0%	5.8%	55.7%
Employment Insecurity	24.1%	23.3%	58.7%	80.5%
Income Insecurity	8.8%	4.6%	6.3%	30.3%
Unpaid Wages	3.9%	6.6%	10.7%	18.5%
Long hours	18.6%	21.4%	24.4%	15.8%
Irregular Hours	11.6%	19.3%	20.8%	25.8%
Unpredictable Hours	3.3%	13.5%	7.8%	19.6%
Inflexible Hours	22.3%	20.2%	59.3%	44.3%
Temporary Contract	7.4%	11.2%	0.6%	19.9%
Gig Work	2.4%	8.8%	0.7%	23.1%
Job Lock	16.0%	12.6%	79.8%	63.9%
Job Mismatch	8.0%	9.9%	55.9%	48.7%
Training Opportunities	97.1%	92.0%	50.6%	58.7%
Positive Safety Climate	90.5%	87.5%	40.0%	36.6%
Union Membership	55.1%	9.5%	68.5%	15.8%
Pension Benefits	100.0%	3.0%	96.7%	26.0%