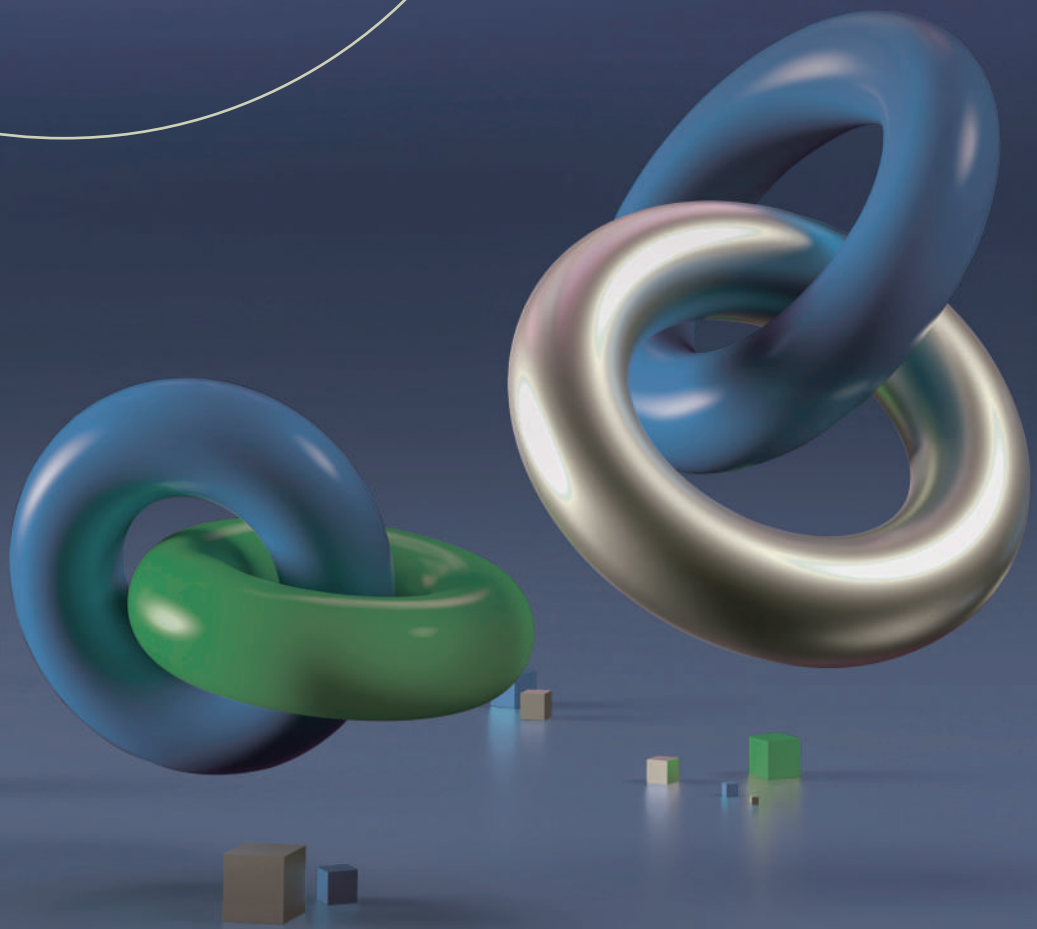


Enhancing Disability-Inclusive Employment Policies in Asia:

Challenges, Good Practices, and
Policy Recommendations



The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) is an intergovernmental organization that promotes productivity as a key enabler for socioeconomic development and organizational and enterprise growth. It promotes productivity improvement tools, techniques, and methodologies; supports the National Productivity Organizations of its members; conducts research on productivity trends; and disseminates productivity information, analyses, and data. The APO was established in 1961 and comprises 21 members.

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ENHANCING DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT POLICIES IN ASIA:

CHALLENGES, GOOD PRACTICES, AND
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing Disability – Inclusive Employment Policies in Asia: Challenges,
Good Practices, and Policy Recommendations

Prof. Hisayo Katsui served as the chief expert and volume editor.

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FOREWORD

In today's rapidly evolving global environment, adopting inclusive employment practices for persons with disabilities has become indispensable for achieving sustainable growth and promoting social equity. This research report, *Enhancing Disability-Inclusive Employment Policies in Asia: Challenges, Good Practices, and Policy Recommendations*, delivers a timely and in-depth examination of disability-inclusive employment across Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye.

This comprehensive publication is the outcome of structured research spearheaded by Professor Hisayo Katsui, Professor of Disability Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland, supported by dedicated national experts from the participating APO members. By providing detailed member-specific insights, the study reveals critical legislative and structural barriers, such as inconsistencies between policy frameworks and their practical implementation, insufficient vocational training tailored to actual market needs, and enduring societal prejudices. Furthermore, each member analysis presents actionable recommendations designed to address these issues, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement of employment quotas, improved infrastructural accessibility, customized vocational training, and enhanced public awareness initiatives.

Collectively, this research critically evaluates the impacts of inclusive employment practices on productivity, economic empowerment, and social integration. Its findings offer practical, evidence-based guidance for policymakers, business leaders, and advocacy groups aiming to cultivate inclusive workplaces and ensure equitable opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The APO remains dedicated to advancing inclusive productivity and sustainable economic development throughout the Asia-Pacific region. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to Professor Katsui and all the contributors, whose rigorous efforts and insightful recommendations have significantly enriched this important publication.

Dr. Indra Pradana Singawinata
Secretary-General
Asian Productivity Organization
Tokyo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

This study examines employment policies and practices concerning persons with disabilities in selected case study countries across Asia, namely, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye. In all seven countries, persons with disabilities are often excluded from employment opportunities and constitute an untapped resource. This study on disability-inclusive employment addresses a critical gap by providing important information for the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) publication series, which primarily focuses on productivity.

In this study, we adopted the definition of disability outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which conceptualizes it as the result of interactions between individuals with disabilities and their surrounding environments. The analysis also applies the theory of ableism while incorporating local insights and cultural contexts. This approach enables a critical examination of employment policies and practices through a disability-inclusive perspective, thereby identifying key environmental barriers.

National experts from the seven countries conducted policy analyses, literature reviews, and personal interviews to gain a deeper understanding of existing policies and employment conditions. Based on their findings, they formulated policy implications and recommendations to promote more inclusive employment policies and practices in their respective countries. The data collection, analysis, and reporting processes lasted throughout 2024, with national and chief experts maintaining close communication throughout the study.

According to national reports, efforts toward disability-inclusive employment remain largely confined to legislative and policy frameworks, with limited practical implementation. Even when laws and action plans are in place, their enforcement is often inadequate. The lack of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms has resulted in systematic bottlenecks across all studied countries, leading to a lack of accountability and transparency among duty-bearers. The employment situation for persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities, remains discouraging. Identified barriers include limited accessibility, insufficient social protections, inadequate inclusive education and vocational training, persistent negative attitudes, and a lack of accessible information and knowledge.

Policy implications and recommendations are framed in terms of institutional frameworks and implementation processes. Regarding institutional frameworks, there is a pressing need for more rigorous laws and action plans that clearly define the roles of duty-bearers, establish measurable indicators, set realistic timeframes, and allocate sufficient resources. Effective coordination mechanisms among stakeholders must be established. Additionally, systematic data collection is essential for evidence-based policymaking. As for implementation processes, national reports recommend enhanced capacity-building for both duty-bearers and rights-holders. Awareness-raising initiatives should challenge deeply ingrained negative perceptions of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, fostering deliberate collaboration between persons with disabilities and their representative organizations is crucial to ensuring that policies are relevant and effective.

Further studies in this field are required to dismantle the significant barriers hindering the employment rights of persons with disabilities and to monitor developments through longitudinal and internationally comparative studies. Given that a substantial proportion of this group in the studied countries are engaged in subsistent farming, self-employment, and entrepreneurship present valuable areas for further study. Additionally, investigating the potential positive impact of technological innovation and artificial intelligence could provide meaningful insights, especially as many of the identified barriers are addressed. With persons with disabilities comprising 16% of the world's population, they represent an invaluable resource in Asia and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) [1], “disability is an evolving concept” that “results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” [1]. Similarly, Article 1 of the Convention states that “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” Thus, disability is not an issue inherent to the individual but rather a consequence of the interactions between an individual and their environment. The latest estimate from the World Health Organisation (WHO) [2] indicates that 16% of the world’s population has a disability, meaning one in every six individuals is affected, 80% of whom are of working age [3].

This study focuses on employment policies and practices in Asia and the extent to which they facilitate disability inclusion. Asian countries are diverse and vary significantly from one another. However, in many of these countries, employment policies tend to overlook the needs of persons with disabilities in terms of accessibility, reasonable accommodation measures, and assistive devices. Moreover, while social protection systems are evolving, they often remain insufficient for persons with disabilities. This context forms the basis of the study.

The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) has expressed interest in understanding persons with disabilities as an untapped resource in the employment sector and in increasing their productivity across Asia. To explore this theme, this study aligns with the UNCRPD’s definition of disability, conceptualizing it not as a personal deficit (Figure 1) but a societal challenge requiring systemic intervention (Figure 2). From an individual perspective, impairments are viewed as problems to be fixed—through medical treatments, rehabilitation, and medication—to help individuals conform to the “norms” of society. For a medical model of disability, see [4].

FIGURE 1

AN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO DISABILITY, DEPICTING ONE OUT OF SIX PERSONS IN A DIFFERENT COLOR TO ILLUSTRATE HOW DISABILITY IS OFTEN DEPICTED AS AFFECTING ONLY THE INDIVIDUAL



Conversely, the human rights-based approach considers all members of society as stakeholders in constructing and reinforcing disabilities. This perspective emphasizes the local and global environment as well as historical and future dimensions of disability-related challenges [5, 6].

Article 27 of the Convention on Work and Employment affirms the right of persons with disabilities to decent work, ensuring equal opportunities and prohibiting discrimination in all employment matters. The right to decent work is a fundamental human right, grounded in the principles of dignity, equality, and justice, as outlined in the Preamble to the Convention [1]. However, data from the ILO [7] indicates that persons with

FIGURE 2

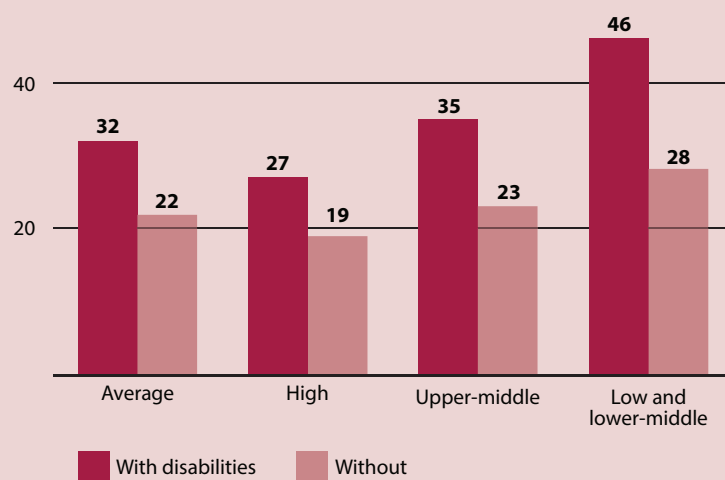
A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISABILITY, SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTIONS



disabilities face significant disadvantages in the labor market compared with those without disabilities. Stoevska [8] reports that seven out of ten persons with disabilities remain economically inactive. Moreover, these disparities persist over time. For example, the ratio of low-paid workers with disabilities to those without disabilities remains consistently higher across all income levels globally, as illustrated in Figure 3 [9, p. 20].

FIGURE 3

SHARE OF LOW-PAID WORKERS AMONG EMPLOYEES WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES, BY NATIONAL INCOME GROUP, IN 2019 OR THE LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR (PERCENTAGE) [9, P. 20]



Regardless of a country's economic situation, persons with disabilities consistently receive lower wages or are excluded from salaried employment, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The negative labor market outcomes that they experience require a more detailed examination within an appropriate context and through a comprehensive analysis.

APO member countries have ratified the UNCPRPD, making it a legally binding instrument within their jurisdictions. They have also committed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 10,

which aims to reduce inequality. This report emphasizes the need to address disparities affecting persons with disabilities. However, APO members face significant challenges in implementing necessary reforms, resulting in critical socio-economic consequences for persons with disabilities, even as they remain an untapped resource. These challenges are often intensified by structural barriers, such as legal restrictions and workplace discrimination, and, where inclusive employment policies exist, their limited implementation. Addressing these barriers aligns with the APO Vision 2025 target of improving inclusive productivity. Therefore, a deeper investigation into inclusive employment policies across APO member states is crucial. One of the most widely recognized challenges is the lack of disability-disaggregated labor force data, which hampers effective situational analysis in many countries [10]. Additionally, the lack of standardized definitions and research methodologies presents further challenges [11]. These challenges underscore the need for this study on APO member countries.

Given the significant variation in the status of persons with disabilities across APO economies, ranging from differences in registration standards and legal frameworks to disparities in social policies, economic participation rates, and societal attitudes, this study presents an opportunity for APO members to examine country-specific realities. Moreover, it provides a platform for learning from good practices and successful strategies implemented by other members. The findings from this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how to best promote inclusive employment policies and practices.

This report first outlines the study's methodology, followed by national reports presented in alphabetical order. A synthesized policy and situational analysis then follows. Finally, the report concludes with policy implications and recommendations derived from national reports, offering a way forward based on the insights gained.

METHODOLOGY

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

The objectives of this study were threefold:

- To examine the status of persons with disabilities in APO members;
- To identify structural barriers to inclusive employment; and
- To evaluate employment policy interventions aimed at enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in APO member states.

Accordingly, **the study was guided by three key research questions:**

- What is the general social and structural context of persons with disabilities in the selected APO countries?
- How do current employment policies and practices facilitate/hinder the employment of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others in the selected APO countries?
- How can the structural and institutional status quo be transformed in support of more inclusive employment policies and practices?

The study adopted a theoretical framework based on disability studies. In this context, disability is conceptualized as a social phenomenon that shapes the relationship between persons with disabilities and their environment, while also acknowledging the effects of impairment-specific realism (critical realism). This critical perspective on disability allowed for a better understanding of policy and practice gaps within the employment sector. One of the key concepts applied was ableism [12], which highlights how disability is often positioned as a counter-image to able-bodiedness and perceived as an unwanted difference [13]. As a result, whether intentional or not, a preference for able-bodied individuals over persons with disabilities is prevalent. These preferences can manifest in direct and indirect discrimination or take subtler forms. By using ableism as an analytical tool, the study identified pathways for transformation.

Furthermore, the analysis incorporated country-specific understandings of disability to consciously decolonize the study. Recognizing that Global North-oriented theories alone could not fully explain disability-related phenomena in APO member states, the study drew on national reports to integrate local perspectives. Additionally, in some contexts, disability-inclusive employment policies and practices were notably lacking. Therefore, the analysis examined existing policies and practices as well as highlighted gaps where such measures were lacking.

The primary data collection methods used in this study were: 1) policy analysis, 2) literature review, and 3) personal interviews. Data collection and analysis occurred throughout 2024. The policy analysis focused on existing policies related to the employment of persons with disabilities, viewed through the critical standpoint of disability/ability. The lack of policies was also analyzed. The literature review included academic studies as well as “grey literature,” including reports from civil society organizations. Interviews were conducted with representatives from disability organizations, including national federations, in each APO member country.

National experts were trained to ensure informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the privacy and ethical management of interview data. Some interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. The recordings were then

destroyed after transcription. The interviewees' identifiable information was not disclosed in the final report. Furthermore, the study adhered to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity [14], ensuring ethical research practice throughout the process.

Based on the policy analysis, literature review, and interviews, the national experts prepared their reports, covering the following four topics: 1) contextual background, 2) policy analysis, 3) situational analysis, and 4) policy implications and recommendations for inclusive employment. These national reports serve as the foundation and source material for this synthesis report.

The APO members involved in this study included Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Turkiye. The table below indicates comparable data on the selected member countries, primarily based on the UNDP's HDI for 2023/2024 [15]:

TABLE 1

HDI DATA ON THE SELECTED APO MEMBERS

Country	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (USD)	HDI rank	Change in HDI rank 2015–22	Population in 2024*
Bangladesh	73.7	7.4	6,511	130	+12	173,562,364
Cambodia	69.9	5.2	4,291	147	+2	17,638,801
Lao PDR	69.0	5.9	7,745	140	+2	7,769,819
Mongolia	72.7	9.4	10,351	99	–2	3,475,540
The Philippines	72.2	9.0	9,059	118	+2	115,843,670
Sri Lanka	76.6	11.2	11,899	76	+6	23,103,565
Turkiye	78.5	8.8	32,834	48	+9	87,473,805

Source: [15, 16].

The statistics presented reflect average population data and do not fully capture the realities faced by persons with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to highlight their lived experiences using additional research methods, as discussed below.

Background of the experts: National experts specializing disability studies were invited from the seven participating countries. An affirmative action policy was implemented to recruit experts with disabilities, resulting in some of the national experts being persons with disabilities. The local insights of these experts were instrumental in understanding the complex social fabric of disability in each context. Regarding the epistemological background of the chief expert, I bring two key qualifications. First, I am a professor of disability studies, employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates disability studies, global development studies, human rights studies, and social policy. Second, I have conducted disability research in many Global South countries, working closely with local actors. Among the selected countries for this study, I have collaborated with experts from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, and Sri Lanka, and have visited Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. I am originally from Japan, which provided valuable contextual insight into the disability situations in Asia. For example, I facilitated introductions between disability organization representatives and national experts who were unable to identify suitable interviewees on their own. Additionally, having lived in Finland for the past 25 years, I bring a Nordic welfare state perspective, which has enriched the analysis of this study, especially given Finland's relatively comprehensive disability policies and services. I have conducted several disability research projects in present and past Finnish contexts [17, 18, 19, 20]. The welfare state perspective has also proven valuable for the analysis in this study.

Project process: After appointing the national and chief experts in the spring of 2024, the chief expert collaborated with the APO secretariat to develop the research framework and guidelines for the national experts. The first online coordination meeting was held on June 14, with the experts and the APO secretariat in attendance to discuss the research framework and specific national contexts. The national

experts submitted their first draft report to the chief expert by July 30. Within one week of submission, each national expert received individualized feedback from the chief expert. A second online coordination meeting occurred on August 20–21, where the national reports and the chief expert’s collective comments were discussed. The revised second draft reports were submitted to the chief expert by September 30, and individual feedback was provided again within a week. On October 22, during a separate business-related visit to Japan, the chief expert held an in-person meeting with the APO secretariat to finalize the project. The deadline for submitting the final national reports was October 13, which was met by most national experts. While the chief experts provided feedback, the national experts were ultimately responsible for the content of their reports; hence, not all suggestions were fully incorporated. The chief expert compiled, analyzed, and synthesized all national reports, finalizing the current synthesis report in November 2024. National experts then reviewed this report to verify the accuracy of their respective country data. Lastly, the final version of the synthesis report was submitted to the APO secretariat at the end of 2024.

A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH

Murteza Rafi Khan

CEO, Bangladesh Business & Disability Network

Assisted by Arup Ratan Chowdhury and Sharlin Akther, BBDN

Executive Summary

Bangladesh is a forerunner in South Asia in ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), including its Optional Protocol. Following this, the country enacted the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 (RPPDA 2013), largely aligned with the UNCRPD. The RPPDA 2013 explicitly states that persons with disabilities have the right to employment in the public and private sectors, with necessary measures undertaken to create an enabling environment by addressing various barriers to skills development and employment opportunities. Furthermore, in 2018, the Government of Bangladesh developed a National Action Plan (NAP) based on the RPPDA 2013 and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Rules 2015 to facilitate the effective implementation of the RPPDA 2013.

According to the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, only one-third (33.78%) of persons with disabilities aged 15–64 years are employed; 47.59% of men and 12.80% of women, with 35.55% residing in rural areas and 25.95% in urban areas. Among employed persons with disabilities in this age range, the majority are self-employed (54.42%), followed by those engaged in household or family business (18.14%) and private organizations (16.37%).

This study examines policies related to the employment and productivity of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh and provides key recommendations for developing an inclusive labor market system. It is based on a review of relevant laws and policies, an analysis of existing surveys and research data, an examination of the UNCRPD report, and alternative reports from civil society organizations. Additionally, key informant interviews with representatives of disability organizations provide further insights.

The key challenges in establishing employment rights for persons with disabilities include environmental and attitudinal barriers, as well as issues related to accessibility. This report identifies gaps in national laws and policies, highlights challenges in their implementation, and presents key findings. It concludes with a set of recommendations tailored to the specific context of Bangladesh. A central recommendation is the operationalization and monitoring of the NAP through enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders and the allocation of necessary budgets. Additional recommendations include raising awareness, building capacity, facilitating knowledge exchange on best practices, ensuring greater alignment across disability-related laws and policies, incorporating necessary provisions in laws and policies that currently lack disability-related considerations, and scaling up successful models.

Contextual Background

Disability has historically been approached largely from a charity- and welfare-based model in Bangladesh. Eventually, a transition occurred, initially to a medical model and subsequently to a social model of understanding disability. Since the ratification of the UNCRPD, a new shift is evident. While Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and NGOs have adopted a human rights framework, government laws and policies are being formulated under this approach. However, government program interventions and budgeting are still in the process of transitioning to this approach [1]. Once the UNCRPD became available for ratification in 2007, the Government of Bangladesh promptly ratified it, committing to implementing state measures in compliance

with its provisions by enacting the RPPDA 2013. The RPPDA defines disability in alignment with the UNCRPD:

The RPPDA defines persons with disabilities as “those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” [2].

This definition aligns with the broader understanding of disability as not just a medical condition but a combination of impairments as well as societal and environmental barriers affecting an individual’s ability to fully participate in society. Further, the RPPDA categorizes disabilities into physical, visual, hearing, speech, intellectual, multiple disabilities, among others. [3] Replacing the 2001 Disability Welfare Act, the RPPDA marked a shift from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based one for persons with disabilities. Enacted after strong advocacy from civil society and human rights activists, and reinforced by Bangladesh’s commitment to the UNCRPD, the RPPDA guarantees equality, access to education, employment, and protection from discrimination for persons with disabilities. It empowers them to live without barriers, supported by their representative organizations. The Ministry of Social Welfare oversees the implementation of the Act through five high-level committees, ensuring coordination and enforcement at national and local levels [5].

The statistics on the prevalence of disability have been widely debated, with various sources presenting conflicting figures. [6] The World Health Organization’s global estimate suggests that approximately 16% of the world’s population has some form of disability. [7]. In 2022, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted the 17th Household Income and Expenditure Survey, revealing significant insights into the prevalence of functional difficulties in the country. According to the survey, 5.71% of the national population experiences some form of functional difficulty, compared with 6.94% in 2016 and 9.01% in 2010, utilizing the Washington Group questions. This issue is slightly more common among females (5.92%) than males (5.50%). Furthermore, the survey highlighted a rural–urban divide: 6.05% of the population in rural areas experiences functional difficulties, compared with 4.96% in urban areas. These statistics provide essential data for policymakers and social services to address and support this segment of the population [8].

The National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021 found that 2.80% of the Bangladeshi population lives with disabilities, with a prevalence of 3.29% among males and 2.34% among females. Disability rates are higher in rural areas (2.92%) than in urban areas (2.45%). The prevalence is notably higher among those aged 65 and above, reaching 9.90%. Physical disability is the most common type, affecting 1.19% of the population, followed by visual disability (0.39%), multiple disabilities (0.26%), and hearing disability (0.19%). Males have higher prevalence rates for all disability types, with 1.49% having physical disabilities compared with 0.90% of females. Data also show that 18.47% of persons with disabilities use assistive devices, with a higher prevalence among males. Among those who do not use assistive devices, 24.42% cite cost as the primary barrier [9]. The 6th Population and Housing Census of 2022 reported that 2,361,604 people in Bangladesh (1.43%) have disabilities, with prevalence rates of 1.63% for males and 1.23% for females [10].

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AGED 15 AND ABOVE

Persons with disabilities	Male	Female	Total
Rural	1,331,000	1,170,000	2,501,000
Urban	481,000	397,000	878,000
Bangladesh	1,812,000	1,567,000	3,379,000

Source: Reproduced with permission from disability insights from the Labour Force Survey 2022, Table 1 [11].

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF THE DISABLED POPULATION AGED 15 AND ABOVE WITH OFFICIAL RECOGNITION (CERTIFICATE OR IDENTITY CARD CALLED SUBARNA NAGORIK), BY SEX (%)

Certificate/Subarna Nagorik Card	Total	Male	Female
Officially recognized as a percentage of the disabled working-age population			
Yes	27.2	31	22.9
No	72.8	69	77.1
Total	100	100	100

Source: Reproduced with permission from disability insights from the Labour Force Survey 2022, Table 16.5.1 [12].

The data extrapolated from the Labour Force Survey, as presented in the aforementioned tables, indicate that most persons with disabilities (72.8%) do not possess a national disability identification card (Subarna Nagorik). This card is essential for accessing government benefits, such as disability allowances [11–12].

In Bangladesh, persons with disabilities experience significant barriers to accessing services and employment due to a combination of tangible and intangible obstacles. These include a lack of awareness, stigma, discrimination, misconceptions, negative societal attitudes, and limited infrastructural accessibility. The prevailing perception that disability is a form of punishment for past misdeeds or a burden on society intensifies the isolation and emotional distress of persons with disabilities. In many cases, disability is regarded as a curse, bringing embarrassment to the individual as well as their family, thereby increasing the risk of social exclusion. As a result, individuals belonging to this group may experience strained relationships with family members, relatives, and the broader community. Even within their own households, parents and siblings may attempt to conceal a disabled family member's identity due to embarrassment and societal prejudice. Working-age individuals with disabilities experience disproportionately high unemployment rates compared with those without disabilities, with women being particularly disadvantaged. Limited job opportunities, inadequate workplace accommodations, and negative attitudes from employers and colleagues contribute to an unwelcoming work environment. Women with disabilities face additional barriers to socioeconomic participation, including exclusion from education and employment opportunities. They are also at a higher risk of violence and social isolation [13–14].

The lack of accessible infrastructure significantly affects the independence and quality of life of persons with disabilities, especially those with physical impairments. Inadequate facilities in public transportation, buildings, and workplaces, such as the absence of ramps, elevators, and accessible WASH facilities, restrict mobility and limit access to essential services. [15] Although Bangladesh has made progress in internet penetration and mobile technology, digital platforms often lack accessibility features such as screen readers and text-to-speech functionalities. This limits persons with disabilities from engaging in digital activities, including purchasing internet packages, using phone services, accessing educational materials, and pursuing employment opportunities. Moreover, these digital resources remain largely unaffordable and inaccessible due to limited access to devices and connectivity, a lack of digital skills, and a shortage of relevant, accessible digital content. However, recent observations indicate that government websites, banks, and other organizations have started implementing accessibility features on their digital platforms [16–17].

The government has undertaken various initiatives to address these barriers by formulating relevant laws, policies, and action plans within the framework of existing legal provisions. These efforts aim to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities and establish a foundation for affirmative measures to eliminate barriers. Key measures include raising awareness, combating stigma and discrimination, and improving physical and digital accessibility in the workplace. Additionally, the government introduced

a new national building code in 2020, ratified the Marrakesh Treaty, and adopted web accessibility guidelines to enhance physical, informational, and digital accessibility. Bangladesh is home to numerous NGOs that actively collaborate with the government to support national development. These NGOs play a crucial role in delivering essential services to meet various community needs. Beyond services provision, NGOs work closely with OPDs to ensure that services extend to the grassroots level and empower persons with disabilities to advocate for their rights. Furthermore, national and international NGOs are committed to strengthening the organizational capacity of OPDs. This effort is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of initiatives, enabling OPDs to continue their work independently and effectively over the long term. Through such collaborative efforts, the government and NGOs contribute significantly to fostering inclusivity and overall development in Bangladesh [18].

The private sector, particularly businesses operating in the formal economy, has increasingly shown interest in advancing disability inclusion in the workplace through various initiatives. The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network (BBDN), launched by the Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) with support from the ILO, is a coalition of representatives from business, NGOs, and OPDs. Working in partnership with development organizations, BBDN aims to create a more disability-inclusive workforce in Bangladesh. Its initiatives include awareness-raising, training, research, and advocacy. The network also assists persons with disabilities in securing decent employment by providing practical guidance to employers and institutions, facilitating knowledge exchange on best practices, and helping organizations build their disability confidence by promoting inclusive workplace policies. [19] While BBDN has primarily engaged with the government through advocacy initiatives, a significant recent development has marked its first formal collaboration with a government agency. The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Foundation, operating under the Ministry of Industries, has entered into a partnership agreement with BBDN. This collaboration aims to support the development of entrepreneurs with disabilities by holistically addressing the current challenges faced by them. Additionally, development partners have increasingly incorporated disability inclusion targets into the programs funded by them for skills development and employment. For instance, the ongoing ILO-led project "Building a Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) System in Bangladesh (ProGRESS)" aims to upskill persons with disabilities and support them in securing waged employment, self-employment, or entrepreneurship opportunities. As partners in the initiative, the SME Foundation and BBDN contribute to fostering cross-sectoral collaboration. Furthermore, recent infrastructure projects, such as the Metro Rail in Dhaka, have been designed to be fully accessible for persons with disabilities.

Policy Analysis

The Government of Bangladesh has introduced various laws to protect human rights, which are legally binding and carry consequences for noncompliance. Additionally, it has developed policies that serve as guiding principles for decision-making and practices. While these policies are not legally enforceable, they aim to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

Employment Status of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh

Many persons with disabilities remain excluded from national development efforts, particularly in the employment sector, due to negative societal attitudes and poverty-related challenges. Inclusive employment can promote economic independence and reduce poverty; however, the employment rate for persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of the general population. In Bangladesh, only 29% of persons with disabilities participate in the labor force, compared with the national average of 63%. Workplace inaccessibility, negative employer perceptions, and limited job opportunities contribute to this disparity [20].

To provide a clearer understanding of the current scenario, the following tables present key statistics from two government surveys.

TABLE 3

INSIGHTS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (2021)

Insights from the National Survey of Persons with Disabilities 2021	%
Employment rate of persons with disabilities	27.21
Employment rate of males with disabilities	40.39
Employment rate of females with disabilities	7.30
Employment rate in rural areas	28.19
Employment rate in urban areas	23.00
Self-employment rate of persons with disabilities	54.94
Self-employment in rural areas	56.15
Self-employment in urban areas	47.59
Self-employment of females with disabilities	63.01
Self-employment of males with disabilities	53.15
Households as employers of persons with disabilities	18.32
NGO/private organization as an employer of persons with disabilities	16.34
Others as employers of persons with disabilities	6.66

Notes: NGO, nongovernmental organization.

Source: Reproduced with permission from the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (2021) [20].

TABLE 4

EMPLOYED PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BY SECTORS (INFORMAL, FORMAL) AND SEX (IN %)

Status in employment	Male	Female	Total
Informal	84.26	96.87	87.19
Formal	15.74	3.13	12.81
Total	100	100	100

Source: Reproduced with permission from disability insights from the Labour Force Survey (2022), (Table 17) [21].

TABLE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYED PERSONS WITH DISABILITY BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND SEX (IN %)

Employment status	Male	Female	Total
Employee	34.99	21.76	31.92
Employer	4.15	1.33	3.49
Own account worker	55.19	52.47	54.56
Unpaid family worker	5.09	5.09	9.37
Others	0.58	0.58	0.66
Total	100	100	100

Source: Reproduced with permission from disability insights from the Labour Force Survey (2022), (DILFS Table 15) [21].

TABLE 6

EMPLOYED PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BY SECTOR (IN %)

Economic sector	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	47.94	66.09	52.16
Industry	12.59	6.33	11.13
Service	39.47	27.58	36.71
Total	100	100	100

Source: Reproduced with permission from Disability insights from the Labour Force Survey (2022), (DILFS Table 17) [22].

TABLE 7

LITERACY RATES AND TRAINING PROVIDED

Literacy and Training	Total
Literate	37.11
Illiterate	62
Training in agriculture crop production and preservation	20.87
Training in ready-made garments	19.9
Training provided by government institutes	51.85
Training provided by NGOs	20.12

Notes: NGO, nongovernmental organization

Source: Reproduced with permission from disability insights from the Labour Force Survey (2022) [21].

Survey data indicate that most people with disabilities in Bangladesh are self-employed, primarily in the informal sector, with a significant concentration in rural areas where agriculture is the dominant employment sector. Although training opportunities in the ready-made garment sector are nearly equivalent to those in agriculture, employment within the industrial sector accounts for only one-fourth of that in agriculture. The average monthly income of a person with a disability is BDT10,470 (USD110), with males earning more than females, whereas persons without disabilities earn an average of BDT13,669 (USD124) [21–22].

In Bangladesh, policy challenges related to skills and employment are complex and deeply intertwined with socioeconomic factors. The national frameworks and implementation mechanisms addressing these issues are outlined below:

The Rights and Protection for Persons with Disabilities Act (2013) defines various categories of disabilities, outlines the general and specific rights for persons with disabilities, and establishes protective measures to safeguard their well-being. It also delineates the roles and responsibilities of government authorities in implementing the law and includes penal provisions for violations. At its core, this law recognizes equality between persons with and without disabilities concerning fundamental rights, ensuring non-discrimination in access to livelihood opportunities, education, healthcare, communications, and mobility. Furthermore, it classifies discrimination as an offense, subject to formal complaints, investigations, and compensations [23].

The Neurodevelopmental Disability Protection Trust Act (2013) was enacted to support the specific needs and protect the rights of persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities, which are categorized into four types. Under this law, a special trust has been established to provide financial assistance and microfinance schemes, aimed at creating opportunities for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities as well as their families [24].

The National Skills Development Policy: The National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) of Bangladesh, first established in 2011 and revised in 2020, prioritizes disability inclusion in skills development. The policy recognizes individuals with disabilities as eligible for programs and recommends setting an admission target of 5% for learners with disabilities at all TVET institutes. Additionally, it calls for the provision of stipends, hostel facilities, and transport, alongside ensuring reasonable accommodation and accessibility in training institutes [25]. Despite these provisions, skills development programs often fail to address the specific needs of people with disabilities, and trainers are not adequately prepared to teach or communicate effectively with them. Moreover, financial barriers, such as the cost of assistive devices and transportation, remain largely unaddressed [26].

National Employment Policy (2022): Under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the National Employment Policy (2022) seeks to reduce unemployment and poverty by creating job opportunities for an increasing number of young job seekers while enhancing workforce skills. It emphasizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in formal and informal workplaces, recommending infrastructure modifications, assistive devices, and flexible work options to encourage their participation [27]. However, the policy lacks clarity regarding the institutional framework for implementing disability inclusion. It does not specify the government stakeholders or ministries responsible for its execution, leading to ambiguity and limited accountability. Additionally, it fails to address the need for comprehensive data on persons with disabilities in the labor market, underscoring the importance of a national database to better understand their needs and develop targeted programs [28].

National Jobs Strategy (2019): The National Jobs Strategy (2019), under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, outlines the country's employment objectives from 2021 to 2030. It sets forth aims, policies, and programs to achieve these goals, while also suggesting coordination mechanisms and progress-tracking methods. However, the strategy does not explicitly address the needs or inclusion of persons with disabilities [29].

The SME Policy (2019), drafted by the Ministry of Industries, aims to strengthen the SME sector by enhancing efficiency, improving the business environment, promoting easy access to finance, expanding marketing opportunities, and creating employment. This policy identified 11 strategic goals, each supported by a time-bound action plan for implementation. Despite these efforts, the SME Policy does not explicitly mention entrepreneurs or persons with disabilities. Additionally, while it focuses on simplifying business procedures, making startup processes more accessible, and enhancing business support services, it lacks specific provisions to support persons with disabilities in entrepreneurship [30].

Legal and Policy Framework Related to Accessibility

The RPPD Act (2013) defines “accessibility” in line with Article 9 of the UNCRPD. It addresses the physical accessibility of all public and private premises, the right to use public transportation without restrictions, as well as access to opportunities, services, information, data, technology, and all forms of communication. Regarding public transportation accessibility, the Act mandates that transportation owners, authorities, drivers, and conductors reserve 5% of seats on boats, airplanes, and land transportation for persons with disabilities [31].

The Bangladesh National Building Code (2020) establishes accessibility standards for all buildings in Bangladesh; however, enforcement remains inconsistent and is often lacking. The Road Transport Act (2018) includes specific provisions for persons with disabilities, such as accessibility requirements in public transport, reserved seating, the issuance of driving licenses for persons with physical disabilities, and their inclusion in committees responsible for monitoring transportation services [32].

The Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006, under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, sets out legal provisions that govern the rights of workers and employers. Under section 22, an employer may discharge a worker due to physical or mental incapacity or prolonged ill health, provided that the condition is certified by a registered medical practitioner. This clause has been introduced to allow employers to dismiss workers deemed “unfit for work.” However, it should be noted that such incapacity or ill health must result from external factors and not workplace accidents or occupational injuries [24]. Additionally, under the BLA (2006), a worker who acquires a disability as a result of workplace-related

causes does not have a legal right to alternative employment. This provision conflicts with the rights established by the RPPD Act (2013), which mandates protections for persons with disabilities. However, The BLA (2006) does not specify circumstances under which employers are required to provide compensation to injured workers or, in the case of a worker's death, to their dependents [34].

The Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021–25): The Five-Year Plan (FYP) highlights opportunities for disability inclusion by proposing measures such as enhancing the National Coordination Committee for persons with disabilities to oversee activities across ministries, reforming disability benefits through a lifecycle approach, and enhancing teacher training and vocational education programs. Additionally, the plan emphasizes the importance of small business initiatives and elimination of labor market discrimination to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The FYP also encourages collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the private sector to expand educational institutions and enhance teacher training programs focused on disability inclusion [35].

Analysis of National Action and Initial State Report to the UNCRPD Committee

The Ministry of Social Welfare developed the NAP to promote disability-inclusive policies across government ministries and agencies, in accordance with the 2013 RPPDA and its 2015 Rules. The NAP designates specific government bodies as responsible for implementing the provisions of the RPPDA and outlines key actions to be taken. In the area of employment, employer associations and chambers of commerce are tasked with supporting the government, including through a proposed recruitment quota system for the public and private sectors. However, the implementation of public sector quotas has been inconsistent, and no legal quota mandates exist for the private sector. Furthermore, the NAP addresses education and skills development, aiming to improve access to general and vocational education for persons with disabilities [36].

In line with the NAP, the government has set a target to establish rehabilitation centers in all sub-districts by 2025 and in all districts through the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation. These centers aim to ensure widespread access to rehabilitation services, including therapy, provision of assistive devices, awareness campaigns, and accessibility improvements in the upazila (sub-district) health complexes and community clinics.

Entrepreneurship development is another key agenda of the NAP. It aims to address limited access to finance, raise awareness, and enhance the ability of persons with disabilities to start or expand their businesses. Although the SME Policy does not explicitly mention entrepreneurs with disabilities, the NAP prioritizes increasing business support services, ensuring loan accessibility, and enhancing competitive capacity through an accessible training curriculum. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of recognizing successful entrepreneurs to inspire others and raise public awareness. To facilitate these initiatives, the government acknowledges the need for the active involvement of representative OPDs.

Moreover, collaboration between the government and NGOs has led to the expansion of vocational training, job placement programs, and support services, all of which promote entrepreneurship and technical education. Furthermore, the National Disability Development Foundation has built hostels to provide temporary living arrangements for persons with disabilities who are employed, offering free accommodation and subsidized food.

Industry-specific initiatives, particularly in the ready-made garments sector, have further enhanced employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. For example the “Marks & Start” program, a demand driven skills development and employment generation initiative, has been successfully operating since 2006. This program serves as a collaborative effort between the UK based retailer Marks & Spencers, its local sourcing factories, and the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), a disability focused NGO. Similarly, IT-focused training offered by the Bangladesh Computer Council has provided additional employment pathways. Moreover, job fairs exclusively for persons with disabilities are being organized by various organizations, including the Bangladesh Computer Council, BBDN, and the National Disability Development Foundation [37].

Situational Analysis

Bangladesh submitted its State report on the implementation status of the UNCRPD in April 2017, despite the original deadline of May 2010. On behalf of the UNCRPD Platform-Bangladesh, an alternative report was submitted to the CRPD Committee in February 2019. The UNCRPD Platform-Bangladesh ensured the representation of all groups of persons with disabilities. As a result, voices from diverse, excluded, and underrepresented groups were captured through thematic groups.

Participation of Representative Organizations of Persons with Disabilities in Policy Formulation and Decision-making

While the representation of persons with disabilities in government committees has increased, their participation remains neither meaningful nor active, as reflected in meeting minutes. Despite efforts by the government and NGOs to enhance education, skills, cultural engagement, and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, they are still largely excluded from decision-making processes. Although the state asserts that policies and frameworks for persons with disabilities are formulated in consultation with them, no specific mechanism exists for these consultations, and civil society organizations have limited avenues through which they can voice concerns.

A significant gap remains in ensuring regular consultations involving persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. The implementation of the NAP has been slow and it lacks an independent monitoring committee. Moreover, the RPPDA does not recognize disabilities related to leprosy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, kidney disease, and other conditions, and there is a lack of documentation regarding its use and impact. Although efforts to harmonize laws with the UNCRPD are ongoing, implementation remains weak. To ensure meaningful participation in the law and policy-making processes related to skills and employment, mandatory consultation with OPD should be instituted. This should include involving OPD representatives in committees such as the Neuro Development Disability Trust, particularly in legislative reforms. Additionally, a committee comprising OPDs, community-based organizations, and government organizations should be established to oversee the implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of the NAP as well as submit annual progress reports on its implementation.

Awareness-raising

The government's awareness-raising initiatives, such as the observance of key days, art and cultural competitions, and employment fairs, suffer from limited publicity and are often inaccessible to persons with disabilities. These events were primarily held in urban areas, excluding those in rural regions. As a result, employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remain significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Much work remains to be done to raise general awareness among employers and TVET institutions regarding disability inclusion. Significant efforts are needed to highlight existing programs through print media, billboards, electronic platforms, digital media, and other means. While disability is not addressed in textbooks, the government has taken the initiative to incorporate universal design principles into the curriculum for architectural students. In Bangladesh, electronic, print, and social media often publish content that is discriminatory and humiliating for persons with disabilities despite the RPPDA criminalizing such acts. Additionally, there is no government-driven initiative to encourage private sector contribution to disability-related programs as part of corporate social responsibility. Nevertheless, some employers are undertaking disability-inclusive initiatives independently or in collaboration with NGOs.

One respondent noted, “Attitudinal barriers are the first obstacles to the employment of persons with disabilities. A deeply-rooted belief among employers is that persons with disabilities will not be able to work as effectively as those without disabilities, including concerns about their ability to arrive at work on time.”

Additionally, legal information is not being disseminated in accessible formats, and no designated agency is responsible for overseeing this issue or taking legal actions accordingly. Due to the lack of awareness initiatives and non-functionality of district committees, no employee or job seeker has filed complaints regarding discrimination with these committees to date. Notably, no legal provision exists to protect employees with disabilities from harassment in the workplace.

Accessibility

The government allocated funds in the national budget to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, the use of these funds remains unclear due to a lack of reporting. International NGOs (INGO) have collaborated with city corporations to build accessible public toilets in Dhaka and other major cities. Despite this, progress in the transport sector remains slow, with no clear guidelines for making public transport accessible. Although three seats are reserved and half-price tickets are offered for persons with disabilities, these measures are insufficient. One key informant interview respondent noted, “Lack of accessibility and reasonable accommodation remains a significant barrier to securing a job.”

An increasing number of OPDs and persons with disabilities are using Right to Information applications to seek information. However, responses are often not provided in accessible formats. Most government websites and documents do not comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 or 2.2, and many are not written in Unicode, which hinders access for persons with visual impairments. Additionally, laws and policies are also not available in accessible formats. The longstanding demand for the establishment of an institution for Bangla Sign Language remains unmet, and TVET lacks adequate exposure to sign language to effectively integrate it into their operations. The Bangladesh National Building Code has clear directives for making buildings, including TVET institutes, accessible for persons with disabilities. However, implementation has been very slow. Women with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing vocational training and employment due to social and cultural factors. In particular, after marriage, women are expected to take on traditional roles, resulting in an increased burden of caregiving responsibilities and additional household work, compared with men. For unmarried women with disabilities, overprotective family members often restrict their ability to commute and participate in upskilling and employment opportunities, particularly those beyond close proximity to their homes [33].

Work and Employment

Employees with disabilities often experience bullying, harassment, and inappropriate behavior in the workplace. They are often paid less, especially in manual or field-based roles. Most factories and offices in the private sector are not designed to accommodate persons with different types of disabilities. Moreover, workers who acquire disabilities due to workplace injuries rarely receive rehabilitation or training suited to their needs. Furthermore, compensation under the Labour Act (2006) for workplace injuries is insufficient to cover actual medical expenses or dependent care costs.

In 2018, the government abolished the quota system for persons with disabilities in first- and second-class public service positions through a gazette notification. However, this was recently reinstated at 1% for persons with disabilities and individuals with a third-gender identity. While certain government agencies have started recruiting persons with disabilities, these efforts fall short of expectations. Hiring practices predominantly focus on persons with physical disabilities, although partially sighted individuals are, to some extent, gaining access the labor market. No database currently exists to track the proportion of persons with disabilities employed in public and private sectors.

The Finance Act (2020) introduced a tax rebate for organizations employing persons with disabilities and imposed a 5% additional tax on educational institutions and service-providing NGOs that fail to ensure accessibility. Employers are eligible for a 5% rebate on their total payable tax if their workforce comprises at least 10% of employees with disabilities. Alternatively, if they employ at least 25 persons with disabilities, 75% of the total salaries paid to those employees can be claimed as a tax rebate. Of the two aforementioned tax rebates, the lower of the two calculations will be provided to the employer. Despite these provisions, no information is available regarding the implementation of these penalty measures in Bangladesh.

Government and non-government vocational and technical education training institutions consistently fail to meet enrollment targets for learners with disabilities. Most TVET institutes remain inaccessible to persons with various disabilities, including women. Additionally, several skills training course curricula are outdated and fail to address current technological and accessibility needs.

Individuals with leprosy and those from marginalized communities, such as Dalits, experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, with the situation being particularly severe for minority women with disabilities. These individuals encounter significant barriers to accessing education, vocational skills, employment, and justice. They are often denied employment due to the stigma associated with their disabilities, such as leprosy. Furthermore, persons with disabilities from Dalit communities have historically been restricted to certain occupations that offer low wages and pose serious health risks. Dalits who acquire disabilities through their work face further discrimination in the labor market, resulting in extreme financial insecurity. This, in turn, contributes to their treatment as a “burden” within their families and communities.

The national budget for 2024–25 has increased allowances for persons with disabilities, expanding the number of beneficiaries from 2,900,000 to 3,234,000. Notably, the allocation for the National Academy for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities has seen a significant increase. The total allocation for the disability sector amounts to BDT3,321.43 crore (USD282,587,000), constituting only 2.80% of the social security budget and 0.48% of the total budget. Additionally, the education stipend for students with disabilities remains unchanged for 100,000 beneficiaries, while the monthly allowance for persons with disabilities remains at BDT850 (USD7.23), which is insufficient given the current cost of living and inflation. The government is implementing measures in the 2024–25 budget to enhance mental and physical health services, education, and sports opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, corruption remains a significant barrier, preventing them from accessing these government allowances. Beneficiaries reportedly have to pay between BDT1,000 (USD8.50) and BDT3,000 (USD25.50) to be enlisted in the government’s disability allowance scheme and receive the “Subarna Card” for disability identification. Government hospital staff, local MPs, and officials engage in extortion and favoritism, sometimes securing benefits for persons without disabilities. Political influence and local government corruption further undermine the process of obtaining disability benefits.

Entrepreneurship remains challenging for persons with disabilities as banks, especially those run by the state, often refuse to open accounts for persons with visual disabilities. Additionally, although persons with disabilities are eligible to receive loans of BDT500,000 (USD4,259) from the SME Foundation to start small businesses, such loans are rarely granted. Grants from the National Foundation for Disability Development to organizations supporting persons with disabilities are insufficient and irregular. Furthermore, loans provided by the Directorate of Social Services are inadequate to be meaningful for startup ventures [38–44]. The Government of Bangladesh established the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) to reduce poverty through training and financial support, including employment generation initiatives for persons with disabilities. In collaboration with local partners, PKSf has launched programs aimed at sustainable development for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, Dalits, ethnic minorities, third-gender individuals, and extremely poor communities in the Haor and Char regions. For persons with disabilities, PKSf offers interest-free seasonal, small, and business loans, with a minimal 5% service charge. Additionally, various need-based training programs help enhance their skills, and organizations such as Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) assist in connecting them with local markets to sell their products. Moreover, Agrani Bank, a state-owned financial institution, has introduced a loan facility aimed at promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship among persons with disabilities. This initiative encourages participation in cottage or micro-scale agricultural enterprises, initially offering loans of BDT25,000 (USD205), with the potential to double the amount based on successful business performance. Besides credit services, microfinance institutions in Bangladesh also offer non-credit services, such as savings, insurance, training, and financial literacy programs. However, many persons with physical disabilities continue to face challenges in accessing them [45–46]. Furthermore, due to limited knowledge of the internet and digital marketing, persons with disabilities have minimal presence on online platforms, restricting their access to the digital market [47].

Additionally, Bangladesh’s susceptibility to climate change threatens labor productivity, increasing occupational health risks, reducing efficiency, and resulting in job losses. In coastal agricultural communities, frequent climate disasters damage crops, disrupt employment, and negatively impact the livelihoods of many, including persons with disabilities. This exacerbates poverty and worsens living conditions [48–50]. Interviews revealed that natural disasters pose a significant risk to the employment of persons with disabilities, often leading to job loss. Small business owners are particularly vulnerable, as

they may be unable to operate during a disaster. Additionally, after a calamity, persons with disabilities often require additional time to resume work compared with those without disabilities. One respondent noted, “The issues of women with disabilities should be given separate consideration during natural calamities in Bangladesh, as they are more vulnerable in such situations compared to men with disabilities.”

Currently, all disability-related development issues fall under the Ministry of Social Welfare. As a result, other ministries, such as the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Communication, Ministry of ICT, and Ministry of Information, do not consider disability as a cross-cutting development issue in their respective annual development programs. Moreover, these ministries lack designated focal points for disability-related initiatives. Many public servants remain uninformed and untrained on disability and development. One respondent stated, “The National Action Plan of the Ministry of Social Welfare exists only on paper, with no allocated budget at the field level and no monitoring system to track the implementation.” Consequently, a lack of awareness, indifferent attitudes, and negative mindsets continue to hinder the development of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh [51].

Policy Implications and Recommendations

When this report was being drafted, an interim government was in power following a sudden regime change in August 2024. As such, the relevant issues outlined below may be addressed in due course with necessary adjustments to timelines, depending on how the scenario evolves following the next elections, which will be organized by the interim government.

Short- to Mid-Term:

1. The NAP (2018) clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government actors in implementing the RPPDA 2013. Therefore, it is imperative that the National Coordination Committee and National Executive Committee, which are ultimately responsible for achieving the NAP, conduct regular meetings to monitor progress. Furthermore, the NAP clearly outlines the present status, action steps, and time frame for completing the identified actions. While timelines may be adjusted owing to the delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NAP noted that the expected progress had not been made at the time of its drafting. Thus, while new policies may need to be introduced, the key challenge lies in effectively implementing the commitments already established in the NAP (CRPD Article 33).
2. Ensuring sufficient budgetary allocations across relevant departments and ministries is essential for undertaking initiatives that promote disability inclusion. For instance, although government TVET institutions are required to maintain a target of 5% enrollment rate for persons with disabilities, as stipulated in the Skills Development Policy, annual budgetary allocations remain insufficient to achieve this target sustainably and effectively. The responsible departments within each ministry, as identified in the NAP, must formally request budget allocations from the Ministry of Finance through established official channels (CRPD Article 24).
3. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) should establish an Inclusive Employment Task Force and appoint a Disability Focal Point to lead and monitor the integration of disability inclusion into employment policies. This Task Force could include key ministry representatives (e.g., social welfare, labor, and education), in addition to non-government actors such as the BEF, BBDN (a non-profit trust of BEF), development partners including the ILO (as MOLE, BEF, and worker’s representatives are official constituents of the ILO in Bangladesh), OPD representatives, and disability-focused NGOs (CRPD Article 33).
4. All relevant ministries, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare and other non-government stakeholders, must implement measures to address attitudinal, infrastructural, transportation, communications, informational, and procedural barriers in workplaces, educational institutions, financial institutions, service providers, and other relevant sectors. (CRPD Article 09).

5. The current government quota for public sector jobs, which reserves 1% of jobs for persons with disabilities and people of a third gender, requires close monitoring to ensure that persons with disabilities have an effective pathway to secure jobs under the quota system (CRPD Article 27).
6. While some employers' associations and chambers of commerce are identified as associate authorities in the implementation of "quality employment for persons with disabilities" in the NAP, many of these stakeholders are unaware of the NAP and their role within it. In addition to national-level committees, a multistakeholder approach could be adopted at the district, upazila, and town levels. The BBDN is well-positioned to serve as a coordinating and representative body on behalf of employers' associations and chambers of commerce within these committees. Additionally, the Ministry of Industries is identified as the principal authority responsible for implementing "quality employment for persons with disabilities." Given that this research report is commissioned by Asian Productivity Organization, with whom the NPO Bangladesh under the Ministry of Industries collaborates closely, it is recommended that NPO Bangladesh actively mobilize the Ministry of Industries to undertake the necessary actions outlined in the NAP. A potential first step could be the appointment of a disability focal person within the Ministry of Industries. Furthermore, the SME Foundation, which also operates under the Ministry of Industries, recently executed a partnership agreement with BBDN to provide holistic entrepreneurship development support, including access to finance for persons with disabilities, as stipulated in the NAP. A public-private partnership approach should be considered for all employment-related initiatives within the NAP, given the private sector's increasing involvement in disability inclusion initiatives (CRPD Article 27).

Long Term

7. An independent unit may be established under the Law Commission of Bangladesh to evaluate and effectively align all existing laws, policies, strategies, and action plans with the RPPDA 2013, especially those related to responsible government bodies identified in the NAP (CRPD Article 12).
8. The National Employment Policy 2022 lacks specificity regarding the institutional framework for implementing directives pertaining to disability inclusion. It remains unclear which government stakeholders or ministries are responsible for ensuring disability inclusion and how these measures will be monitored and evaluated. This ambiguity limits accountability, as no single organization is designated to spearhead the process. To ensure effective implementation and measure progress in promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, clear mechanisms must be established. Additionally, a database should be created to collect comprehensive information, including personal, social, educational, and skills-related details, to better understand the needs of persons with disabilities and design targeted programs and initiatives accordingly (CRPD Article 31).
9. It is recommended that the RPPD Act (2013) explicitly include persons with leprosy-related disabilities as one of the recognized disability types under the legislation (CRPD Article 5).
10. The Bangladesh Labour Act (2006), particularly section 22(1), should be amended to ensure consistency with the RPPD Act (2013). This amendment should mandate reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities during exams, recruitment, and all stages of employment, including the development of inclusive questionnaires that address the needs of persons with disabilities (CRPD Article 27).

Concluding Remarks

The ratification of the UNCRPD by Bangladesh, along with the enactment of the RPPDA and the Neurodevelopmental Disability Trust Act (2013), marked significant milestones for the disability movement in the country. Historically, disability in Bangladesh has been approached through charity-based and medical models; however, recent legislative efforts indicate a shift toward a rights-based approach. The RPPDA exemplifies this transition, as it largely aligns with the UNCRPD, demonstrating Bangladesh's commitment to international obligations, despite certain deviations. The NAP, developed in accordance with the RPPDA, aimed to systematically address key provisions in the Act. Additionally,

other laws and policies, such as the Bangladesh Labour Act and the NSDP, incorporate disability-related provisions. However, disability inclusion has yet to be fully operationalized to ensure the meaningful and large-scale participation of persons with disabilities in fields of education, skills development, and employment. A major challenge in achieving greater disability inclusion lies in addressing the gaps in laws and policies, while also ensuring sustained political will for implementing existing commitments. This requires increased budgetary allocation to relevant ministries and departments, stronger inter-ministerial coordination, and enhanced engagement with civil society and the private sector. If the NAP were progressively implemented through effective stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and collaboration, it could lead to significant improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities.

The key labor force dynamics for persons with disabilities provide a clear indication of the current situation. In summary, persons with disabilities are mostly self-employed, predominantly in the informal sector, with a greater presence in rural areas than in urban areas. Moreover, agriculture remains the largest economic sector for employment. Training is largely provided by the government and NGOs, and more men with disabilities are employed compared to women with disabilities. The government has taken significant steps to enhance the skills development and employment prospects of persons with disabilities. For instance, the Bangladesh Computer Council, under the ICT Ministry, provides upskilling opportunities and job placements. Similarly, the National Disability Development Foundation organizes training sessions, supports self-employment, and hosts national-level job fairs to facilitate employment. Additionally, several national NGOs run skills development, employment, and livelihood programs tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities. Some of these programs have established connections with employers and the corporate sector; however, a broader collaboration with employers is necessary to ensure that these initiatives are more market-driven. Employers are increasingly willing to offer opportunities to persons with disabilities, provided they have adequate skills or qualifications and can retain their positions with necessary workplace adjustments. Enabling factors such as accessible housing and transportation further play a crucial role in sustaining employment. For instance, the ready-made garments sector, the largest formal employer and primary export sector in Bangladesh, has demonstrated notable progress in disability inclusion. This inclusivity is partly influenced by the sector's integration into the global supply chain and the expectations set by internal brands. OPDs' advocate for expanding formal sector employment across diverse industries and addressing different types and severity of disabilities. While best practices and effective models exist locally, they have yet to be meaningfully scaled up. Greater public-private partnerships could facilitate this expansion, as most enablers for scaling up are tied to government involvement, which can be supported by key stakeholders.

Recent developments in this regard are encouraging. For instance, BRAC Bank, a leading financial institution, has launched its flagship corporate social responsibility campaign, "Aporajeyo Ami" (Invincible Me). In collaboration with partners such as BBDN, the bank has committed to several initiatives aimed at fostering greater disability inclusion. These include (i) skills development and employment opportunities, waged and self-employed, for persons with disabilities, (ii) building internal capacity for disability inclusion across its operations, and (iii) undertaking advocacy initiatives to positively influence the banking sector and the wider business community. Similarly, the SME Foundation, under the Ministry of Industries, has pledged to support the development of entrepreneurs with disabilities through tailored holistic solutions in collaboration with the ILO, BBDN, and other key stakeholders. If more institutions from the public and private sectors champion disability inclusion, significant progress can be achieved.

Beyond government interventions, development partners are also funding skills development programs that increasingly incorporate disability inclusion targets. However, not all such programs are adequately designed to ensure sustainable inclusion due to a lack of technical expertise and sufficient budgetary allocation. Many of these initiatives collaborate with the government and private sector TVET institutions. While concerted efforts could be made during project periods to promote disability inclusion, these efforts often do not extend beyond the project timeframe. This is primarily because disability inclusion is rarely embedded into the annual operating plans and budgets of mainstream TVET institutions. Furthermore, when trained duty bearers leave their institutions, the knowledge and capacity

for disability inclusion are often lost. Therefore, it is imperative to implement regular capacity-building programs for TVET institutions and establish budgeted partnerships with local OPDs and other key stakeholders to sustain inclusion initiatives. Furthermore, recent policy shifts by major development partners, such as USAID, to reduce development sector funding may negatively impact the availability of global resources for disability inclusion initiatives. In this context, there is an urgent need to mobilize greater support from local, private, and public sectors, alongside the development of innovative funding mechanisms and partnership models.

Overcoming these challenges demands a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy that involves raising awareness, shifting societal attitudes toward disability, and implementing effective legal frameworks and policies that promote equal employment opportunities. Collaboration among key stakeholders, including the government, employers, civil society organizations, development partners, and disability rights advocates, is essential to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where persons with disabilities can thrive in the workforce. Duty bearers within the government often lack the necessary technical expertise, whereas NGOs, CSOs, and OPDs possess this technical knowledge but lack the influence and financial resources to make significant progress.

Disability must be recognized as a key development agenda, reflected in statistics, plans, budgets, and reports. The lack of reliable and comparable disability-disaggregated data hinders effective planning and progress monitoring. This data gap further affects the evaluation of the NAP and the Eighth Five-Year Plan. Furthermore, Section 31(6) of the RPPD states that without an identification card issued under this section, persons with disabilities cannot access their rights and entitlements. The complex identification and registration process, managed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health, and BBS, remains a major barrier for people with disabilities. To overcome the existing knowledge gap on disability and its impact on social and economic development, more evidence-based research is essential. This research focused on the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their specific needs, particularly in the employment context. Additionally, further studies on the effectiveness of current policies and programs are crucial. These studies would aid policymakers in determining whether to expand, revise, or discontinue existing policies and in developing new ones aligned with the 2030 Agenda for persons with disabilities.

The recommendations from this study aim to improve the employment prospects of persons with disabilities by fostering greater inclusion and participation in the workforce in Bangladesh. Enhancing employment opportunities involves creating more jobs or entrepreneurship opportunities as well as ensuring that workplaces and financial services are inclusive and accessible, with policies supporting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, implementing these recommendations requires considerable investment at a time when the Bangladesh economy is facing significant challenges. Consequently, securing adequate public and political support is crucial, alongside establishing innovative partnerships with the private sector, development partners, and other key stakeholders to mobilize the necessary resources. These efforts are essential to ensuring that reforms are carried out effectively and sustainably, ultimately creating a truly disability-inclusive workforce in Bangladesh.

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A CASE STUDY OF CAMBODIA

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Executive Summary

Cambodia experienced significant economic growth prior to the global outbreak of COVID-19. In the postpandemic era, the country's economy has rebounded significantly, with positive annual growth rates since 2021. As part of its recovery efforts and resilience-building strategy, the government has prioritized human capital development as a key driver of national progress, including the involvement of persons with disabilities. However, several persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination and stigma, limiting their access to education, healthcare, information, and job opportunities. This chapter examines the current situation of this group in Cambodia, with a particular focus on their employment rights.

This study is based on a desk review of existing literature, reports, and news articles, supplemented by key informant interviews to enhance understanding of disability-related statistics, issues, and ongoing support programs. The chapter provides a policy and situational analysis of productivity and employment for persons with disabilities, covering aspects such as education and training, job matching, and employment opportunities. The desk review and key informant interviews yield the following key findings.

Statistics on the prevalence of disabilities among the Cambodian population vary across censuses and surveys. However, the latest Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (2014 and 2022) has been used to analyze the situation of persons with disabilities. The 2014 survey reported a prevalence rate of nearly 10%, while the 2022 survey indicated a significantly higher rate of up to 24%. A comparison of these surveys reveals that persons with disabilities lag behind their counterparts without disabilities across all dimensions, including access to education, livelihoods, health, and employment. As of the end of 2023, it has been reported that 75,535 persons with disabilities were employed in public and private institutions.

As in several other parts of the world, persons with disabilities in Cambodia continue to face discrimination and stigma, often lagging behind persons without a disability. Misperceptions regarding their capabilities persist among parents, relatives, employers, and broader society, leading to them being excluded from education and employment opportunities. To provide them with fair livelihood opportunities, the government, in collaboration with development partners and NGOs, has developed various intervention programs. For example, the National Institute for Special Education was established to train teachers in inclusive education and provide vocational training opportunities, especially for persons with disabilities from low-income families. Additionally, disability identification initiatives have been introduced to facilitate access to social benefits. Cambodia has also ratified international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Rights Real” for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. Furthermore, the country has enacted national laws, regulations, policies, and strategic plans at the national and ministerial levels to support disability inclusion.

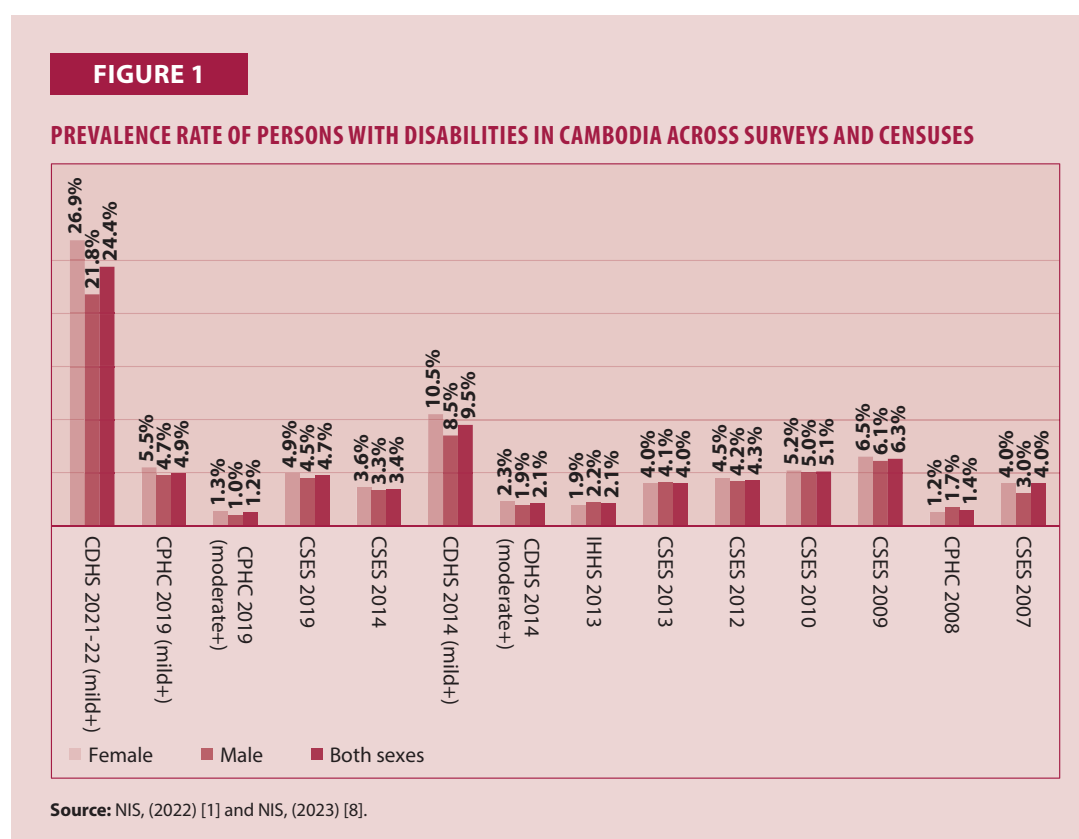
To promote inclusive employment for persons with disabilities, the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009) mandates that private institutions with over 100 employees and public institutions with over 50 employees recruit at least 1% and 2% of employees with disabilities, respectively. Subsequent sub-decrees and prakas have outlined provisions for reasonable accommodation, penalties for noncompliance, and definitions of disability. However, enforcement remains incomplete due to a lack of awareness among employers regarding laws related to the employment of persons with disabilities and the provision of appropriate accommodations, nonbinding

penalties, unclear job matching mechanism between employers and employees with disabilities, as well as education and skills of persons with disabilities across different types and levels of disabilities. Moreover, the shortage of human and financial resources has hindered the effective monitoring and enforcement of compliance among employers. However, responsible government bodies, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSYV), and the Disability Action Council (DAC) have intensified efforts to mobilize resources, enhance disability identification processes, register employers, and provide incentives to encourage compliance.

Contextual Background

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia experienced a positive economic recovery marked by a decline in inflation, resumption of trade, and the formation of a new government in 2023. The government's development strategy prioritizes human capital development, which extends beyond the general population to include persons with disabilities. Recognizing this group's potential to contribute to the labor force when provided with meaningful employment opportunities, education, and training, the government has committed to fostering an inclusive environment. According to the General Population Census of 2019, the proportion of the working-age population (15–64 years old) increased, particularly among individuals aged 30–39, compared with that of 2008. This demographic shift highlights Cambodia's potential for economic growth, given its substantial working-age population. Ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, is essential to achieving sustainable and equitable development. Acknowledging this importance, the government has intensified efforts to promote inclusivity for persons with disabilities with respect to various aspects, including their rights, education and training access, healthcare services, information dissemination, and employment opportunities.

Data on persons with disabilities in Cambodia are primarily obtained from surveys and censuses conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). However, prevalence rates vary across these data sources, likely due to differences in data collection methods, enumerators, and how respondents with disabilities answer survey questions. The 2019 General Population Census of Cambodia (GPCC) estimated that only 4.9% of the population had disabilities, whereas the 2014 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS)



reported a significantly higher prevalence (10%), suggesting a potential underestimation in the GPCC data [1]. The most recent CDHS (2021–22) revealed a significantly higher prevalence rate of persons with disabilities (up to 24.4%), particularly among females (26.9%) compared with males (21.8%).

Persons with disabilities in Cambodia, as well as in other parts of the world, experience discrimination and are subjected to stereotypes and prejudice. In Cambodia, persons with disabilities may be referred to by their disability types or mocked by relatives, friends, and neighbors [2], even though such actions may sometimes be unintentional. Certain children with disabilities have experienced discrimination within their households, with parents preventing them from participating in society [3] due to the belief that they are incapable of attending school or securing employment in the future [4]. Cultural perception further contributes to the marginalization of persons with disabilities. In Cambodia, disabilities are often attributed to karma from past misdeeds, leading to the belief that individuals are born with physical or mental impairments as a form of retribution [4, 5]. As a result, persons with disabilities frequently experience poverty. Moreover, working-age persons with disabilities, especially women, often have fewer opportunities to participate in the workforce and society, despite their ability to perform certain tasks [4]. This societal perception limits their employment prospects [6], reinforcing a circle of exclusion, especially when their rights are not widely recognized or enforced.

Providing care for persons with disabilities remains a significant challenge, especially for low-income households, where families often incur higher expenses for healthcare, transportation, rehabilitation, and other essential services. Additionally, caregivers may lose income-earning opportunities to support households with persons with disabilities [7]. Research suggests that households with persons with disabilities tend to experience a lower standard of living compared with households without persons with disabilities. An ACCESS study estimated that, for two households with the same level of daily income, a household with persons with disabilities would require an additional 18.6%, approximately USD3.5 per day, to attain the same standard of living as a household without persons with disabilities [3, 7].

Persons with disabilities face multiple barriers to accessing healthcare, education, information, social services, and employment. According to a further analysis report by the NIS, persons with disabilities are more likely to hail from low-income households, limiting their opportunities to pursue higher education [8]. Furthermore, they tend to be susceptible to health-related issues, and accessing healthcare services remains a significant challenge for them. Individuals belonging to this group, particularly women, are also at a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence [9]. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated challenges for them, including an increased risk of experiencing violence and income loss [9, 10].

Since 2009, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has implemented its first law dedicated to persons with disabilities: the Law of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This law defines persons with disabilities as: “Any persons who lack, lose, or damage any physical or mental functions, which result in a disturbance to their daily life or activities, such as physical, visual, hearing, intellectual impairments, mental disorders and any other types of disabilities toward the insurmountable end of the scale” [11]. The law aims to safeguard the rights, freedoms, and interests of persons with disabilities, prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination against them, and ensure access to essential rehabilitation services, enabling them to become productive members of society [11].

Cambodia has frequently ratified and adopted international conventions while issuing sub-decrees, prakas, and national and ministry-level strategic plans to support the Law of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2012, Cambodia ratified the United Nations CRPD, committing to the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. The DAC was established under the 2009 law to play a key role in developing national strategic and action plans on disabilities, overseeing the implementation of related laws and policies, and engaging with national and international stakeholders to exchange expertise and mobilize resources. As part of its ongoing efforts, Cambodia has implemented two phases of the National Disability Strategic Plan: Phase I (2014–18) and II (2019–23). The latest phase, 2024–28, is currently being finalized, following bilateral meetings and workshops, with a validation workshop held on 26 March 2024. The draft plan outlines seven key objectives, covering “employment and economic security, health and well-being, education and lifelong learning, social protection, inclusion and accessibility, safety, rights and justice, and risks and climate change” [12]. Additionally, the

government is in the process of revising the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with key stakeholders such as the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization (CDPO), NGOs, and development partners actively contributing. Moreover, the DAC is collaborating with development partners, including UN agencies, to prepare Cambodia's state report for the CRPD [8].

With support from UNICEF, the government developed the Disability Management Information System and launched the disability identification process in 2020, despite the Sub-Decree on the Identification of Disabilities by Social Model and Basic Rights and the Prakas on the Disability Identification Card only being introduced in 2023. An interview with a key informant from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSAVY) revealed that 356,269 persons with disabilities (174,437 females) had voluntarily registered in the system. However, only 287,599 were approved and issued a disability card. Currently, the card grants recipients a social assistance benefit of KHR28,000 (approximately USD7) per month under the Social Assistance for Poor Family program. The government aims to enhance these benefits by integrating the disability database with the management information system of the Ministry of Health, the Social Assistance Council, and other government institutions, enabling recipients to access additional services, including healthcare, education, vocational training, and social services. The process of obtaining a disability card involves registration and an interview conducted at the commune level via tablets. Subsequently, the compiled data is forwarded to the district and provincial levels, before undergoing final assessment and approval at the national level (MoSAVY). Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)—community-based groups formally registered with the Ministry of Interior and often comprising three members with disabilities—play a key role in this process. They assist in raising awareness and facilitating registrations, particularly for individuals who are unable to travel to the commune office due to their disabilities. Errors in completing the registration forms could result in delays or rejections, underscoring the need for commune-level staff to possess the necessary expertise to accurately identify disabilities and effectively use registration forms and electronic tools. However, this remains a challenge, necessitating additional technical support for commune teams. Expanding awareness campaigns on disability card registration is also essential to improve accessibility. According to a key informant from a disability organization, despite the key roles of the OPDs, challenges persist in collecting accurate statistics and reaching persons with disabilities in certain communes. This is primarily due to insufficient funding, as many OPDs are not located in areas targeted by development partners such as GIZ, ACCESS 1 and 2, and UNDP. Consequently, these organizations often operate voluntarily with limited resources, affecting their ability to provide support at the community level.

Policy Analysis

Related Laws, Regulations, and Policies

To promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, the RGC has ratified international conventions while also developing its laws, regulations, and policies over the past few decades. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009) aims to protect the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities as well as their interests, prevent and eliminate discrimination, and provide necessary rehabilitation to ensure their full and equal participation in society [11]. This law explicitly defines the rights of persons with disabilities in areas such as education (Chapter 6) as well as employment and vocational training (Chapter 7), ensuring non-discriminatory access to human capital accumulation and facilitating their productive contribution to the labor market. Article 33 of the law states that “persons with disabilities who have the required qualification and competence to carry out the duties, roles and responsibilities of a particular position have the rights to be employed without discrimination, including employment as civil servants, workers, employers, apprentices, or interns.” However, due to the broad nature of the law's provisions, enforcement only took place after complementary legal documents and guidance were issued.

For instance, employment quotas for public and private entities were established through Sub-Decree 108 ANKr. BK (2010). According to Articles 5 and 6 of this sub-decree, ministries or state entities with over 50 employees must ensure that at least 2% of their workforce comprises persons with disabilities, while private legal entities with over 100 employees must maintain a 1% employment rate. Article 15

stipulates that heads of these public and private institutions who fail to meet the required quotas must contribute to the Persons with Disability Foundation (PWDF), paying a penalty equivalent to 50% of a civil servant's basic salary for public entities and 40% of the minimum wage of a worker for private entities per unified position [13]. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities further mandates that these entities provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities, provided such accommodations do not impose an undue burden on them.

In September 2012, Circular No. 005, jointly issued by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), provided further guidance on reasonable accommodations that state and private entities could implement for workers with disabilities. Employers subject to the quota are required to submit annual reports in January, detailing the number of employees with disabilities and outlining their recruitment plans for fulfilling the quota. Nevertheless, enforcement of the quota and data collection efforts remain inconsistent [11].

The MLVT has acknowledged that records on the number of employed persons with disabilities remain incomplete and that greater efforts are required to improve inclusivity. Consequently, the ministry's Five-Year-Strategic Plan (2024–28) prioritizes labor market interventions to empower persons with disabilities. Key initiatives include: Ensuring all export companies provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities by 2026, incentivizing entities that hire job seekers with disabilities, and targeting at least 1% employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector [14].

To achieve these objectives, the strategy outlines mechanisms such as gradually implementing infrastructure modifications to accommodate workers with disabilities, collaborating with stakeholders to provide internship, transportation, and job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and offering Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses, career counseling, and study visits prior to market entry.

Additionally, through the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), the strategic plan seeks to enhance rehabilitation efforts for NSSF's members who acquire disabilities during employment. Proposed actions include establishing a rehabilitation center for injured employees, ensuring the provision of rehabilitation services within 15 days for at least 10% of the NSSF's members in need, and coordinating with TVET institutions, employment agencies, and rehabilitation service providers to facilitate reintegration into the labor market [14].

Similarly, there are other related legal documents, policies, and strategic plans that promote productivity and employment for persons with disabilities in Cambodia. The National Employment Policy (NEP) (2015–25) emphasizes that ensuring quality and access to TVET is key to equipping persons with disabilities with the skills needed in the labor market. The NEP paved the way for the development of the National Technical Vocational Education and Training Policy (2017–25), which outlines strategic activities aimed at attracting more students from marginalized groups. However, while it vaguely references persons with disabilities, it includes provisions for scholarships, allowances, and dormitories. Despite these initiatives, access to and acquisition of TVET skills remain challenging for students with disabilities. To address this, the Agile Development Group and the People in Need, with support from the Czech Development Agency (CzechAid) under the project “Towards Inclusive Employment for Persons with Disabilities,” developed the guide on inclusive TVET institutions to implement inclusive education by emphasizing two key principles: (i) accessibility – ensuring that infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment strategies, language, and communication are designed to accommodate all individuals without discrimination and (ii) adaptation – allowing for flexible and multiple forms of assessment that cater to students with diverse needs and learning progress.

The guideline further recommends job coaching and matching, while fostering an entrepreneurial mindset to support persons with disabilities in successfully transitioning into the labor market [15]. However, there are no recent reports on the extent to which TVET institutions have adopted this guideline, nor on its effectiveness or the challenges faced in its implementation.

To empower persons with disabilities with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in society, it is essential to ensure access to education and training at any stage of life, in addition to TVET. Accordingly, Cambodia has developed inclusive education policies and plans that prioritize accessible and equitable education services for children with disabilities, from preschool through higher education. The Education Strategic Plan (2014–18) aimed to increase the enrollment of children under six years of age with disabilities in public and community-based preschools through an inclusive education program, which contributed to a rise in the number of such institutions. As a result, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in these preschools increased from 71 students (35 females) in the 2013–14 school year to 502 students (216 females) in the 2017–18 school year [16]. The subsequent Education Strategic Plan (2019–23) expanded its focus to include children with disabilities in primary and secondary education, as well as career counseling and employment services for students with disabilities. The most recently adopted Inclusive Education Action Plan (2024–28) represents another step toward achieving comprehensive inclusivity for all children and students, especially those with disabilities.

The National Institute for Special Education was established in 2017 with support from UNICEF [17]. Nevertheless, access to education remains a significant challenge for children with disabilities. More than half of children with disabilities lack access to education, compared with less than 10% of children without disabilities [18]. This disparity highlights the need for continued efforts to improve school accessibility, especially for children with disabilities in rural areas. For higher education, the Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 emphasizes expanding equitable access for students with disabilities through a scholarship program administered by the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). In the 2019–20 school year, MoEYS implemented a policy allowing students with disabilities (i.e., children who are physically disabled, deaf, or blind) who pass the high school national exam to automatically enroll in higher education institutions that do not require an entry exam [19]. However, enrollment rates remain low, with only 43 students with disabilities (including 13 women) pursuing undergraduate degrees in 2022 [20]. Despite these opportunities, students with disabilities continue to experience significant challenges, including those related to transportation, learning accommodations, and exams. Certain students report that commuting to class is costly, as they are unable to travel independently due to the lack of accessible transportation. Additionally, essential learning materials, such as braille textbooks, remain scarce in universities [19].

Although Cambodia has introduced numerous policies, laws, and regulations supporting persons with disabilities, challenges in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation hinder progress toward full inclusivity. A key issue is the lack of systematic data collection for individual programs, including education, training, and employment, making it difficult to assess progress against established targets. Furthermore, efforts to identify persons with disabilities only commenced in 2020, complicating the process of tracking progress. Additionally, while it remains unclear whether detailed action plans exist for the policies and strategic plans mentioned above, reviews indicate a need for comprehensive activity planning, clear budget allocations, and a structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure effective implementation.

Situation Analysis

Employment Situation

As mentioned earlier, disability data in Cambodia may vary across surveys depending on the methodology used. However, in 2023, the NIS released a report based on the CDHS (2014) and the CDHS (2021–22), enabling a deeper investigation of employment among persons with disabilities in Cambodia. According to the report, more than 50% of individuals aged 15 and above with any form of disability are employed. However, the employment rate is higher among those with mild or moderate disabilities compared to those with severe disabilities [9]. Table 1 shows that 73.2% of individuals aged 15 and above with mild or moderate disabilities are employed, although 8.2% of them are engaged in unpaid jobs. Conversely, the employment rate among individuals with severe disabilities is lower, at 53.9%, with 9.9% engaged in unpaid work. A gender-based analysis reveals a significant employment gap between males and females with disabilities. The data in Table 1 show that 92.2% of males with mild or moderate disabilities are employed, compared with only 67% of females in the same category. Similarly, while 72.2% of males with severe disabilities are employed, the employment rate for females with severe disabilities stands at only 51.3%. Interestingly, females with mild/moderate and severe disabilities are more likely to be engaged in unpaid jobs compared with males.

TABLE 1

EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BY LEVEL OF DISABILITY AND SEX

	Mild (%)	Severe (%)	None (%)
Any work	73.2	58.8	72.7
Any paid work	68	53.9	69
Any unpaid work	8.2	9.9	6
Male	92.2	72.2	86.1
Female	67	51.3	66.2

Source: NIS, 2023 [8].

According to the Minister of MoSYV on 4 December 2023, only 7,535 persons with disabilities were employed in public and private sectors [21]. Of these, 3,776 were working across 39 public institutions while 3,759 were employed in 241 private institutions, 3,631 of whom were females. This indicates that less than 1% of persons with disabilities are employed, a fact also recognized by the Minister of Labour and Vocational Training in a different report [22].

Due to the lack of official employment data for public and private institutions, it is challenging to ascertain whether these entities are fully compliant with the employment quota. Nonetheless, a key informant from MoSYV shared that approximately 300 private companies, factories, and enterprises are currently registered with them, compared with an estimated 1,500 that are eligible. Meanwhile, some registered companies have failed to meet the employment quota and are therefore required to pay a penalty contribution to the PWDF. A news article from March 2024 [23] reported that PWDF collected nearly KHR1.3 billion (approximately USD325 million) from 80 companies, factories, or enterprises in 2023.

Among all industries, the garment, footwear, and travel and bags sector, which mostly includes large factories employing over 80,000 workers, more than half of whom are females, has actively promoted employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, it continues to face significant challenges [24]. Several initiatives have been introduced to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in this sector. One such initiative is the Legal Guidelines on the Obligation of Employers to Hire Employees with Disabilities, developed in 2020 by the Textile, Apparel, Footwear and Travel Goods Association in Cambodia (TAFTAC), formerly known as the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC). These guidelines are designed to assist members in understanding relevant legal requirements. In collaboration with MoSYV, TAFTAC also conducted training sessions in May 2024, educating members on employer obligations and registration procedures for hiring persons with disabilities [25]. Additionally, TAFTAC provides employment opportunities for landmine survivors and their children following their training at the Cambodian Garment Training Institute.

Several individual factories have demonstrated inclusive employment practices. For example: (i) Horizon-Outdoor in Kampong Chhnang Province has implemented an appropriate return-to-work policy for injured employees. (ii) Mutita Textile Social Enterprise in Battambang Province promotes a supportive work environment, ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment for all employees. (iii) La Paloma, also in Battambang Province, provides proper accommodations and adapts work environments to support employees with disabilities [24].

What Determines Employment for Persons with Disabilities?

When it comes to employment, as with other aspects such as access to education and information, persons with disabilities tend to have fewer opportunities, especially among women. A study by the NIS on persons with disabilities found that persons with severe disabilities are statistically and significantly less likely to be employed compared with those with mild or moderate disabilities, or those without disabilities, particularly in paid jobs. Meanwhile, their likelihood of working in unpaid jobs is higher [9].

However, there are limited official reports or statements on the types of unpaid jobs performed by persons with disabilities, despite concerns regarding their vulnerability to labor exploitation, especially among those from underprivileged families or those lacking family support [26]. A combination of factors contributes to the lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. They are as follows:

First, persons with disabilities are more likely to come from low-income households and receive limited to no education, frequently resulting in lower-paying jobs compared with individuals without disabilities [9]. Therefore, education and training play a significant role in determining their employability. A key informant from an organization supporting persons with disabilities stated that “persons with disabilities who possess a high level of education, for example, a bachelor’s degree, and can speak a foreign language, are able to secure better (high-paying) jobs, and if not, they could end up working in call centers.” They further added, “if not, they are hardly recognized by people around them.” According to the NIS study report from 2023¹ [8], 33% of persons with disabilities had never attended school, compared with 16% of those without disabilities. Additionally, 33% of school-aged children (aged 6–12) with disabilities were currently attending schools, compared with 76% of those without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities also face limited opportunities for vocational training. The exact number of vocational training centers or programs specifically targeting persons with disabilities is unknown. As official statistics are scarce. According to a key informant, the Por Sen Chey Vocational Training Centre, under the MoSYV, offers a one-year vocational training course to an average of 50 persons with disabilities per year, primarily from low-income families. Additionally, provincial vocational training centers under the MLVT provide vocational training courses to the general population, including youth from low-income and vulnerable households, as well as those with disabilities. Nevertheless, there are no official statistics on how many persons with disabilities are enrolled in these programs. Apart from limited availability, persons with disabilities, especially those in rural areas, often lack awareness of existing training opportunities or the means to access them due to transportation challenges. A key informant from the PWDF stated, “Those in remote and low-income households cannot afford vocational training centers. Given the limited daily allowance, some of them prefer to stay home instead.” Another crucial concern is that many vocational training centers may still lack proper accessibility for trainees with disabilities and may not offer adequate training courses for certain disability types, such as visual or hearing impairments.

Persons with disabilities often lack awareness of their rights and have limited access to information, especially on employment. This lack of awareness, combined with self-misperception about their ability to work, can further hinder them from seeking employment opportunities, education, and training. For instance, a study by Light for the World in Pursat province between late 2018 and early 2019 found that the majority of respondents with disabilities did not receive any information on employment-related topics, whereas they were more likely to obtain information on subjects such as political elections [27]. Similarly, a study by UNESCO in collaboration with CDRI, expected to be released in early 2024, also highlighted the need for better access to information and media context that enhances the quality of life for persons with disabilities, including job opportunities. However, as reported by Kiripost News in 2023, employment does not appear to be a primary focus for them when seeking information [27, 28]. The government has increasingly taken steps to reach out to more persons with disabilities, including through community-based campaigns. A key informant from a PWDF explained that some individuals remain underserved due to limited human resources and financial capacity. However, local NGOs such as the Women and Children with Disabilities Forum and the OPDs play an active role in promoting awareness and supporting persons with disabilities in obtaining disability identification cards and accessing education, healthcare, and social assistance [29].

On the demand side, persons with disabilities are often perceived by employers as incapable or weak in performing certain tasks, limiting their roles and employment opportunities, even when they attain higher education and can perform equally well, if not better. As cited in a news article [30], a leader with a disability from the Smart Disabled Women of Shampoo Producing Community Team remarked: “First, there is discrimination. People often believe that individuals with disabilities work slowly and are

¹ Based on the study’s estimation from the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey, 2014 & 2021–22

less capable. However, some perform even better than those without disabilities. Given a choice, employers often prefer those without disabilities, and we are frequently the last option.” In the same article, a representative from a music association added that persons with disabilities continue to face exclusion and discrimination and are often paid less, despite possessing equal or superior abilities and talent.

Some employers remain unaware of their legal obligations, and weak enforcement of employment quotas further intensifies the issues [24]. The Disability Rights Administration has acknowledged that implementing these laws and guidelines is challenging due to insufficient resources and enforcement mechanisms [24]. A key informant from MoSYV emphasized the need for a comprehensive management information system to facilitate registration and monitor compliance among eligible public and private institutions. Meanwhile, the ministry, through the Department of the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities and relevant stakeholders, is actively working to promote awareness among employers through business associations in sectors such as garment, tourism, and finance. Nonetheless, it has been argued that employers are often incentivized to avoid recruiting persons with disabilities when penalties for noncompliance are nonbinding [7, 23] or when they do not face external pressure from buyers. Furthermore, it remains unclear to what extent the various certificates² awarded to ministries, government institutions, and private entities effectively sustain their achievement or encourage broader participation.

The DAC, with support from the ACCESS project, published a Technical Standard on Physical Accessibility Infrastructure for Persons with Disabilities in 2018, which can serve as a useful tool for compliance inspection. According to the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009), eligible entities are required to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities, provided that the association costs are not excessive. However, the criteria for determining what constitutes an “excessive” cost remain unclear, and employers often perceive these accommodations as expenses rather than investments.

It has also been argued that persons with disabilities face limited access to job matching services. The National Employment Agency (NEA) integrated a question on disability status to allow job seekers to disclose their condition. However, the number of persons benefiting from these services may be small [10], and it is unclear how they are matched with employers utilizing NEA’s recruitment services. Furthermore, there is limited information available regarding the services provided by other formal employment or recruitment agencies for persons with disabilities. The CDPO, in its 2021 annual report [31], indicated ongoing collaborations with vocational training institutions, job centers, and the NEA through consultative meetings and training sessions focused on disability concepts, issues, and the needs of persons with disabilities. These institutions have also assigned focal persons to facilitate continued engagement with the OPDs. While a small number of job seekers with disabilities are estimated to secure employment through job service providers, employers still face challenges in meeting employment quotas for persons with disabilities. For instance, TAFTAC [24], has reported difficulties in fulfilling these requirements.

The types of disability also influence employment opportunities. As profit-driven entities, private employers often refrain from hiring persons with disabilities altogether or limit recruitment to persons with mild disabilities. This leaves fewer opportunities for persons with more severe disabilities, such as persons who are blind or deaf, who already encounter significant barriers in accessing the education and training needed for employment [10].

Self-employment also presents challenges for persons with disabilities. The PWDF provides funding to support persons with disabilities in establishing their businesses; however, coverage remains limited. Additionally, not all recipients of these funds achieve business success. A key informant explained that some persons with disabilities failed in their ventures and subsequently withdrew from the program. Conversely, those from relatively better-off families were more likely to succeed, as they had access to stable financial support in addition to funding from the PWDF. Another key informant noted, “Some persons with disabilities could not even start their own small business, such as a motorcycle repair shop, due to a lack of initial capital. As a result, they were unable to apply the skills they acquired from vocational schools.”

² Gold, silver, and general certificate.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Cambodia has had policies and regulations supporting persons with disabilities, and attention to this issue has increased in recent years. Nevertheless, the policy and situation analysis in this chapter highlights several policy implications and recommendations. It should be noted that key legal and policy documents, such as the new law for persons with disabilities and the National Disability Strategic Plan (2024–28), which are expected to introduce improved and detailed measures to support persons with disabilities in all aspects, including education and employment, are currently being finalized.

In the Medium Term

- First and foremost, finalizing and disseminating the new disability law and national strategic plan to relevant stakeholders, including public and private education and training institutions, as well as employers, is crucial. These documents are expected to contain updated measures that comprehensively address existing and emerging challenges faced by persons with disabilities.
- The government, through the MoSVY, should expand the promotion campaign on disability cards to ensure that persons with disabilities, especially those in rural areas, are informed of the availability, process, and benefits of obtaining a card. Additionally, strengthening the capacity of the local commune authority to conduct interviews and collect information using tablets is crucial. This approach can streamline processing time and increase the likelihood that a person with disabilities receives the card and its associated benefits. Engaging OPDs in this process is also essential, as they often have a better understanding of and can communicate more effectively with persons with disabilities.
- Schools and vocational training institutions should be assessed on their infrastructure’s responsiveness to the needs of persons with disabilities and their ability to provide reasonable accommodation based on different disability types.
- Awareness-raising initiatives regarding laws and regulations related to persons with disabilities, including their employment rights, should be conducted regularly for employers and employer associations. Simultaneously, efforts should be made to understand the challenges faced by employers in hiring persons with disabilities.
- Career guidance for students with disabilities is just as crucial as it is for those without disabilities. Thus, a specialized service should be established, ensuring that career guidance providers or counselors have sufficient knowledge of disabilities and the job market.
- Job matching processes should be made more inclusive for persons with disabilities. Additionally, employment and recruitment agencies should engage with employers to discuss the different types of jobs and their respective requirements to enhance job matching tailored to persons with disabilities, thereby increasing their employment opportunities.
- Nevertheless, sustained financial and technical support from development partners and NGOs remains crucial, as certain challenges faced by persons with disabilities have yet to be fully addressed.

In the Long Term

- The government should strengthen the enforcement of disability law, particularly in the area of employment, while ensuring that persons with disabilities acquire knowledge and skills suited to their disability types, enabling them to achieve an appropriate level of workplace productivity.
- The government should reconsider employer incentive mechanisms beyond certificates, such as promoting best practices to a wider audience or introducing additional investment incentives.
- Students and job seekers with disabilities should have equal access to labor market information and services, including career guidance, job matching, and related workshops and training. These

services should be actively promoted to persons with disabilities and designed with appropriate accessibility measures.

- Promoting awareness of the inclusive rights of persons with disabilities is essential. At the community level, parents and other community members should be informed of the benefits of sending their children to schools and having employment opportunities.
- With the upcoming implementation of a new disability law as well as the National Disability Strategic Plan, it is anticipated that these two documents will address the existing gaps. However, it is essential to consider the diverse types and levels of disabilities to ensure a genuine inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.
- Current registration and inspection mechanisms could be enhanced by integrating management systems across relevant government institutions, specifically those involved in business registration. This integration would allow responsible bodies to identify eligible entities and take timely action, rather than relying on voluntary registration.
- Where human and financial resources remain a challenge, the government must invest in or mobilize resources to support the implementation of programs such as disability identification, disability inspection, and awareness campaigns, particularly for those living in remote areas.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter gathers information on the situation of persons with disabilities, focusing specifically on productivity and the employment environment. Our study is based on a desk review of existing literature and reports as well as key informant interviews with stakeholders from government ministries, institutions, and organizations representing persons with disabilities. As a result, we present statistics on the employment of persons with disabilities, the supporting legal framework, and the enabling factors and challenges in promoting their productivity and employment opportunities.

At the policy level, Cambodia has enacted laws, regulations, and policies to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in various aspects of life, including education, training, and employment. Additionally, Cambodia has ratified international conventions such as the CRPD and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. Although some regulations and policies have been introduced later than others, indicating a slow enforcement process, Cambodia has taken significant steps toward the inclusion of persons with disabilities. These steps include the reform of disability laws and development of the next phase of the National Disability Strategic Plan (2024–28), which aims to address existing gaps in policy implementation. Key issues include inconsistencies in the definition of disability, challenges in enforcing employment quotas, the need for a reasonable accommodation inspection mechanism, and gaps in education, training, and job matching services.

In the fields of education and training, various programs have been implemented to promote inclusive learning opportunities for children and persons with disabilities. These initiatives include special education programs, training on inclusive education for preschool, primary, and secondary school teachers, and vocational training programs open to persons with disabilities. However, children with disabilities continue to lag behind their peers without disabilities. Many lack necessary resources, including digital devices for distance learning, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, some persons with disabilities are unaware of available vocational training programs or are unable to access training centers due to geographical constraints and inadequate means of transportation.

Persons with disabilities are employed in public and private sectors. However, they generally face greater challenges than those without disabilities in securing wage employment and self-employment opportunities. This is largely due to societal perceptions that they are weak or incapable of performing certain tasks, as well as self-misperceptions that may discourage them from seeking education, training,

or employment opportunities. Cambodia's disability laws and regulations require employers to hire persons with disabilities according to a designated employment quota, depending on whether the entity is governmental or private. Employers are also mandated to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that employees with disabilities can work productively. However, enforcing employment quotas and reasonable accommodation requirements remains challenging due to inadequate infrastructure and accessibility, especially in terms of information access, transportation, and assistive technology. Additionally, some employers lack awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and relevant legal requirements, while others, despite being aware, tend to pay penalties rather than comply with hiring obligations. For persons with disabilities from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, self-employment can be particularly challenging due to limited access to financial resources.

The government has implemented a disability identification program that issues ID cards to persons with disabilities, facilitating better access to education, healthcare, and social assistance. However, further steps are needed, such as integrating the disability database into the health and social assistance management information system and improving the registration and identification process for persons with disabilities.

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A CASE STUDY OF LAO PDR

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Executive Summary

The challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) significantly hinder their participation in the workforce, despite a sizable labor force of approximately 3.2 million persons. While the country has experienced significant economic growth in the agriculture, hydropower, and tourism sectors, the inclusion of persons with disabilities remains critical for harnessing the full potential of the economy. Defined by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), disability encompasses impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, which are further intensified by systemic barriers. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where access to education and employment opportunities is severely limited. This report draws on comprehensive data from the "Disability Monograph of Lao PDR" and integrates insights from various disability organizations and academic researchers to critically assess the current employment landscape for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR.

Key findings reveal that employment rates among persons with disabilities are significantly lower compared with those of the general population. Contributing factors include discriminatory hiring practices, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient accessibility measures, and deeply entrenched social stigmas. The structural roots of these stigmas include cultural beliefs that perceive disability as a limitation rather than a natural aspect of diverse human conditions, coupled with a lack of public education on the rights and capabilities of persons with disabilities. Women with disabilities face additional challenges, experiencing compounded barriers due to gender and disability, which further exacerbates their difficulties in securing employment.

To promote an inclusive work environment and enhance productivity, this report outlines several targeted recommendations. These include enhancing data collection mechanisms to inform policymaking, setting explicit employment targets within the National Plan of Action (NPA), and strengthening collaboration between government and civil society organizations. Expanding vocational training and educational initiatives tailored to individuals with disabilities is crucial, alongside implementing public awareness campaigns aimed at reshaping societal perceptions and combating discrimination.

Ultimately, addressing the multifaceted barriers endured by persons with disabilities in Lao PDR is crucial for promoting equity and maximizing socioeconomic participation. Implementation of these recommendations can transform challenges into opportunities, promoting a more inclusive labor market that benefits society as a whole and drives sustainable economic growth.

Contextual Background

Introduction

The Lao PDR, commonly referred to as Laos, is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia (Food and Agriculture Organizations of the United Nations [FAO], 2024). It shares borders with Myanmar and China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the southeast, and Thailand to the west. As of 2022, the population of Lao PDR is estimated to be around 7 million. The labor force comprises approximately 3.2 million individuals, with women accounting for 46.8% of this workforce (World Bank, 2024a). Lao PDR's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture, with rice being the staple crop. The country has experienced substantial economic growth, driven by the hydropower, mining, tourism, and agriculture sectors, alongside the utilization of its natural resources (World Bank, 2024b). Despite this economic expansion, the country remains one of the lesser-developed nations, with a

substantial portion of the population still dependent on subsistence agriculture. This dependence is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where modern infrastructure and economic opportunities remain limited.

Persons with disabilities in Lao PDR are among the most marginalized groups in society, experiencing multifaceted challenges that impede their full participation in social, economic, and political spheres. Systemic barriers such as inadequate access to physical infrastructure, limited educational and employment opportunities, and pervasive social stigma further intensify their exclusion. This issue is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where support services and accessible facilities are scarce, aggravating the situation even further.

Definition of Disability

The 2015 Population and Housing Census (PHC) in Lao PDR adopted a definition of disability based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). Developed by the World Health Organization, the ICF serves as a framework for assessing health and disability at the individual and population levels across all member states. According to the ICF, disability is defined as “an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions,” which underscores the complex interactions between persons with health conditions and their contextual factors. This definition provides a comprehensive view, incorporating physical and environmental factors.

The Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Lao PDR, alongside Law No. 146, issued on 22 January 2019, which is the first law of its kind in the country, defines a person with a disability as someone with long-term physical, mental, or intellectual impairments, including visual, hearing, and speech difficulties, that hinder their daily activities and limit their full participation in society on an equal basis with others (Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, 2023). The decree also clarifies several important terms:

- ***Discrimination based on disability*** refers to any type of differentiation, exclusion, or limitation that impacts the recognition and exercise of rights and freedoms for persons with disabilities, including the refusal to provide reasonable accommodations.
- ***Reasonable accommodation*** denotes necessary adaptations and modifications to environments and services that do not impose undue costs or hardships, enabling persons with disabilities to fully access and enjoy their rights.
- ***Universal design*** involves developing products, spaces, and services that are accessible to all without requiring specialized modifications.
- ***Assistive devices*** include tools that assist persons with disabilities leverage their capabilities in daily activities.
- ***Public places*** include locations accessible to the general public, such as parks, religious sites, cultural landmarks, theaters, and transit stations.

In comparison, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) highlights impairments as well as environmental factors that can either facilitate or hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities. This omission in the Lao definition suggests a potential gap in addressing the broader challenges faced by persons with disabilities, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive legal framework.

General Statistics of Disability

Acquiring precise statistics on disability prevalence in Lao PDR is challenging due to limited systematic data collection strategies. Although several policies have been implemented, the lack of comprehensive data has hindered effective development. The 2015 PHC sought to address this gap by collecting

essential disability-related statistics, culminating in the publication of the “Disability Monograph.” This report provides stakeholders with disaggregated data and comparative analyses of the social and economic characteristics of persons with and without disabilities.

The statistics presented in this report are sourced from the “Disability Monograph of Lao PDR” (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). In Lao PDR, a total of 160,881 individuals aged five and above were identified as having a disability, resulting in an overall prevalence rate of 2.77%. The most commonly reported difficulties were related to vision (1.35%) and mobility, specifically walking or climbing stairs (1.3%), followed by hearing impairments (1.23%) and cognitive challenges such as memory or concentration difficulties (1.2%). Mild difficulties constituted 67.16% of the cases, while moderate and severe difficulties accounted for 23.08% and 9.77%, respectively. Notably, 56.56% of individuals reported experiencing multiple, often interrelated, difficulties. The gender distribution of persons with disabilities was nearly equal, with 80,766 males and 80,115 females affected.

Disability prevalence increased with age, particularly for mild and moderate disabilities associated with aging and neurodegenerative diseases. The average age of persons with disabilities was 54.29 years, compared with 28.52 years for the general population. Geographically, prevalence rates for persons with disabilities were higher in impoverished areas: 3.33% in rural regions without roads, 2.86% in rural areas with roads, and 2.48% in urban areas. Furthermore, ethnic disparities were evident, with the Mon-Khmer group exhibiting the highest disability prevalence rate at 3.51%, compared with 2.5% among the Lao-Tai, 2.79% among the Hmong-Lewmien, and 2.85% among the Chinese-Tibetan groups, all of which were near or below the national average. This prevalence rate among the Mon-Khmer group may be attributed to several factors, including their residence in impoverished rural areas with limited access to healthcare, education, and support services. Such socioeconomic challenges can intensify health conditions and hinder the identification and support of persons with disabilities. Additionally, cultural factors may influence the awareness and reporting of disabilities, leading to variations in prevalence rates across different ethnic groups.

Social Structural Enablers and Barriers

Historical Background and Social Aspects

Lao PDR, a Southeast Asian nation with rich cultural traditions, has historically relied on families and local communities to care for persons with disabilities, as its social welfare systems are less formalized than those in many Western and European countries. However, modernization and international advocacy have begun to shift this perspective. Currently, there is a growing emphasis on recognizing the rights and capabilities of persons with disabilities, moving beyond a traditional charity-based approach (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2022). Despite these advancements, social barriers remain significant. Outdated stereotypes and misconceptions persist, resulting in societal exclusion and discrimination across various domains, including education, employment, and social interaction. A report by the Lao Disabled People’s Association and other disability-focused organizations highlights how entrenched attitudes continue to limit opportunities and reinforce social exclusion for persons with disabilities (OHCHR, 2022).

Physical Accessibility

The physical environment in Lao PDR presents significant challenges for persons with disabilities due to the inconsistent application of universal design principles. As noted in the report, a lack of awareness and training among architects, coupled with insufficient regulatory frameworks and weak enforcement of existing policies, has resulted in several public facilities lacking accessibility features, such as ramps and accessible restrooms (OHCHR, 2022). Programs aimed at improving accessibility are typically underfunded and concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural communities underserved. This disparity in infrastructure significantly limits social, economic, and educational participation of persons with disabilities, highlighting the need for increased investment and national planning to bridge accessibility gaps (OHCHR, 2022).

Digital and Information Accessibility

Digital inclusion is an emerging concern in Lao PDR. While the country has expanded its mobile network coverage and internet access, individuals with disabilities often remain marginalized in the digital landscape. A lack of adherence to digital accessibility standards for websites and applications, combined with economic disparities that limit access to essential devices, intensifies this exclusion. Additionally, the limited availability of adaptive technologies and accessible formats further restricts participation in education, employment, and civic engagement. Reports by the Lao Disabled People's Association and other organizations advocating for persons with disabilities emphasize the urgent need for improved digital accessibility measures (OHCHR, 2022).

Attitudinal Accessibility

Attitudinal barriers rooted in societal perceptions often result in low expectations regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities, thereby influencing interactions, employment practices, and educational opportunities. As noted by the Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the report, specific groups, including government officials, employers, and families, often hold beliefs that restrict opportunities for persons with disabilities. Although advocacy and awareness campaigns led by OPDs have witnessed progress to a certain extent, deeply ingrained cultural beliefs require sustained, comprehensive initiatives to promote an inclusive society (OHCHR, 2022). Programs such as community workshops, public service announcements, and collaborative efforts with educational institutions are crucial steps toward creating a more accepting environment. These efforts must be continuous and scaled up to bring about lasting change (OHCHR, 2022).

Enablers and Progress

Despite significant barriers, several enablers are facilitating improvements in accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR. Government initiatives, supported by civil society and international partners, have resulted in significant advancements in the rights of persons with disabilities. For example, the NPA on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021–30) outlines commitments to enhancing accessibility across multiple sectors. However, the report emphasizes that policy implementation remains a challenge, with enforcement and budgeting constraints limiting their practical impact. A critical evaluation of these initiatives' implementation can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness as well as areas requiring improvement (OHCHR, 2022).

The government's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) further strengthens the ongoing development of disability-inclusive policies. Educational policies aimed at promoting inclusivity seek to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools, complemented by specialized vocational training and skills development programs. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these educational policies varies across regions, especially in rural areas where resources are often scarce and access to quality education remains challenging (OHCHR, 2022).

Civil society organizations, such as the Lao Disabled People's Association [LDPA] (2024), play a critical role in advocacy and raising awareness at the grassroots and national levels. While their initiatives, including public awareness campaigns and community workshops, are vital for increasing the visibility and support for persons with disabilities, the realization of comprehensive support systems and effective partnerships remains a work in progress. These organizations also provide resources and support to persons with disabilities and their families, facilitating access to essential services and information (OHCHR, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these efforts varies, underscoring the need for sustained commitment to ensure that these initiatives translate into tangible improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities. Collectively, these efforts contribute to a multifaceted approach to disability inclusion, revealing opportunities for continued progress. With sustained collaboration and commitment, Lao PDR can further enhance the productivity and inclusion of persons with disabilities, ultimately fostering a more equitable society.

Policy Analysis

Employment Rate and Situation

The employment landscape for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR reveals significant disparities compared with the general population, as reported in the Disability Monograph of Lao PDR from the 2015 PHC

(Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). When analyzing employment rates, it is crucial to address existing policies as well as the lack of comprehensive accessibility laws that ensure equal opportunities. In 2015, data from the Lao Statistics Bureau indicated that the employment rate for persons with disabilities aged over 10 years was 46.5%, significantly lower than the 68.4% employment rate for their counterparts without disabilities. This disparity suggests a lack of accessibility policies and programs promoting equitable employment opportunities. Notably, in many European countries, the working population is often defined using a broader age range, which may differ from the definitions used in Lao PDR.

The Lao Statistics Bureau (2020) also reported that the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities stood at 4.0%, compared with 1.3% for the general population. These findings suggest that individuals with disabilities experience lower employment rates and encounter greater obstacles in securing jobs. Furthermore, the report highlights policy gaps, such as the lack of mandatory accessibility standards and financial incentives for inclusive hiring practices, indicating areas in need of legislative improvement. Approximately 25.4% of persons with disabilities identified as homemakers, suggesting a prevalence of “disguised unemployment” driven by factors such as limited job opportunities and employer discrimination. Gender disparities are also evident, as women with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged, with an employment rate of just 38.1%, compared with 54.9% for men with disabilities. In contrast, employment rates for women and men without disabilities are relatively equal at 67% and 69.7%, respectively. This gender disparity highlights the layered discrimination that women with disabilities face in the labor market.

Additionally, the data indicate that 19.6% of persons with disabilities were either retired or unable to work due to their age or disability, with 38.5% of that group being over 65 years of age. This finding highlights the demographic challenges affecting employment prospects (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). Further, analysis of employment data from the 2015 PHC reveals that individuals with visual and hearing impairments generally have higher employment rates (over 40%) compared with those with physical and intellectual disabilities, whose employment rates range between 30% and 35% (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that other impairments, such as those related to memory or concentration, speech difficulties, and multiple disabilities, further affect employment outcomes. Overall, labor force participation was significantly higher among persons without disabilities across all age groups, illustrating the systemic barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from entering the workforce.

Institutional Enablers and Barriers

On 25 September 2009, the Government of Lao PDR ratified the UNCRPD, committing to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. It became one of the first ASEAN countries to do so (United Nations [UN], 2023). Beyond this significant step, the government has demonstrated its commitment to improving conditions for persons with disabilities through various initiatives. For instance, the government has allocated additional budgetary resources specifically for implementing policies that support the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Moreover, strategic action plans, such as the NPA on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have been developed to outline key objectives and target areas for improvement, serving as a roadmap for implementation. This national action plan aims to enhance the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities across multiple sectors by promoting accessibility, improving healthcare services, and ensuring participation in education and employment opportunities. By fostering collaboration among government agencies, civil society, and the private sector, the plan aims to address systemic barriers and empower persons with disabilities. Additionally, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be established to assess progress and ensure accountability, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive society.

Furthermore, ongoing efforts are being made to align domestic laws with the principles outlined in the UNCRPD. This includes reviewing existing legislation to eliminate discriminatory practices and integrate provisions promoting accessibility and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in education, employment, and public services. The government submitted its initial state reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016, detailing the progress made in implementing the convention. However, no subsequent reports have been submitted since then.

These reports provide valuable insights into the achievements and ongoing challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Lao PDR.

Despite the challenges, institutional enablers continue to support the improvement of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The government's commitment to inclusive policies is evident through its ratification of the CRPD, the promotion of legal frameworks that protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and advocacy for equal opportunities across various sectors.

Educational Policies and Vocational Training

Lao PDR has implemented educational policies that promote inclusive education, aiming to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011). This commitment is reflected in several concrete government initiatives, including the development and dissemination of detailed guidelines for inclusive classroom practices, comprehensive training programs for educators focused on disability awareness and inclusive teaching methodologies, and the provision of resources such as assistive technologies. However, further research is needed to assess the extent of guideline implementation and the effectiveness of training programs in achieving inclusive educational practices. A quantitative analysis of resource allocation and its impact on student outcomes would provide a clearer understanding of the policy's effectiveness.

Despite the existence of these policies, their implementation remains inconsistent. Many educators lack the necessary training and resources to create truly inclusive classrooms, particularly in rural areas, resulting in a gap between policy and practice. While policies supporting inclusive education have been established, prevailing stigma and infrastructural barriers continue to hinder the effective inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Organizations such as the LDPA play a crucial role in advocating for these initiatives and providing vital support services to individuals with disabilities. With financial backing from governmental and international sources, these organizations implement programs aimed at promoting awareness and improving access to education and employment (Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability [APCD], 2020; Organization for Persons with Disabilities [OPDs], 2024; Lemsouthi & Choi, 2023; UNDP, 2024). Their efforts include providing career counseling, job placement assistance, and vocational training workshops tailored to the unique needs of persons with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities. However, a critical examination of these initiatives is necessary, as their impact varies; some programs achieve success at a project level, while others aim for broader systemic changes affecting national policy. Additionally, while certain programs may operate effectively in urban areas, they often struggle to reach rural communities where resources and awareness are limited.

These efforts contribute to improving the social integration and economic participation of persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. Many organizations operate on a project basis with insufficient funding and limited sustainability, hindering their ability to create lasting change. Enhanced collaboration between civil society groups and the government is essential to maximize their collective impact. While efforts are being made to establish partnerships, these collaborations often lack the long-term commitment and financial backing necessary for comprehensive changes.

Moreover, it is important to evaluate how these collaborations specifically benefit persons with disabilities in rural areas. Inclusive education policies must extend beyond urban settings to ensure equitable opportunities for all. Additionally, a detailed examination of how organizations address the unique needs of persons with intellectual disabilities reveals a gap in targeted programming, underscoring the need for specialized support to meet the diverse requirements of this population.

Barriers to Employment

Various barriers to employment exist for persons with disabilities, including inaccessible transportation, limited access to information and communication technologies, employer bias, and legal restrictions based on impairments. These restrictions may stem from laws or regulations that explicitly limit the types of work persons with disabilities can perform or impose additional requirements that

disproportionately affect them (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2020). Certain occupations, such as those associated with healthcare or construction sectors, often impose health or fitness standards that generalize the capabilities of persons with specific impairments, effectively excluding them from those job opportunities. Additionally, discouragement from family and the broader community can further limit employment prospects. A significant challenge arises from inadequate targeted policies and weak implementation. For, instance, the lack of specific programs focused on skill-building for persons with disabilities or insufficient funding for workplace accessibility improvements intensifies employment difficulties. While a national action plan for inclusive education exists and promotes disability rights, the lack of targeted initiatives within specific employment sectors often leads to poor practical outcomes.

Accessibility remains a major issue, as many workplaces fail to meet basic standards for persons with disabilities. These standards may be outlined in national laws or guidelines, such as legislation on the protection of persons with disabilities, which mandates the construction of accessible entrances, restrooms, and workspace accommodations. However, compliance with these laws is often lacking, as many employers remain unaware of or indifferent to their obligations. Additionally, transportation barriers and limited access to information and communication technologies further restrict employment opportunities. Furthermore, the lack of financial incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities hinders their integration into the labor market, highlighting the need for a comprehensive strategy to improve policies, societal attitudes, and support for employers and employees.

Support for employees with disabilities could include reasonable workplace accommodations, flexible work hours, and access to assistive technologies. Training programs for employees and employers on diversity and inclusion could be highly beneficial in fostering an environment that promotes understanding and reduces stigma. Moreover, employee assistance programs specifically tailored to persons with disabilities can provide additional resources and support, further enhancing their integration into the workforce.

Analysis of the National Plan of Action for CRPD Implementation

The NPA for implementing the CRPD outlines strategic goals aimed at enhancing the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities. However, the NPA lacks specific targets and indicators related to employment, weakening accountability and the ability to measure progress (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], 2002). Although a single NPA currently exists, various supplementary action plans and initiatives, such as local government programs and community-based rehabilitation efforts, address different aspects of disability rights. To strengthen the NPA's impact, concrete steps should be taken to establish clear employment-related goals for persons with disabilities, ensuring that these targets are systematically monitored and achieved.

In 2023, the UN advanced the recommendations of the CRPD in Lao PDR through key initiatives, including the development of a measurable NPA in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities (UN, 2023). The plan promotes disability-inclusive employment, provides job readiness training to 52 young job seekers, and enhances disability data collection for the upcoming census. Additionally, a National Inclusive Education Strategy is underway to integrate children with disabilities into schools, complemented by financial support for 428 households with children requiring such assistance.

Cross-sector integration is essential for the NPA's effectiveness in Lao PDR. Strengthening collaboration among the education, health, and employment sectors can create a cohesive support system that facilitates workforce participation through targeted skill development and expanded job opportunities. However, the effectiveness of this integration remains uncertain, as meaningful change depends on action rather than aspiration. Engaging stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, employers, and individuals, is crucial to foster an inclusive labor market. While ongoing dialogue is essential, it must be reinforced through concrete actions and accountability measures to ensure that policies and programs effectively address the needs of persons with disabilities, rather than remaining as mere aspirations and commitments.

Review of the National Report and Monitoring

The national report submitted to the CRPD Committee provides important insights into the current state of disability rights in Lao PDR, especially regarding employment issues. However, it is important to note that the country has submitted only one state report, which was provided in May 2016. According to the CRPD, state parties are required to submit initial reports two years after ratification, followed by subsequent reports every four years. This delay in reporting indicates a weak commitment to the obligations set forth in the convention. While the reports demonstrate the government's commitment to improving conditions for persons with disabilities, they also underscore persisting challenges, particularly in data collection and analysis. Strengthening the depth and reliability of disability-related data is crucial to inform effective policy decisions and design targeted support programs. In this context, establishing clear indicators for measuring employment outcomes for persons with disabilities is essential. These indicators should include various aspects, such as employment rates, job retention rates, types of employment (formal versus informal), and levels of job satisfaction among individuals with disabilities. The development of these indicators would enable the government and relevant organizations to better assess the effectiveness of existing initiatives and identify gaps requiring further attention.

Ongoing monitoring of these employment indicators is crucial for evaluating the success of current programs and recognizing areas for further improvement. Engaging persons with disabilities in this monitoring process is vital, as their firsthand experiences reveal specific barriers, such as accessibility challenges, discrimination, and inadequate support services. By incorporating these insights into policy development, Lao PDR can implement more effective strategies to enhance employment opportunities and promote inclusivity. Moreover, collaboration among relevant agencies, civil society organizations, and persons with disabilities will be essential to transform findings into actionable reforms promoting meaningful change. Collectively, these efforts can lead to enhanced monitoring frameworks as well as the establishment of a more equitable labor market for individuals with disabilities in Lao PDR.

Situational Analysis (Analysis in Practice)

The employment situation for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR is characterized by significant disparities and challenges. This section evaluates insights gained from alternative reports by civil society actors, reports produced by disability organizations, a nationwide study (Lao PDR Disability Monograph), and findings from interviews conducted with persons with disabilities (LDPA, 2024, Lao Statistics Bureau). A qualitative methodology was employed, consisting of semistructured interviews with three participants, each representing different types of disabilities, to capture their lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of systemic barriers in employment. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure adequate representation from various disability groups and geographical locations. The interviews employed open-ended questions to explore their daily lives, employment experiences, perceived barriers, and available support options. Data collected were thematically analyzed to identify common challenges and positive outcomes, thereby adding depth and context to the narrative surrounding disability and employment in Lao PDR.

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive data in various studies impedes a full understanding of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. For example, the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD, 2020) highlights only specific barriers to employment that persist, such as stigma and a lack of supportive measures in the workplace. This situational analysis aims to highlight the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, assess the effectiveness of existing policies, and identify pathways to improve employment outcomes for this marginalized group.

Analysis of Alternative Reports from Civil Society Actors to the CRPD Committee

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, offering insights that complement government reports on disability rights. Their submissions to the CRPD Committee highlight the government's commitment to improving conditions for persons with disabilities as well as the persistent challenges that hinder progress, such as implementation gaps, resource allocation, and societal attitudes. One activist noted, "Even when policies are made, they rarely

reach us. There is a huge gap between what is promised and what actually happens in our daily lives.” This statement underscores the urgent need for robust policy frameworks and stronger mechanisms to ensure that commitments translate into tangible support. Analyzing these voices enriches the findings and reinforces accountability in driving initiatives that foster a more inclusive society.

Analysis of Reports Produced by Disability Organizations and Researchers

Disability organizations provide important perspectives on the employment landscape for persons with disabilities. Their findings often highlight systemic barriers, socioeconomic disparities, and inconsistent levels of accessibility affecting job opportunities.

“The employment rate for individuals with disabilities remains dismally low,” remarked one advocate, “reflecting societal discrimination and a lack of infrastructure that accommodates our needs.” This sentiment highlights how several barriers stem from broader societal attitudes and systemic neglect.

Additionally, the lack of comprehensive data collection complicates advocacy efforts. As one participant explained, “Without precise statistics, it is hard to push for real changes. We need data that speak to our experiences to make our case stronger.” Such insights reflect the urgent need for targeted data collection initiatives to better inform policies and practices.

Integration of Interview Insights

The qualitative interviews conducted with persons with disabilities offer firsthand perspectives that significantly enrich this analysis, providing valuable insights into the systemic challenges they encounter in their daily lives.

One participant described their daily routine: “I wake up early to complete my daily exercises; it helps me stay mobile, but it takes time. My morning routine usually takes longer than most people’s, as I need to focus on stretching and strength-building to manage my condition effectively. After my exercises, I often struggle to find accessible transportation just to get to work.” The participant elaborated on the intricacies of their morning commute: “In my neighborhood, there are very few accessible options, so I often have to rely on friends or family to drive me. However, sometimes they are unavailable. When I attempt to use public transport, I often encounter buses that lack ramps or space for my wheelchair, which can leave me waiting for long periods or force me to make alternative arrangements.”

The challenges of transportation extend beyond logistics. Participants shared the emotional toll it takes on them, with one stating, “It is frustrating and exhausting. Each day feels like a struggle to get to work, and by the time I arrive, I am already drained. This lack of reliable transportation significantly impacts my ability to secure consistent employment and participate fully in my job.” These insights illustrate how daily transportation barriers hinder employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, highlighting the urgent need for more accessible public transport and infrastructure improvements to promote their independence and active participation in society.

One participant shared, “Every day is a struggle; my skills are overlooked because of my disability. Employers often assume that I am unfit for the job without even giving me a chance.” This statement starkly captures the biases encountered during their daily experiences, illustrating the significant impact these biases have on their overall well-being and self-esteem. Participants highlighted their employment challenges, with one stating, “I worked hard to gain my qualifications, but when it comes to applying for jobs, I feel like I’m starting at a disadvantage.” This response sheds light on the hurdles faced by them even after acquiring the necessary skills, emphasizing the influence of discrimination and preconceived notions with regard to their capabilities.

The perceived barriers emerged as a common theme in the interviews. One participant emphasized, “The biggest barrier is the lack of understanding from employers. They focus on my disability rather than my skills.” This sentiment illustrates how societal attitudes and misconceptions contribute to difficulties in securing employment. Additionally, another participant noted, “There is limited

accessibility in many workplaces. Physical barriers make it hard for us to even get through the door.” This statement further highlights the critical need for improved infrastructure and accommodations within the workplace.

Available support options were also discussed during the interviews, emphasizing their significance in the employment journey for persons with disabilities. One participant stated, “Training programs have been essential for me. They helped me gain skills, but getting a job afterward is an uphill battle, as employers doubt my capabilities.” This sentiment emphasizes the importance of accessible vocational training and support services in enhancing employability. While training programs equip individuals with the necessary skills, persistent biases and misconceptions held by employers can make securing a job challenging. Another participant added, “Community support groups have been crucial for my mental health; they provide a space where I can share my experiences and feel less alone.” This highlights the vital role social support networks play in fostering resilience and emotional well-being. The ability to connect with others who face similar challenges provides a sense of belonging and offers a space for practical advice and encouragement. Such community resources play a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment that empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of employment and personal growth.

All participants expressed a strong desire for increased advocacy and awareness efforts to improve their employment situation. One participant stated, “We need more campaigns to show employers the value we bring to the table. It is not just about giving us a chance; it is about recognizing our potential.” This emphasizes the importance of reframing narratives about individuals with disabilities in the workplace, as existing stereotypes often lead employers to underestimate their capabilities. Another individual noted, “Too often, we are seen only through the lens of our disabilities, rather than as capable professionals who can offer unique perspectives and skills.” This perception presents a major barrier to employment, limiting access to opportunities aligning with their qualifications. The call for advocacy emphasizes on the need for educational campaigns to inform employers and the public about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. As another participant remarked, “When employers invest in understanding our capabilities, they empower us and enrich their teams with diverse perspectives.” Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of showcasing success stories to shift perceptions. As one participant noted, “We need more visibility for people like us who have succeeded in our respective careers.” This statement highlights the importance of representation in fostering an inclusive environment that acknowledges and values diverse talents. Overall, the call for increased advocacy and awareness efforts reflects an urgent need for societal change to challenge stereotypes and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. By increasing understanding and visibility, these efforts can foster an equitable environment that values the unique contributions of all individuals.

The integration of these observations demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities with respect to their daily lives, employment experiences, perceived barriers, and available support options. It emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive solutions, including improved training, advocacy, and workplace accommodations, to enhance employment outcomes and foster a more inclusive society. While the interviews have provided meaningful insights, conducting additional interviews with representatives from federations of disability organizations within the country is crucial for a more comprehensive exploration of the challenges. These representatives can offer context-specific insights and highlight effective advocacy strategies employed by their organizations to navigate systemic barriers.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Policy Implications

The following policy implications are crucial for developing a supportive framework that promotes inclusive employment for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR, addresses systemic barriers, and fosters an equitable labor market.

- **Data Collection:** Implement comprehensive data collection initiatives to obtain reliable statistics on disability prevalence, employment rates, and barriers. These data are essential for informed policymaking.

- **Clear Employment Targets:** Define specific targets and indicators for the employment of persons with disabilities in the NPA to improve accountability and track progress.
- **Accessibility:** Prioritize the development and retrofitting of public facilities to cater to universal design standards, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas.
- **Inclusive Education:** Strengthen inclusive education policies to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools and provide necessary support services for improved educational outcomes.
- **Vocational Training Programs:** Increase funding for vocational training programs tailored to individuals with disabilities, equipping them with market-relevant skills to enhance employability.
- **Non-discrimination:** Conduct awareness campaigns to reshape societal attitudes toward disability, challenge stereotypes, and highlight the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- **Financial Incentives:** Implement financial incentives for employers who hire persons with disabilities to reduce employment barriers and promote workforce inclusivity.
- **Support Services:** Expand access to assistive services, technologies, and other support structures to facilitate education and employment for persons with disabilities.
- **Collaboration:** Foster multi-sectoral collaboration among the government, civil society, and the private sector to develop integrated strategies aimed at improving the socioeconomic conditions of persons with disabilities.
- **Policies Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a substantial framework for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of disability rights and employment policies to ensure the effective resolution of barriers.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Implement targeted financial support measures, which include cash transfers and assistive device subsidies, to improve the economic opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations outline practical steps for advancing inclusive employment for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR, with a focus on enhancing accessibility, raising awareness, and formulating supportive policies and practices. Each recommendation includes responsible entities, proposed timelines, and relevant CRPD articles to ensure accountability and effective implementation.

Program Recommendations

- **Establish a National Task Force:** Form a multidisciplinary task force comprising representatives from the government, civil society, and the private sector to coordinate among one another and oversee inclusive employment initiatives.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Government and OPDs.
 - ✓ Timeline: 2025–28.
- **Develop a National Disability Employment Strategy:** Design a comprehensive strategy to increase employment rates for persons with disabilities, outlining specific actions, timelines, and stakeholder responsibilities.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Social Welfare, OPDs, and relevant government agencies.
 - ✓ Timeline: Short-term (1–2 years): To develop the strategy, followed by medium-term (3–5 years) implementation, with periodic evaluations and adjustments.

- **Strengthen the Legal Framework:** Review and amend existing laws and policies to enhance protections against employment discrimination and establish clear guidelines for reasonable workplace accommodations.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Ministry of Justice, Legislative Bodies, OPDs, and Human Rights Organizations.
 - ✓ Timeline: Medium-term (3–5 years): For comprehensive review and amendments, with periodic evaluations to ensure effectiveness.
- **Enhance Public Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct continuous public awareness initiatives to dispel misconceptions about disabilities and highlight the contributions of persons with disabilities to the workforce.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Government, OPDs, and Media Organizations
 - ✓ Timeline: Continuous, with major initiatives every year.
- **Improve Access to Transportation:** Develop and implement inclusive transportation policies that ensure reliability and affordable access for persons with disabilities, facilitating their participation in the workplace.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Ministry of Transport, Local Governments, and OPDs.
 - ✓ Timeline: Medium-term (3–5 years).
- **Expand Access to Assistive Technologies:** Increase the availability and subsidization of assistive technologies to support persons with disabilities in their pursuit of education and employment opportunities, thereby enhancing their overall productivity.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Ministry of Health, Education Authorities, and Technology Providers.
 - ✓ Timeline: Short-term (1–2 years): For initial expansion, followed by continuous implementation.
- **Build Employer Capacity:** Provide training and resources to employers on best practices for inclusive hiring and workplace integration, emphasizing the benefits of a diverse workforce and the rights of employees with disabilities.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Ministry of Labor, Chambers of Commerce, and OPDs.
 - ✓ Timeline: Short-term (1–2 years): To develop and launch training programs, with continuous implementation thereafter.
- **Facilitate Networking Opportunities:** Establish platforms to connect persons with disabilities with potential employers and job opportunities, including job fairs, mentorship programs, and specialized online portals.
 - ✓ Responsibility: Career Centers, OPDs, and Employment Agencies.
 - ✓ Timeline: Short-term (1–2 years): To establish platforms, with continuous networking events taking place thereafter.
- **Implement Pilot Programs:** Launch pilot programs across various sectors to test and refine inclusive employment models, using lessons learned to scale up successful strategies nationwide.

- ✓ Responsibility: Government Agencies, OPDs, and Private Sector Partners.
- ✓ Timeline: Short-term (1–2 years): For initial implementation and evaluation, medium-term (3–5 years): For expansion.
- **Ensure Active Participation of Persons with Disabilities:** Actively involve persons with disabilities in the development and execution of inclusive employment policies to ensure that real challenges are addressed effectively.
 - ✓ Responsibility: All Stakeholders (Government, OPDs, Civil Society Organizations).
 - ✓ Timeline: Immediate and ongoing.

Research Recommendations

- **Conduct Comprehensive Studies:** Initiate research to identify specific barriers to employment for persons with disabilities and evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and policies.
- **Monitor Employment Outcomes:** Establish standardized metrics to track employment outcomes for persons with disabilities, including job retention rates, types of employment, and career progression, to assess the impact of initiatives.
- **Investigate Best Practices:** Examine successful inclusive employment models from other countries to inform local strategies and adapt them to the specific context of Lao PDR.
- **Analyze Economic Impact:** Conduct studies on the economic impact of inclusive employment, assessing benefits for persons with disabilities, businesses, and the broader economy.
- **Engage in Longitudinal Research:** Implement longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of inclusive employment initiatives on the lives of persons with disabilities, providing data-driven insights for future policy adjustments.

Conclusion

The findings of this report on enhancing productivity among persons with disabilities in Lao PDR highlight significant systemic barriers and negative social attitudes that hinder their full inclusion in the workforce. Despite legislative commitments and growing awareness of disability rights, urgent improvements are necessary to ensure that persons with disabilities can fully participate in the socioeconomic landscape. Key barriers, including inadequate support systems, accessibility challenges, societal stigma, and insufficient training, create profound employment disparities. Additionally, the historical reliance on familial care has reinforced the perception of persons with disabilities as recipients of charity rather than empowered contributors to society. Recognizing the potential of persons with disabilities as valuable members of society is essential, especially when appropriate support and opportunities are in place.

Crucially, this report emphasizes the critical relationship between education and employment, noting that barriers to quality education limit skill development and, consequently, job opportunities. Investing in inclusive educational practices is essential for enhancing economic independence and improving quality of life. Additionally, strengthening data collection mechanisms is vital for accurately assessing the employment landscape and tailoring effective strategies. Public awareness campaigns are also necessary to combat stigma, reshape perceptions, and highlight the contributions of persons with disabilities. Ultimately, fostering an inclusive environment is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage, unlocking the full potential of Lao PDR's labor force. Engaging all stakeholders in ongoing dialogue and implementing necessary policy changes are crucial steps toward a more equitable and productive society. By acting on these recommendations, Lao PDR can transform existing challenges into opportunities, paving the way for meaningful inclusion and long-term prosperity.

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A CASE STUDY OF MONGOLIA

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Executive Summary

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the employment landscape for persons with disabilities in Mongolia, highlighting the current challenges, legislative frameworks, and potential solutions to enhance employment opportunities for this marginalized group. Despite various national and international policies promoting inclusion and equal opportunities, the employment rate for persons with disabilities in Mongolia remains disproportionately low.

The 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other related legal instruments aim to ensure equal access to employment and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. However, enforcement of these policies is insufficient, and numerous barriers persist, including limited access to education and vocational training, inadequate workplace accommodations, and widespread societal stigma and discrimination.

Rural areas, where 66.9% of persons with disabilities reside, face additional challenges due to limited job opportunities and inadequate infrastructure to accommodate persons with disabilities in the workforce.

This analysis employed a cross-sectional study, incorporating qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were gathered through interviews with persons with disabilities, employers, and healthcare workers in selected regions. Additionally, policy reviews and analyses of secondary data sources, such as government reports and international studies, were conducted to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Findings reveal that persons with disabilities in Mongolia encounter significant barriers in securing and maintaining employment. These barriers are physical, such as inaccessible infrastructure and transportation, and attitudinal, resulting from negative perceptions of disability. Moreover, the lack of vocational training programs and employment services specifically tailored to persons with disabilities further limits their opportunities for meaningful employment.

To address these challenges, the report suggests several actions, including stronger enforcement of existing legislation, improved accessibility in urban and rural workplaces, and the expansion of vocational training and educational opportunities tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities. Additionally, public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and promoting inclusive hiring practices are essential to fostering a more equitable labor market.

By enhancing policy implementation and fostering a more accessible, inclusive work environment, Mongolia can significantly improve employment rates as well as the quality of life for persons with disabilities, enabling their full participation in society.

This document provides a detailed analysis of the employment situation for persons with disabilities in Mongolia. It focuses on the challenges they face in securing employment, the legislative framework supporting their rights, and the barriers preventing their full participation in the workforce. While the government has taken steps to implement inclusion policies, such as the 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enforcement remains weak. This report recommends stronger policy enforcement, improved accessibility, and expanded vocational training to improve employment rates and the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

Introduction

Disability, as defined globally and recognized in Mongolia, refers to any physical, mental, emotional, or sensory impairment that limits a person's ability to fully and effectively participate in social life. These limitations often arise from the impairment as well as from environmental and societal barriers that limit inclusion. Disability is a universal human condition; at some point, nearly everyone will encounter a temporary or permanent disability, especially with advancing age, affecting their ability to perform daily functions and engage actively in society.

Global Framework for Disability Rights

In 2006, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), marking a transformative shift in the global perception and approach to disability. The CRPD's objective is to "promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity" [1]. This Convention advocates for a rights-based approach, moving beyond the traditional medical model, which primarily focuses on treatment and rehabilitation, to emphasize the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. It emphasizes that disability is not solely a personal health issue but is shaped by societal attitudes, accessibility barriers, and environmental factors.

Mongolia's Legislative Response

Building on the principles of the CRPD, Mongolia enacted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016 [2]. This legislation represents a crucial shift from a health-centered, welfare-based view of disability to a rights-based approach. It draws from the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), which integrates medical and social perspectives to define disability comprehensively. The ICF views disability through a biopsychosocial lens, recognizing that physical, emotional, and social factors collectively shape an individual's experience of disability [3].

By adopting this law, Mongolia aims to improve the country's low human development indicators for persons with disabilities, ensuring they are legally protected as well as empowered to participate fully in all aspects of society, including employment, education, and community life.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

This study aims to analyze the current employment situation of persons with disabilities in Mongolia, identify systemic challenges, and provide evidence-based policy recommendations. It examines disability within the broader Mongolian context, focusing on the impact of social security, employment, and legal frameworks on persons with disabilities.

The report is structured as follows:

1. **Introduction:** A foundational overview of disability as a social issue, along with Mongolia's legislative and international commitments.
2. **Policy Analysis:** An in-depth analysis of Mongolia's laws and policies pertaining to the rights and employment of persons with disabilities, highlighting existing gaps and areas for improvement.
3. **Situational Analysis:** A comprehensive assessment of the challenges and systemic barriers faced by persons with disabilities in employment settings.
4. **Policy Implications and Recommendations:** Evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving employment opportunities and promoting social inclusion for persons with disabilities in Mongolia.

Data Sources and Research Methodology

This analysis draws from multiple credible sources, including reports from the National Statistics Committee, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and social security data from Mongolian government

portals such as hudulmur.gov.mn and legal info.mn. Additionally, statistical reports, surveys, and data from the National Commission for Human Rights were reviewed. For data processing and analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences was employed to ensure analytical rigor.

Demographics and Disability Prevalence in Mongolia

According to the National Statistical Office (2023), Mongolia has over 111,228 persons with disabilities, comprising approximately 3.2% of the national population. This number has been gradually increasing, partly due to improved early detection and environmental factors such as pollution, which may contribute to disability rates (Table 1).

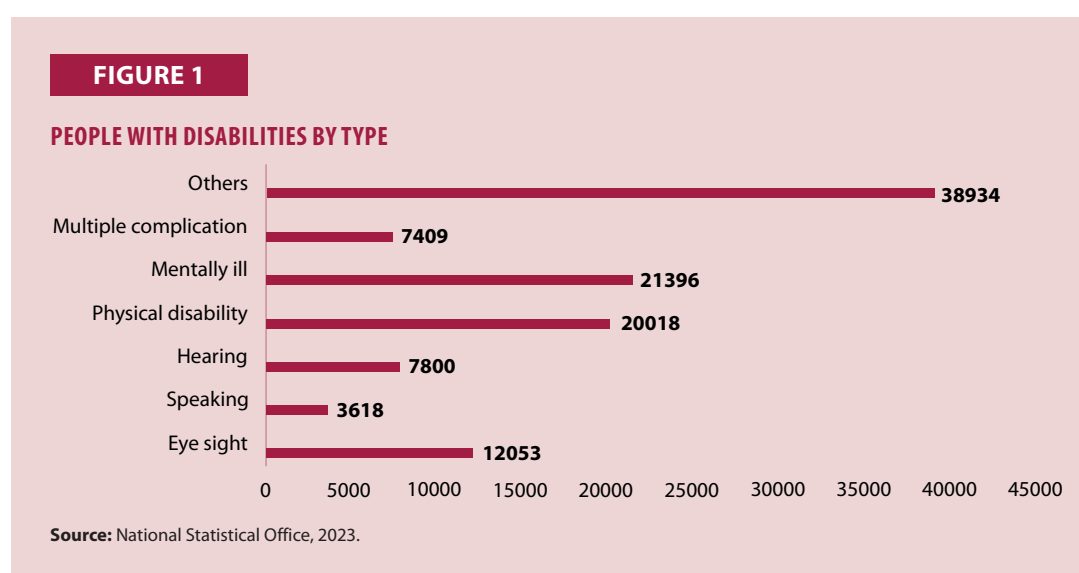
TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY TYPE (2013–23)

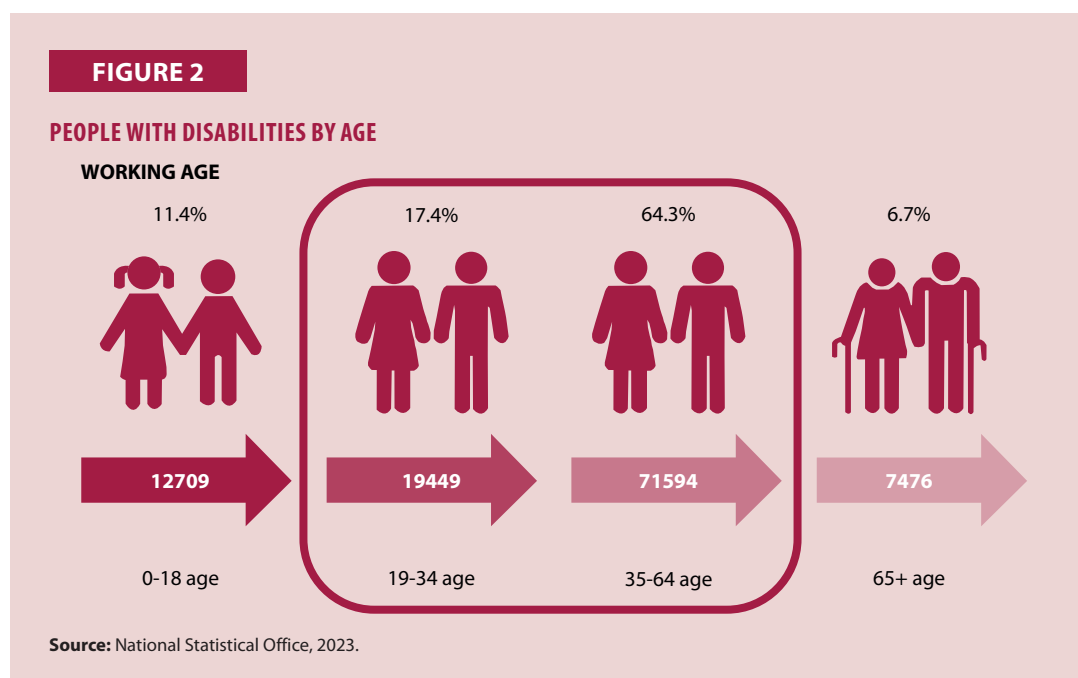
Disability	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	96325	99573	101730	100993	103630	105565	107075	108399	106169	115115	111228
Eyesight	9559	9652	10925	11001	11071	11534	11690	11871	11695	12696	12053
Speaking	5480	5294	4491	4367	4228	4299	4086	4060	4074	4220	3618
Hearing	8055	8304	8406	8560	8554	8445	8585	8708	8430	8780	7800
Physical disability	18351	18411	20110	20127	20688	21614	21545	21810	21011	21064	20018
Mental deficiency										0	0
Mentally ill	16549	16997	18433	18359	19733	20321	20728	20742	20414	21639	21396
Multiple complications	9571	10116	7912	8052	7842	7288	7334	7678	7430	7580	7409
Others	28760	30799	31453	30527	31514	32064	33107	33530	33115	39136	38934

Source: National Statistical Office, 2023.

Types of Disabilities: The population of persons with disabilities in Mongolia includes individuals with visual, auditory, physical, and mental impairments. Among them, physical disabilities are the most common, affecting over 20,000 individuals (Figure 1).



Age Distribution: A significant proportion of the population with disabilities (84%) is of working age, with 17.4% aged 19–34 and 64.3% aged 35–64. However, only about 16.3% of these individuals are employed, illustrating a critical employment gap for persons with disabilities in Mongolia (Figure 2).



Excerpt 1 (Group Interviews/Person with a Disability/Interview No. 1)

P1: “As a person with a disability, I have faced discrimination in various roles: as a child with a disability, as a woman in her 20s with a disability, as a mother with a disability after having a child, and as a civil servant with a disability.”

Challenges in Social Inclusion and Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Despite legislative progress, discrimination and exclusion remain pertinent issues. Many persons with disabilities continue to experience prejudice and social exclusion, rooted in deep-seated cultural beliefs and societal norms. Several factors contribute to this discrimination [5]:

- 1. Cultural Beliefs and Stigma:** Traditional Mongolian beliefs and values regarding disabilities often perpetuate stigma, resulting in social exclusion and limited opportunities. Many view disability as a source of shame, and persons with disabilities may experience discrimination in their public and private lives. This stigma also affects families, as parents often feel compelled to hide or shield their children with disabilities, resulting in isolation and fewer social interactions.
- 2. Gender-Related Risks and Vulnerabilities:** Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and experience greater obstacles in accessing social services. This intersectional discrimination limits their participation in education and employment, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities [6].
- 3. Educational Barriers:** Access to education remains a significant issue for children with disabilities. Although the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates that schools create accessible environments, inclusive education practices are still lacking. Specialized schools are largely concentrated in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia’s capital, with limited available options in rural areas [5]. Only about 20% of children with disabilities attend these specialized schools, leaving many without access to appropriate educational opportunities.
- 4. Employment Barriers:** Cultural and infrastructural barriers further restrict access to employment opportunities. Many workplaces lack the necessary accommodations to support employees with disabilities, and societal attitudes often prevent them from being seen as capable employees. As a result, unemployment rates among this group remain high, with the majority of employed individuals working in informal sectors or earning low wages.

Policy Context and Areas for Improvement

Mongolia's ratification of the CRPD in 2009 marked a significant step toward fostering a more inclusive society. Since then, Mongolia has enacted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities alongside other supportive regulations. However, full alignment with the Convention has yet to be achieved. Existing policy gaps highlight the need for improved access to social services, healthcare, education, and employment support for persons with disabilities. Moreover, additional efforts are required to fully integrate the principles of the Convention into Mongolia's social and legal frameworks [7].

According to the 2016 WHO Disability Brief, several barriers continue to impact the inclusion of persons with disabilities:

1. **Inadequate Policies and Standards:** Several policies lack enforceability, limiting their effectiveness in safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities.
2. **Negative Attitudes:** Deep-seated societal prejudices against disability hinder social integration and workplace inclusion.
3. **Limited Service Provision:** Specialized services for persons with disabilities remain scarce, especially in rural regions.
4. **Infrastructure and Accessibility Challenges:** Physical barriers, such as inaccessible buildings and transportation systems, restrict the full participation of persons with disabilities in social and economic activities.
5. **Insufficient Data and Evidence:** Reliable data on the population with disabilities are essential for effective policy planning; however, such data remain scarce in Mongolia [8].

In summary, the findings of this study underline the importance of adopting a comprehensive human rights-based approach to disability in Mongolia. Addressing legislative gaps, enhancing public awareness, and investing in inclusive infrastructure will foster a more supportive environment, enabling persons with disabilities to fully participate in society. Moreover, the study highlights the need for targeted social and employment programs, especially in rural areas, to bridge accessibility gaps and improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Implementing these improvements will better align Mongolia with international disability rights standards, fostering a more equitable society for all.

Policy Analysis Around Employment

Mongolia has made significant progress in developing a legal and policy framework to support the employment of persons with disabilities. Through various national laws and international commitments, the country aims to enhance social and economic inclusion for individuals belonging to this group. However, despite a robust framework, certain practical challenges persist, hindering effective implementation and making it difficult for persons with disabilities to access equal employment opportunities.

Legal and Policy Framework

Mongolia's commitment to disability rights is reflected in its ratification of over 20 international conventions, as well as the establishment of over 35 national legislative and policy frameworks. These frameworks are designed to protect persons with disabilities and promote their participation in the workforce. Key legal documents include [9]:

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** Mongolia ratified this Convention in 2009, committing to international standards that uphold the rights, dignity, and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The CRPD calls for full participation in social, economic, and cultural life, reinforcing the principle that disability rights are human rights [10].

- **Labor Law of Mongolia (1999):** This law includes a mandatory quota that requires organizations with 25 or more employees to reserve at least 4% of positions for persons with disabilities. The quota system aims to increase employment opportunities by holding employers accountable for inclusive hiring practices [11].
- **Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016):** A landmark law that shifted Mongolia's approach from a welfare-based to a rights-based model. It mandates that persons with disabilities retain access to social welfare benefits, even if employed, ensuring financial stability without disincentivizing participation in the workforce [12].
- **Personal Income Tax Law (2019):** Provides tax exemptions for persons with disabilities, reducing their financial burden and promoting economic independence. This law serves as a fiscal incentive to enhance financial security for persons with disabilities [13].
- **Incheon Strategy for Asia-Pacific (2012):** Mongolia has adopted this regional framework to promote disability inclusion in the Asia-Pacific region. The strategy addresses key areas such as employment, education, and social participation, aligning Mongolia's national policies with broader international efforts [14].

These legal provisions are further supported by national programs such as the National Program for the Rights, Participation, and Development of People with Disabilities (2017) as well as the Job Support Program for Persons with Disabilities (2017), both of which aim to foster a more inclusive and accessible work environment for persons with disabilities.

Positive Developments and Institutional Support

Several recent reforms and initiatives reflect Mongolia's ongoing efforts to implement disability-inclusive policies:

- **Amendments to the Labor Code (2021):** These amendments provide additional protections for persons with disabilities in employment settings, mandating that workplaces be accessible and that hiring practices be inclusive.
- **National Program on Rights, Participation, and Development (2018–22):** This program emphasizes inclusive policies that improve access to healthcare, education, and employment for persons with disabilities. It aims to increase social participation by ensuring equal access to job training and employment support.
- **Supervisory Committees and National Councils:** The establishment of a National Supervisory Committee in 2016, along with councils within each ministry, demonstrates Mongolia's commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration in the implementation of disability rights policies. These committees provide oversight and support, coordinating efforts across ministries and local governments.
- **Development of Specialized Centers:** Rehabilitation, training, and production centers have been established to offer tailored support services. One example is the "Disability and Equality" training program, which was implemented with support from Japan. This program educates employers and the public on disability rights, contributing to greater societal awareness [15].

Challenges in Implementation and Enforcement

Although Mongolia's policy framework aligns closely with international standards, practical challenges have limited its effectiveness:

- **Weak Implementation and Oversight:** Enforcement of disability rights laws remains inconsistent, with monitoring mechanisms proving inadequate due to limited resources for inspecting workplaces and ensuring employer compliance with the employment quota. Moreover, many businesses remain unaware of their legal obligations.

- **Inadequate Budget and Resources:** Budget constraints impede the success of several disability support programs, limiting the scope of vocational training, job placement assistance, and workplace accommodations. These financial constraints prevent the full execution of program goals, thereby limiting access to employment services.
- **Stakeholder Coordination:** Fragmented cooperation among government agencies, NGOs, and private sector actors hinders a unified approach. Studies indicate that 24.4% of regulations overlap with other laws, while 35.5% lack full compliance across sectors. This fragmentation results in duplicated efforts and policy gaps, limiting the overall impact of programs designed to support persons with disabilities.
- **Insufficient Infrastructure for Accessibility:** Accessibility remains a significant issue in Mongolia. Though laws mandate accessible infrastructure, few public or private buildings adhere to these standards. The lack of ramps, elevators, and accessible bathrooms creates barriers to accessing public spaces and workplaces, restricting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Employment Support Programs

Mongolia has implemented several initiatives to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. Between 2019 and 2021, the Program to Support the Employment of Persons with Disabilities engaged 3,969 individuals and 279 organizations, resulting in the creation of 1,171 jobs and the allocation of MNT4.4 billion to employment initiatives. Program assessments indicate an implementation rate of 81.7%, reflecting active government involvement, with room for improvement in terms of scope and outreach [16].

Notable Support Programs Include:

- **Employment Support Law:** This law provides financial incentives, including tax breaks, for employers hiring persons with disabilities. It also offers wage subsidies and funding for workplace adaptations to encourage inclusive hiring and retention. Planned amendments aim to enhance these incentives to further attract employers.
- **Development Centers for Persons with Disabilities:** Operating across six provinces, these centers offer training, rehabilitation, and job placement support. Their services include career counseling, vocational training, and specialized rehabilitation to improve job readiness and workplace integration for persons with disabilities.
- **Disability and Equality Training:** Now in its fourth year, Mongolia's annual "Disability and Equality" program focuses on educating employers and society on the benefits of inclusive hiring. While the program has contributed to increased employer awareness, additional training and outreach efforts remain necessary.

Creating a Barrier-Free Environment

The 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities introduced mandates to foster a barrier-free environment, encompassing physical, digital, and information accessibility. The law requires public and private spaces to be accessible, including transportation systems, information platforms, and assistive devices. However, enforcement remains weak, and progress is slow due to budget constraints and low public awareness. Organizations advocating for persons with disabilities have been at the forefront of monitoring accessibility in public spaces and pushing for improvements [17].

Social Welfare and Tax Benefits

Mongolia's social welfare policy includes multiple provisions to promote financial independence among persons with disabilities:

- **Social Insurance and Pensions:** Persons with disabilities are eligible for social insurance pensions, with their benefits remaining intact even if they choose to work. This policy ensures that employment does not compromise access to essential social welfare benefits.

- **Income Tax Exemptions:** Persons with disabilities are exempt from paying income tax, which reduces their financial burden and encourages workforce participation.
- **Expanded Services:** The 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guarantees various benefits, including healthcare, social assistance, transportation subsidies, and prioritized access to public services. However, budget constraints often restrict these benefits, diminishing their overall effectiveness.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Mongolia's policy framework for the employment and social inclusion of persons with disabilities is extensive and well-aligned with international standards. However, several key areas require attention to drive meaningful progress:

1. **Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms:** Effective monitoring of employment quotas, workplace accessibility, and employer compliance is essential. Allocating additional resources to inspections and establishing penalties for non-compliance can encourage greater adherence to regulations and promote a more inclusive job market.
2. **Increasing Funding for Disability Programs:** Sustainable financial support is necessary to expand vocational training, job placement services, and workplace adaptation initiatives. Greater investment in these areas will enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities while assisting employers in fostering inclusive work environments.
3. **Improving Stakeholder Coordination:** Improved coordination among government ministries, NGOs, and the private sector can reduce redundancy, improve efficiency, and strengthen overall support systems for persons with disabilities.
4. **Advancing Accessibility Initiatives:** Implementing standardized accessibility measures across public spaces and workplaces is vital. Prioritizing infrastructure improvements, especially in urban areas, will help eliminate physical barriers that hinder access to employment opportunities.

By addressing these challenges, Mongolia can foster a more equitable labor market, enabling persons with disabilities to fully participate in society and contribute to the country's broader social and economic development.

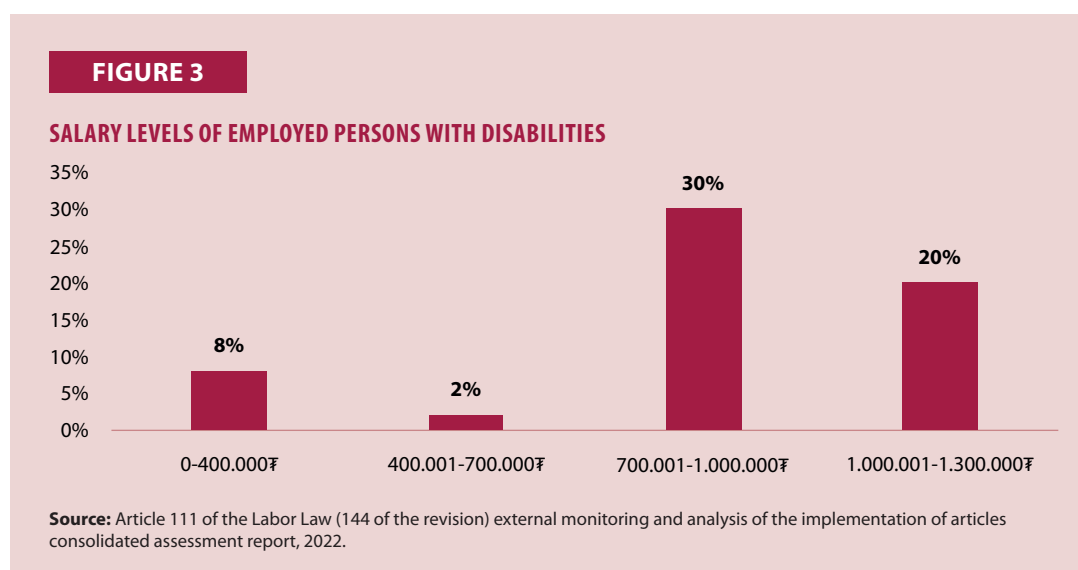
Situational Analysis of Employment

This analysis examines the key factors influencing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Mongolia. Despite existing policies and support programs, significant gaps persist in ensuring equitable access to employment, with barriers rooted in structural, social, and economic factors.

Access to Employment

- **Employment Rates:** The employment rate for persons with disabilities remains notably low. As of 2014, only 25.2% of individuals aged 15 and above with disabilities were economically active, compared with 62.1% of the general population. This substantial gap highlights persistent disparities in workforce participation, underscoring the challenges persons with disabilities face in securing and retaining employment [18].
- **Type of Employment:** Many persons with disabilities who are employed work in low-paying, informal roles that lack job security and benefits. Approximately 45% of economically active persons with disabilities are employed as herders, compared with 25% of the general population, highlighting limited occupational diversity. Furthermore, only 22% of persons with disabilities hold paid jobs, compared with 50% of their peers without disabilities, reflecting significant barriers to accessing stable, salaried employment [19].

- **Income Disparities:** Persons with disabilities earn, on average, approximately half the national income level, with those experiencing mental disabilities facing even greater challenges in securing higher-paying roles. Income inequality perpetuates financial dependence and poverty, further limiting opportunities for social and economic mobility.



As shown in Figure 3, 82.3% of the wage data for employed persons with disabilities come from private sector workers. Among them, 5.4% earn up to MNT420,000, 73.7% earn between MNT420,000 and MNT900,000, 16.9% earn between MNT900,000 and MNT1,500,000, and 3.9% receive salaries exceeding MNT1,500,000. Approximately 74% of working persons with disabilities earn between MNT420,000 and MNT900,000, which is 1.8 times lower than the national average salary. These low wages provide little to no financial incentive for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce [19].

Public Employment Services and Support Programs

- **Employment Promotion Services:** Mongolia's employment services provide a wide range of support, including job counseling, skills matching, and access to unemployment benefits. Targeted programs for persons with disabilities offer vocational training, self-employment assistance, and financial support for businesses run by persons with disabilities. However, these programs are often centralized, limiting access for individuals in rural areas, where the majority of persons with disabilities reside.
- **Legal Frameworks for Inclusion:** The Mongolian Labor Code mandates a 3% employment quota for persons with disabilities in organizations with over 50 employees. However, compliance remains inadequate due to weak enforcement mechanisms and limited employer awareness. Few incentives and penalties exist to encourage companies to meet these quotas, and without active monitoring, many businesses do not prioritize inclusive hiring practices.

TABLE 2

MAIN COMPLAINTS FROM EMPLOYERS REGARDING THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Form	The reason	Percent
Enterprises and organizations do not employ persons with disabilities	1. Job adjustment requirements and finances	12.0
	2. Career characteristics	23.3
	3. Unable to handle workload	7.2
	4. Productivity is low	3.1
	5. Family problems	

Source: Article 111 of the Labor Law (144 of the revision) external monitoring and analysis of the implementation of articles consolidated assessment report, 2022.

The 23.3% of paid and non-paid workers who do not comply with clauses 1 and 2 of Article 111 of the Labor Law need to adjust to the workplace, while 7.2% are unable to handle the workload. Additionally, 3.1% believe that employing a person with a disability is impossible due to perceived lower productivity (Table 2) [19].

Regarding the employment status of persons with disabilities, enterprises and organizations are required to make payments for not employing persons with disabilities for two main reasons. Conversely, some persons with disabilities remain unpaid due to non-employment. A detailed analysis follows in Table 3:

TABLE 3

REASONS FOR PAYMENT OR NON-PAYMENT RELATED TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1 Payment due to non-employment of persons with disabilities	1. There are no job vacancies suitable for persons with disabilities 2. When a person with a disability is employed, their education and skills do not align with the job requirements 3. A person with a disability has never applied for a job
2 No payment for non-employment of persons with disabilities	1. Fees are not included in the annual budget 2. A previously employed person with a disability has retired, was fired, or passed away 3. No invoices to be paid 4. There are no suitable vacancies 5. A person with a disability has never applied for a job

Source: Article 111 of the Labor Law (144 of the revision) external monitoring and analysis report on the implementation of articles consolidated assessment report, 2022.

In budget institutions, labor contributions for persons with disabilities are not paid due to their exclusion from the employment support fund, which significantly impacts financial planning and allocation.

- **Challenges in Implementation:** The quota system's effectiveness is hindered by limited employer participation and a lack of financial incentives. While the framework is in place, its impact on improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remains minimal.

Of the 3,243 organizations monitored and evaluated, 2,440 (75.3%) fully or partially comply with Article 111.1 (revised 144.1) of the Labor Law. Meanwhile, 546 organizations (16.8%) fail to implement the law, 249 organizations (7.7%) have fewer than 25 employees, and seven organizations (0.2%) do not employ persons with disabilities but pay fees. Nationwide compliance with the law stands at 60.0%, with public institutions reporting a compliance rate of 59% and the private sector at 61%. Future employment opportunities for 3,838 persons with disabilities could be created to ensure full legal implementation [19].

Social Welfare Benefits and Limitations

- **Social Welfare and Insurance Provisions:** Mongolia provides two main types of benefits for persons with disabilities: Contributory social insurance (disability pensions) and non-contributory social assistance. Social insurance offers pensions to those who meet the minimum contribution period, whereas non-contributory assistance supports individuals with insufficient contributions.
- **Special Entitlements:** Additional benefits include caregiver allowances, rehabilitation services, transportation subsidies, and funding for assistive devices. Despite these provisions, the benefits are often inadequate due to bureaucratic constraints and low benefit amounts relative to the cost of living.
- **Gaps in Coverage:** The majority of persons with disabilities, particularly those in remote areas, remain excluded from receiving adequate support. Social welfare benefits are insufficiently tailored to individual needs, and in the absence of comprehensive needs assessments, there is no assurance that funds and resources are allocated efficiently.

Barriers and Discrimination in Employment

- **Educational Barriers:** Low educational attainment among persons with disabilities is primarily due to inaccessible schooling and a lack of inclusive learning environments. Without adequate education, individuals struggle to gain the necessary skills for competitive employment.
- **Inadequate Workplace Accessibility:** Physical barriers in workplaces and public spaces significantly limit mobility for persons with disabilities. Only 17.5% of government-owned buildings are accessible, and a mere 2.6% of public transport vehicles can accommodate wheelchairs, restricting commuting options and full workplace participation.
- **Social Stigma and Family Perceptions:** Widespread beliefs that persons with disabilities are incapable of independent work persist, often influenced by outdated medical perspectives. This stigma, combined with a lack of workplace accommodations, discourages employers from hiring persons with disabilities and negatively impacts their confidence in securing employment.

TABLE 4

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OBSERVED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS (PERCENT)

Negative aspects	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
Manager's attitude is bad	66.1	28.95	4.95
The community atmosphere is bad	70.3	25.85	3.9
Poor productivity due to lack of workplace adjustment	65.85	28.85	5.3
The community's knowledge, understanding, and attitude toward persons with disabilities are not fully developed	64.55	29.2	6.25
Workload exceeds actual capacity	52.4	39.85	7.75

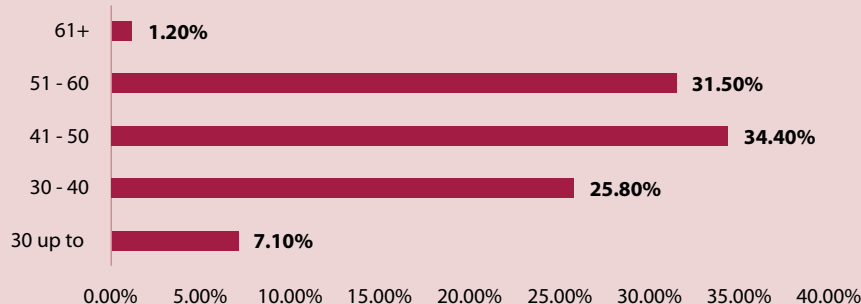
Source: Article 111 of the Labor Law (144 of the revision) external monitoring and analysis of the implementation of articles consolidated assessment report, 2022.

Although most employed persons with disabilities are satisfied with their jobs, certain negative aspects were mentioned. For example, 4.95% of the respondents reported that the management staff's attitude was unsatisfactory, 5.3% noted low productivity due to inadequate workplace adjustment, 6.25% stated that the community's knowledge, understanding, and attitude toward persons with disabilities were underdeveloped, and 7.75% felt that their workload exceeded their actual abilities (Table 4).

In contrast, 87.7% of employed persons with disabilities expressed satisfaction with their current job, 93.1% reported an increase in income, 86.5% indicated they gained more friends, and 95.6% experienced a boost in self-confidence. The survey results also indicate that colleagues and co-workers (95.4%) serve as the primary sources of support and guidance for employees with disabilities in overcoming workplace challenges.

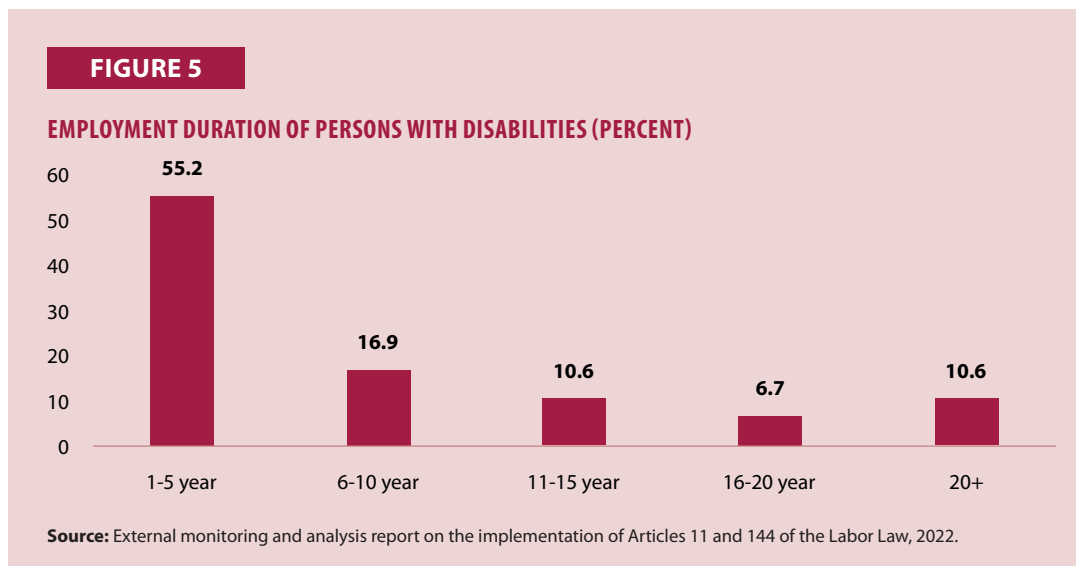
FIGURE 4

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



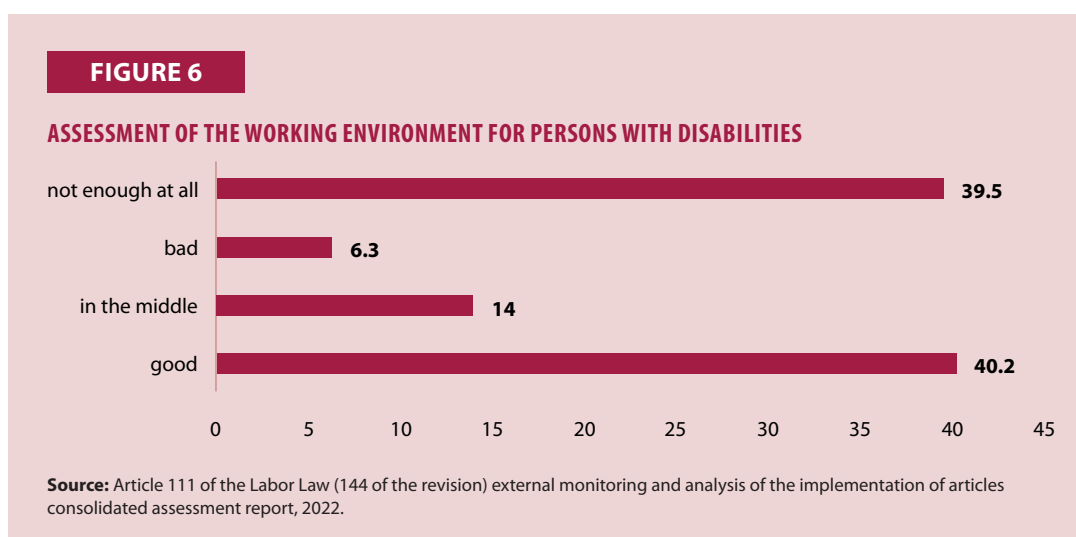
Source: Article 111 of the Labor Law (144 of the revision) external monitoring and analysis of the implementation of articles consolidated assessment report, 2022.

Information gathered during the monitoring and evaluation of Law 111/144 revealed data on 4,140 persons with disabilities employed in enterprises that partially or fully comply with the law (Figure 4). An analysis of the age distribution of working persons with disabilities shows that 7.1% are under 30 years old, 25.8% are between 30 and 40 years old, 34.4% are between 41 and 50 years old, 31.5% are between 51 and 60 years old, and 1.2% are 61 years or older. Notably, over 60% of working persons with disabilities are aged 40 or older, with 49.7% being males and 50.3% females.



Regarding the duration of employment, 55.2% have been employed for 1–5 years, 16.91% for 6–10 years, 10.6% for 11–15 years, 6.7% for 16–20 years, and 10.6% for over 20 years. More than half of the persons with disabilities working in ANBs have secured employment within the past five years (Figure 5).

A total of 95.0% of employed individuals with disabilities have signed employment contracts, and 84.5% are aware of the contents of these contracts. In addition to employment contracts, job descriptions are other key documents that define an employee’s role. According to the survey, the majority of employees have job descriptions in place; 89.8% of persons with disabilities are familiar with their job descriptions, and 85.8% perform their duties as specified. Regarding awareness of Article 111 of the Labor Law, 38.55% of the surveyed persons with disabilities had good or very good knowledge, 35.85% had medium knowledge, and 25.6% had poor knowledge. Additionally, 64.35% rated this law as important, while 62.7% were satisfied with its implementation.



When asked about workplace equipment, 39.5% of employed persons with disabilities reported that no suitable equipment was available, 40.2% rated the equipment as good, 14.0% as average, and 6.3% as bad (Figure 6).

TABLE 5

RATINGS OF WORKPLACE APPROPRIATENESS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PERCENT)

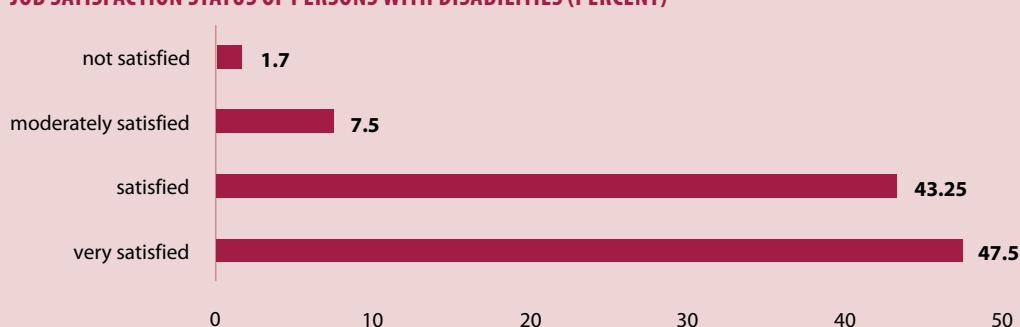
Facilities	Good	Medium	Bad	Not at all
Ramp	48.8	19.5	4.8	26.9
Entrance and exit	56.2	16.8	8.0	19.0
Ability to travel between floors	34.5	10.9	8.0	46.6
Service room availability	52.8	22.1	5.7	19.4
Braille signs for elevators	19.1	7.0	4.6	69.2
Bathroom with special equipment	31.8	11.9	6.6	49.7
Disaster information delivery tool	55.1	17.2	5.1	22.6
Parking lot with special equipment	36.1	11.8	6.9	45.2
Access to bulletin boards	51.3	17.3	9.4	22
Guide way	27.7	12.5	7.0	52.9
Braille signage	28.7	6.9	2.9	61.5

Source: External monitoring and analysis report on the implementation of Articles 111 and 144 of the Labor Law, 2022.

When assessing workplace facilities for persons with disabilities by category, indicators such as ramps, entrances and exits, access to service halls, access to information boards, and tools for delivering disaster information received the highest ratings. However, the majority indicated the absence of accessibility features, including a guideway, Braille signage in rooms and elevators, designated parking spaces, and specially equipped bathroom amenities (Table 5).

FIGURE 7

JOB SATISFACTION STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PERCENT)



Source: Article 111 of the Labor Law (144 of the revision) external monitoring and analysis of the implementation of articles consolidated assessment report, 2022.

When asked about their job satisfaction, 90.75% of persons with disabilities reported being satisfied with their current job, while 7.5% expressed slight dissatisfaction. Notably, 1.7% reported significant dissatisfaction. This finding highlights the critical role of employment in enhancing the well-being of persons with disabilities (Figure 7).

Employer Perceptions and Compliance Issues

- **Awareness and Compliance with Employment Quotas:** Despite the 3% employment quota mandated by the Labor Code, many employers are either unaware of the law or disregard it due to limited

consequences for non-compliance. Awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement are necessary to educate employers about their legal obligations and the benefits of inclusive hiring.

- **Concerns About Accommodation Costs:** Employers often overestimate the expenses associated with accommodating persons with disabilities in the workplace. Without clear guidance on cost-effective adaptations, businesses may avoid hiring employees with disabilities due to perceived financial burdens, despite many accommodations being low-cost and highly effective.
- **Misconceptions About Productivity:** A common misconception among employers is that persons with disabilities are less productive. This bias contributes to discrimination and reluctance to hire persons with disabilities, even for positions for which they are well-qualified.

Community-Based Rehabilitation and Social Support

- **Community-Based Rehabilitation Approach and Alignment with International Standards:** Mongolia's Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) strategy, developed following the UN CRPD, aims to provide localized access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and employment support. The CBR approach seeks to reduce reliance on institutionalization by promoting independence.
- **Service Gaps in Community-Based Rehabilitation Programs:** The reach of Mongolia's programs is limited, with only a fraction of persons with disabilities receiving necessary services. Although CBR aims to provide home care, caregiver allowances, and vocational training, its effectiveness is hindered by resource limitations and the lack of comprehensive data on the specific needs of persons with disabilities [20].

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Promoting Inclusive Hiring and Social Awareness:** Public awareness campaigns highlighting the skills and contributions of persons with disabilities can help reshape societal attitudes and promote more inclusive hiring practices.
- **Strengthening Policy Enforcement:** Stricter monitoring and enforcement of the employment quota system, coupled with financial incentives, could enhance compliance. Regular inspections and tangible penalties for non-compliance would hold employers accountable and further improve opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- **Investing in Accessible Infrastructure:** Expanding accessible infrastructure in urban and rural areas is crucial. Investments in public transportation, workplaces, and public buildings can help eliminate mobility barriers, enabling greater community participation and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

In summary, the situational analysis reveals that while Mongolia has laid a foundation for supporting persons with disabilities, significant gaps remain in execution, social acceptance, and infrastructure. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multi-pronged approach involving stronger policy enforcement, improved accessibility, expanded vocational training opportunities, and a shift in public attitudes. With these enhancements, Mongolia can foster a more inclusive environment, enabling persons with disabilities to participate fully in the workforce and society, in alignment with national goals and international human rights standards.

Policy Implications and Recommendations on Employment

Policy Implications and Recommendations for Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Mongolia.

The Mongolian government has demonstrated a commitment to improving employment and social integration for persons with disabilities through investments and legislative efforts. Between 2019 and 2021, the "Program to Support the Employment of Persons with Disabilities" facilitated employment for

1,171 individuals, with MNT4.4 billion allocated to employment initiatives. However, performance metrics indicate strengths and areas requiring further improvement, carrying significant policy implications for the future.

Key Policy Implications

Program Performance and Resource Allocation:

While the financial support provided to employers exceeded expectations, achieving 127% of the target, other aspects, such as employer engagement, fell short, reaching only 55% of the target. This suggests that while current programs effectively provide financial assistance, further alignment with employer requirements is necessary to enhance engagement and improve workplace accommodations.

Legal Framework and Implementation Gaps

The 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other legislative efforts, including the National Human Development Policy (2024–28), establish a foundation for disability rights in employment. However, certain enforcement gaps persist, especially in monitoring compliance with employment quotas for persons with disabilities. The law mandates that organizations with 25 or more employees reserve at least 4% of positions for persons with disabilities. However, many employers remain unaware of or fail to adhere to this requirement due to inadequate monitoring and weak penalty structures.

Implementation of the Human Development Policy (2024–28)

The Government of Mongolia has formulated the Human Development Policy (2024–28) [21], which aims to foster an inclusive living environment that supports the development, learning, and well-being of the Mongolian people, ensuring no one is left behind. Within the framework of the “Prosperous Mongolians” initiative, specific policies tailored to family and population characteristics must be effectively implemented to ensure persons with disabilities benefit from a wealthy, educated, and healthy society.

Policies for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

- 2.1.1.23. Implement a comprehensive plan to promote a thorough understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities in society. Additionally, the legal framework should be strengthened to ensure they have access to equal rights and opportunities for social participation.
- 2.1.1.24. Enact the Accessibility and Accessibility Act and establish uniform infrastructure standards to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities in all types of housing, commercial, and service establishments.
- 2.1.1.25. Gradually introduce an international methodology for determining the operational capacity of persons with disabilities. Expand the variety and availability of interdisciplinary social services and promote information accessibility.
- 2.1.1.26. Improve the quality of social care and services for persons with disabilities. Moreover, a Human Development Center should be established at the state and provincial levels, with the development of personal care partnerships at the district level.
- 2.1.1.27. To promote the employment of persons with disabilities, enterprises and organizations with 25 or more employees, regardless of type or ownership, must ensure that at least 4% of their total workforce comprises persons with disabilities, in accordance with employment laws.
- 2.1.1.28. Strengthen employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by promoting electronic, remote, part-time, and short-term work options, thereby increasing income-generating opportunities.
- 2.1.1.29. Implement seven key measures to improve the quality of social care and services for persons with disabilities through government, private sector, and social partnerships.

Infrastructure and Accessibility Challenges

Currently, no comprehensive law enforces accessibility standards across public spaces, workplaces, and housing. The proposed Accessibility and Inclusion Act aims to bridge this gap by implementing universal design principles across all building types, thereby enhancing mobility and independence for persons with disabilities.

Employment Support Services

Mongolia's current support services include vocational training, career counseling, and socio-psychological support. However, these services are often centralized, making them less accessible to persons with disabilities in rural areas. The Employment Services Map is a promising initiative that seeks to provide lifelong access to training, employment, and support services. However, for greater impact, it requires increased targeted funding and stronger community-based support.

Innovative Inclusion Efforts through Technology

The rise of remote work and digital platforms presents a unique opportunity to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, especially in rural areas where job opportunities are limited. Expanding support for flexible, part-time, and remote roles can help bridge the prevalent employment gap.

Recommendations for Policy Enhancement

Strengthen Legislative Enforcement and Monitoring

The government, especially the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, should prioritize enforcing existing employment quotas and disability rights legislation. Increased inspections and clear penalties for non-compliance are essential to ensuring that employers adhere to hiring quotas. Additionally, offering incentives to companies that exceed minimum requirements—such as implementing accessibility improvements or providing specialized job training—can drive compliance and foster a more inclusive workplace culture. A timeline of 1–2 years is recommended for implementing improved enforcement practices.

Expand and Upgrade Accessible Infrastructure

The lack of accessible infrastructure in the urban and rural areas of Mongolia limits the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities. The proposed Accessibility and Inclusion Act should be enacted to enforce appropriate standards across public buildings, workplaces, housing, and transport systems. Infrastructure improvements should be introduced in phases, with an initial focus on high-density urban areas where the impact will be most significant. A phased implementation over 3–5 years is recommended for meaningful progress.

Invest in Vocational Training and Education Programs

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor should collaborate to establish specialized vocational training programs tailored to different types of disabilities. These programs should focus on equipping persons with disabilities with relevant, in-demand skills that align with the requirements of the labor market. Additionally, supporting education initiatives that promote accessible learning environments will help young persons with disabilities develop foundational skills. This initiative could begin within a year, with measurable outcomes anticipated within 3–5 years as program offerings and participation expand.

Launch Public Awareness Campaigns to Address Stigma

To challenge the deep-rooted stigma surrounding disabilities, public awareness campaigns should focus on reshaping societal perceptions by highlighting the abilities and achievements of persons with disabilities, while promoting inclusive hiring as a beneficial practice for organizations and society. Training workshops targeted at employers and educational institutions should foster an understanding of disability rights as well as the economic and social contributions of persons with disabilities. Campaigns can begin within one year and continue over several years to drive sustained cultural change.

Increase Financial Incentives for Inclusive Employers

Introducing financial incentives, such as tax breaks and grants, for employers who hire persons with disabilities and meet or exceed legal employment quotas can encourage more organizations to adopt inclusive practices. The Ministry of Finance could oversee this program, providing scalable incentives based on company size and hiring practices. Additionally, grants could be extended to companies investing in workplace modifications, such as wheelchair ramps, assistive technologies, or flexible workspaces. These financial incentives could be initiated within 1–2 years, with periodic reviews every 5 years to assess economic impact and effectiveness.

Implement a Centralized Database and Improve Data Collection

A centralized, regularly updated database managed by the National Statistical Office and relevant ministries will provide vital insights into the requirements, demographics, and employment status of persons with disabilities. Comprehensive, disaggregated data will enable evidence-based decision-making, targeted policy interventions, and better monitoring of program outcomes. Implementing this centralized data system within one year could equip policymakers with the necessary information to refine and adapt disability-related employment policies effectively.

Support the Development of Flexible and Remote Work Opportunities

Remote, flexible, and part-time work opportunities are essential for providing equitable employment opportunities, especially for persons with disabilities in rural or remote areas. Policies should encourage employers to offer remote roles and adapt positions to accommodate virtual or flexible work arrangements. Furthermore, providing financial assistance for the technology and training necessary for remote work could help reduce employment barriers. This strategy aligns with global trends and could be implemented in a phased approach over the next 1–3 years.

Excerpt 4 (Individual Interview/Residents/Interview No. 4)

P4: “Most citizens, enterprises, and NGOs with IDs lack information about the program. It is not publicly accessible, and the announcement period is brief. The lack of comprehensive information, especially when awaiting a government job, complicates both service delivery and evaluation, ultimately leading to inefficiencies.”

In Mongolia, segregation and exclusion remain prevalent. However, efforts should be directed toward fostering an inclusive society [22].

Moreover, pensions and allowances for persons with disabilities, as part of the social security policy, are not distributed equitably and access to them remain inconsistent.

Excerpt 5 (Individual Interview/Residents/Interview No. 4)

“Member of Parliament O.S: As an MP elected through the party list as a representative of persons with disabilities, I have extensively explained the significance of the phrase ‘no one should be left behind.’

#Disability
#Elderly
#SocialWork
#VolunteerWork”

In summary, the employment landscape for persons with disabilities in Mongolia demands stronger policy reinforcement, improved infrastructure, and a transformation in societal attitudes to promote inclusivity. Implementing these measures will aid Mongolia in fulfilling its international commitments, including the UNCRPD and SDGs. A more inclusive labor market will enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities as well as strengthen Mongolia’s social and economic framework, fostering a more equitable and sustainable society.

TABLE 6

SWOT ANALYSIS: NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICE VALIDATION OF EMPLOYMENT SITUATION RESULTS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Internal environment	
Strength	Weaknesses
1. Legislative Support: Mongolia has established a legislative framework to support the employment of persons with disabilities, including the 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a mandate requiring organizations with over 50 employees to maintain a 3% employment quota. 2. International Commitments: By ratifying the UNCRPD and aligning with international frameworks, Mongolia has demonstrated its commitment to disability rights. 3. Growing Awareness and Policy Evolution: The shift from a medical model to a rights-based model of disability is ongoing, aligning with modern standards for inclusion. 4. Government Support Programs: Programs such as the “Employment Support Program for Persons with Disabilities” provide some level of funding and assistance for employment, vocational training, and business support.	1. Poor Enforcement of Legislation: Weak enforcement of disability rights and employment quotas results in low compliance among employers and minimal job opportunities for persons with disabilities. 2. Limited Access to Education and Training: Citizens with disabilities face substantial barriers to accessing quality education and vocational training, limiting their competitiveness in the job market. 3. Insufficient Accessibility: Many workplaces, especially in rural areas, lack accessible infrastructure, making it challenging for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce. 4. Prevalent Stigma and Discrimination: Societal stigma and negative perceptions persist, creating additional attitudinal barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. 5. Data and Monitoring Gaps: A lack of comprehensive data on the population with disabilities impedes effective planning, monitoring, and implementation of programs.
External environment	
Opportunity	Threat
1. Enhanced Policy Enforcement and Monitoring: Strengthening enforcement mechanisms and monitoring compliance with existing laws pertaining to employment of persons with disabilities could result in significant progress. 2. Public Awareness and Cultural Shift: Campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and promoting inclusivity can help foster a more welcoming environment, encouraging employers to hire persons with disabilities. 3. Infrastructure Development for Accessibility: Investments in accessible infrastructure across urban and rural areas could improve the independence and mobility of persons with disabilities, making workforce participation more feasible. 4. Incentives for Employers: Financial and tax incentives for companies hiring persons with disabilities can enhance compliance and encourage more inclusive hiring practices. 5. Technology and Remote Work: With the rise of remote work, there is potential to create flexible, accessible job opportunities for persons with disabilities who may face challenges in physically commuting to traditional workplaces.	1. Economic Constraints: Budget constraints may restrict government programs designed to support persons with disabilities, reducing the effectiveness of employment and support initiatives. 2. Persistent Social Attitudes: Deep-rooted societal stigma and misconceptions about disability could hinder efforts to promote workplace inclusion and delay shifts in employer attitudes. 3. Rural–Urban Disparities: The concentration of resources in urban areas leaves rural regions with fewer employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructure for persons with disabilities. 4. Fragmented Support Services: Limited coordination among government agencies and NGOs can lead to fragmented support services, reducing the effectiveness of assistance programs for persons with disabilities. 5. Global Economic Uncertainty: External economic factors may impact the funding and prioritization of disability-inclusive programs, posing risks to the sustained progress of initiatives aimed at improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The employment situation for persons with disabilities in Mongolia reveals significant gaps between legislative intentions and real-world outcomes. Although Mongolia has made progress in recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities through policies like the 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and international commitments such as the UNCRPD, implementation remains inconsistent. Key issues include inadequate enforcement of policies, limited accessibility to education and vocational training, insufficient workplace accommodations, and widespread social stigma. These challenges are especially pronounced in rural areas, where the majority of persons with disabilities reside, lacking employment opportunities and the necessary infrastructure to support their integration into the workforce.

To address these challenges and promote the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Enforcement of Existing Legislation:** The Mongolian government, especially the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, should prioritize the enforcement of the 2016 Disability Rights Law and the employment quota system. This can be achieved by increasing inspections, imposing penalties on employers for non-compliance, and providing incentives for businesses that adopt inclusive hiring practices. A timeline of 1–2 years for initial improvements in enforcement mechanisms is suggested.
2. **Enhance Accessibility in Urban and Rural Workplaces:** Local and national authorities should work to improve infrastructure accessibility in urban and rural regions. Public buildings, workplaces, and transportation systems must be made accessible to support the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities. This process requires a phased approach, to achieve substantial infrastructure improvements within the next 5 years.
3. **Expand Vocational Training and Education:** The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor, should establish and expand specialized vocational training programs for persons with disabilities. These programs should be tailored to various types of disabilities, enabling individuals to develop skills that meet current market demands. This initiative could begin within a year, with measurable impacts expected in 3–5 years, with an increase in training opportunities and participation.
4. **Launch Public Awareness Campaigns:** To combat societal stigma, public awareness campaigns highlighting the contributions and rights of persons with disabilities should be launched. These campaigns, targeted at employers, communities, and educational institutions, should promote a shift toward a more inclusive societal attitude. Initiating such campaigns within the next year and continuing them over the next 3–5 years could significantly improve public perceptions and reduce discrimination.
5. **Increase Employer Incentives and Support:** Financial and tax incentives should be offered to businesses that actively employ and accommodate persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Finance could design tax breaks or grants to encourage businesses that surpass the mandated hiring quotas. Implementation within 1–2 years would provide immediate incentives, with a longer-term assessment of their economic impact after 5 years.
6. **Establish a Centralized Database and Improve Data Collection:** To better understand the needs and demographics of persons with disabilities, the National Statistical Office, alongside relevant ministries, should establish a centralized, regularly updated database. This data would enable more informed decision-making as well as targeted policy adjustments. Establishing this system within a year would enhance the monitoring of program effectiveness.

By implementing these recommendations within a structured timeline, Mongolia can foster a more equitable and inclusive labor market, significantly improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities, and promote their full participation in society. These efforts align with Mongolia's broader social and economic objectives and will help fulfill international commitments to human rights and disability inclusion.

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A CASE STUDY OF THE PHILIPPINES

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Executive Summary

This study critically examines the policies and practices related to disability-inclusive employment in the Philippines. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines policy analysis, literature review, and qualitative interviews with representatives from disability advocacy organizations, this study assesses the various challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities. It identifies key structural, legal, and societal challenges that hinder inclusion and proposes actionable policy recommendations.

The findings reveal significant gaps in the implementation of existing disability laws, such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (Republic Act (RA) No. 7277) and the Employment Quota Law (RA 10524). While these legal frameworks are designed to promote accessibility and equal employment opportunities, poor enforcement has led to continued stigmatization and low employment rates among persons with disabilities. The report concludes with targeted recommendations to ensure meaningful reform in disability-inclusive employment.

Key Findings

This study highlights key social structural enablers and barriers affecting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Philippines. The legislative framework, which includes the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA No. 7277), the Accessibility Law (Batas Pambansa Bilang 344), and the Philippine Web Accessibility Policy, mandates accessibility features in public infrastructure. These laws aim to ensure equal access to public spaces and services for persons with disabilities. However, implementation remains insufficient. Many buildings still lack essential accessibility features, government websites are not fully accessible, and societal stigma and attitudinal obstacles persist, preventing the full participation of persons with disabilities.

In the employment sector, the employment rate for persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of the general population. This disparity stems from institutional barriers such as negative societal attitudes, lack of awareness, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient vocational training programs. Additionally, the Employment Quota Law (RA No. 10524), which seeks to promote the hiring of persons with disabilities, lacks adequate enforcement, further limiting employment opportunities.

To address these issues, several policy measures are recommended. First, it is crucial to strengthen the monitoring of the enforcement of existing disability laws and incentivize private sector compliance. Improving data collection on the employment status of persons with disabilities is crucial for formulating more effective policies. Second, it is essential to ensure that new infrastructure and digital platforms meet established accessibility standards, thereby fostering a more inclusive environment. Expanding and improving vocational training programs tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities will enhance their employment prospects. Additionally, public awareness campaigns and sensitivity training programs should be implemented to address societal stigma and attitudinal barriers. Developing targeted programs and support services that address the specific needs of persons with disabilities, including assistance with job placements and workplace accommodations, is further recommended. Finally, ensuring that emergency planning and response strategies are inclusive of persons with disabilities is essential for safeguarding their well-being during crises and disasters.

In summary, enhancing disability-inclusive employment in the Philippines necessitates comprehensive legislative reforms, improved accessibility, expanded vocational training programs, and strong public awareness

initiatives. Effective collaboration among government bodies, the private sector, NGOs, and advocacy groups is essential to fostering an inclusive employment environment. Such coordinated efforts are essential to achieving sustainable development goals and ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Contextual Background

In the Philippines, the legal definition of disability, as outlined in the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (sic) (RA No. 7277) [1], is primarily medical in nature. It defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more psychological, physiological, or anatomical functions of an individual” or the individual’s activities. This definition places impairment at the core of what constitutes a disability. While amendments introduced by RA No. 9442 [2] and No. 10524 [3] expand on this framework, they remain aligned with the medical model of disability.

This approach contrasts with the definition set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which the Philippines ratified in 2008. The UNCRPD adopts a more holistic and social perspective on disability, emphasizing the interaction between persons with impairments and societal barriers that restrict full participation. Rather than viewing impairments as the sole determinant of disability, the CRPD highlights the role of these barriers in shaping the experiences of disability, thus advocating for an integrated approach that incorporates medical and social dimensions [4].

Classification of Disabilities

The Department of Health (DOH) Administrative Order No. 2013-0005-B outlines the classification of disabilities recognized in the Philippines, categorizing them as follows [5]:

1. **Physical Disability:** Impairments that affect a person’s mobility, endurance, or stamina. Causes may be congenital, hereditary, or acquired due to trauma, infection, surgical, or medical conditions. This category includes:
 - Connective tissue, musculoskeletal, or orthopedic disorders.
 - Neurological or neuromuscular disorders.
 - Cardiopulmonary disorders.
2. **Visual Disability:** Impairment of visual functioning that persists even after treatment and standard refractive correction, with visual acuity in the better eye of less than 6/18 or a visual field of less than 10 degrees from the point of fixation.
3. **Hearing Disability:** Complete or partial loss of hearing in one or both ears, with a hearing threshold of 26 dB or greater.
4. **Speech and Language Impairments:** Disorders affecting voice, articulation, rhythm, and the receptive or expressive processes of language.
5. **Mental Disability:** Impairments resulting from organic brain syndrome or mental illness, including psychotic and non-psychotic disorders.
6. **Psychosocial Disability:** Behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or social impairments that limit an individual’s ability to engage in effective interpersonal interactions and daily activities.
7. **Intellectual Disability:** A significantly reduced ability to comprehend new or complex information, as well as difficulties in learning and applying new skills.
8. **Learning Disability:** Disorders affecting perception, listening, thinking, reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic, despite normal sensory, emotional, and intellectual abilities.

9. Cancer: As defined in RA No. 11215, a large group of diseases characterized by the rapid production of abnormal cells.
10. Rare Disease: As defined in RA No. 10747, conditions that include inherited metabolic disorders and other diseases with rare occurrences, recognized by the DOH upon recommendation from the National Institutes of Health.

Available General Statistics on Disability

According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), of the 97.60 million household population, 8.7% of individuals aged five years and above (approximately 8.47 million people) reported experiencing at least one domain of functional difficulty. These difficulties included impairments in seeing, hearing, walking, remembering or concentrating, self-care, and communicating [6].

Key statistics from the 2020 Census, which applied the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning, include:

1. Seeing: 78.3% reported experiencing difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.
2. Walking or climbing steps: 22.4%.
3. Hearing: 21.1%.
4. Remembering or concentrating: 16.4%.
5. Self-care 7.6%.
6. Communicating: 7.4%.

Access to eyeglasses for individuals with vision impairments in the Philippines, especially in remote villages and islands, remains severely restricted due to limited local resources. Furthermore, the shortage of eye care professionals and limited availability of affordable services presents significant barriers, intensified by the geographical concentration of specialists in urban centers like Manila. As a result, many rural residents lack access to essential eye care, leading to untreated vision problems [7]. Economic factors further compound these challenges. For example, the cost of eyeglasses, approximately \$4, can be prohibitive for families struggling to meet basic needs, making corrective lenses a luxury for many. Additionally, a lack of awareness about the importance of regular eye examinations contributes to high rates of uncorrected vision issues and preventable blindness. Organizations such as the Fred Hollows Foundation have initiated programs to improve access to eye care through community outreach and local health workers' training. However, comprehensive solutions, including enhanced optical resources, increased public awareness, and government subsidies, are essential to addressing these persistent challenges [8].

A detailed breakdown of these statistics by sex and domain of functional difficulty is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1

HOUSEHOLD POPULATION AGED FIVE YEARS AND OLDER EXPERIENCING AT LEAST ONE DOMAIN OF FUNCTIONAL DIFFICULTY, BY SEX AND DOMAIN OF FUNCTIONAL DIFFICULTY (PHILIPPINES, 2020)

Domain of Functional Difficulty	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Proportion of Household Population Aged Five Years and Older Experiencing at least One Domain of Functional Difficulty
Household population aged five years and older experiencing at least one domain of functional difficulty	8,469,426	3,763,241	4,706,185	

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Domain of Functional Difficulty	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Proportion of Household Population Aged Five Years and Older Experiencing at least One Domain of Functional Difficulty
Difficulty in seeing, even when wearing glasses	6,630,068	2,826,325	3,803,743	78.3
Difficulty in hearing, even when using a hearing aid	1,784,690	823,797	960,893	21.1
Difficulty in walking or climbing up stairs	1,895,026	870,653	1,024,373	22.4
Difficulty in remembering or concentrating	1,392,151	580,243	811,908	16.4
Difficulty in self-care (washing or dressing)	644,872	299,441	345,431	7.6
Difficulty in communicating	626,717	310,586	316,131	7.4

Notes: The total number of individuals experiencing functional difficulties does not add up to the overall household population aged five years and older due to individuals reporting multiple functional difficulties.

Source: PSA, 2020 CPH.

The Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities

The Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities, managed by the Department of Health under the mandate of the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (RA No. 7277, as amended by RA No. 9442 and RA No. 10754), plays a crucial role in compiling comprehensive data on persons with disabilities who have been issued identification cards across the nation. As of 21 October 2024, the registry has recorded 1,834,080 persons with disabilities. This database serves as an essential tool in ensuring that persons with disabilities receive the appropriate services and benefits accorded by law.

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES, BY REGION

Region	Number of Persons with Disabilities
REGION I (ILOCOS REGION)	96,028
REGION II (CAGAYAN VALLEY)	76,193
REGION III (CENTRAL LUZON)	222,420
REGION IV-A (CALABARZON)	300,167
REGION V (BICOL REGION)	102,076
REGION VI (WESTERN VISAYAS)	150,781
REGION VII (CENTRAL VISAYAS)	95,121
REGION VIII (EASTERN VISAYAS)	49,318
REGION IX (ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA)	59,757
REGION X (NORTHERN MINDANAO)	72,461
REGION XI (DAVAO REGION)	64,283
REGION XII (SOCCSKSARGEN)	76,860
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (NCR)	303,136
CORDILLERA ADMINISTRATIVE REGION (CAR)	40,452
BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO (BARMM)	15,923
REGION XIII (CARAGA)	56,563
MIMAROPA REGION	52,541
TOTAL	1,834,080

Social Structural Enablers and Barriers

Historical Background

Historically, persons with disabilities in the Philippines experienced significant discrimination and limited access to essential services. The situation began to improve with the enactment of RA No. 7277,

the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (sic), in 1991, which guarantees rights to employment, health, and education for persons with disabilities. Despite these legislative advancements, societal stigma and inadequate support services continue to hinder their full participation in society [9].

The stigma surrounding disability in the Philippines is deeply rooted in structural factors contributing to the persistent challenges faced by this group. These factors are intertwined with historical, cultural, and societal elements that have shaped people's attitudes and behaviors toward persons with disabilities over time.

Historical Context of Exclusion

For much of history, persons with disabilities have been subjected to significant exclusion and discrimination [10]. In the Philippines, Filipinos with disabilities have long suffered from a lack of recognition of their economic, social, and political rights [11]. This historical marginalization has established a foundation for stigma that persists to this day, as societal attitudes tend to evolve slowly, even in the presence of legal and policy reforms.

Cultural Beliefs and Superstitions

Cultural values and norms in the Philippines have significantly influenced attitudes toward disability [12]. Certain Filipino beliefs attribute mental disorders to personal weaknesses or supernatural causes [13]. These misconceptions foster stigmatization and discrimination by portraying disability as something to be feared or as a form of punishment rather than a natural human variation.

Stigma remains a significant barrier to the education of children with disabilities. In some communities, individuals with disabilities are perceived as symbols of bad luck or divine punishment. These prejudices further influence the attitudes of teachers, school administrators, peers, and even family members, leading to exclusion and discrimination. As a result, stigma continues to hinder the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools [14].

Physical Accessibility

Enablers: The Accessibility Law (Batas Pambansa Bilang 344) mandates the integration of accessibility features into public infrastructure to promote barrier-free environments. It aims to ensure that public buildings and transportation systems are accessible to all individuals [15].

Barriers: Despite the law, progress has been limited, and several public and private buildings still lack essential accessibility features. This gap between policy and practice limits the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities [16].

Digital Accessibility

Enablers: Initiatives such as the Philippine Web Accessibility Policy, established by the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) through Memorandum Circular No. 2017-004, align with the ISO/IEC 40500:2012 Information Technology - W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. This policy aims to enhance the accessibility of government websites for persons with disabilities by ensuring compliance with internationally recognized web accessibility standards [17].

Barriers: Although the policy mandates that all government website content be accessible, including descriptive texts for images, machine-readable documents, closed captions, and sign language interpretations for audiovisual material, many digital resources on government websites remain inaccessible to persons with visual disabilities [18].

Information Accessibility

Enablers: Efforts to improve information accessibility in the Philippines are supported by several legislative measures:

RA No. 10905: Known as the “Closed Captions Option for Television Programs” law, this act mandates the inclusion of closed captions in television programs to ensure accessibility for individuals with

hearing impairments. This measure promotes equal access to televised information and entertainment for the hearing-impaired community [19].

RA No. 11106: This law promotes the use of Filipino Sign Language (FSL) as the national sign language of the Filipino Deaf. It mandates the adoption of FSL in education, government services, and other public domains, ensuring full inclusion and equal rights for individuals who are deaf. By establishing a standardized communication method, this measure enhances comprehension and participation among individuals who are deaf in various sectors [20].

RA No. 10372: Amending Section 184.1 of the Intellectual Property Code (RA No. 8293), this law permits the reproduction or distribution of published materials in specialized formats exclusively for the use of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or reading-impaired, provided that these copies are produced on a nonprofit basis. This provision ensures that individuals with visual impairments can access necessary information in usable formats [21].

Barriers: A major concern is the lack of emergency accessibility for persons with disabilities. Despite existing legal frameworks, emergency planning and response often fail to address their specific needs. Certain prevalent challenges include inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate communication during crises, and insufficient medical and personal support in emergency shelters. Moreover, emergency information often fails to effectively reach all individuals. For example, during Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda), many persons with disabilities were deprived of timely information due to a lack of accessible communication formats [22].

Attitudinal Accessibility

Enablers: The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) actively involves persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all its sub-committees to ensure the development of disability-inclusive policies and programs. It conducts access audits and disability sensitivity training for public and private entities to address physical and attitudinal barriers. By collaborating with national government agencies (NGAs), NGOs, and private establishments, the NCDA promotes disability sensitivity and advocacy, aiming to destigmatize disability and combat discrimination [23].

Barriers: Persons with disabilities frequently encounter negative perceptions from various sources, including government officials and family members, resulting in social exclusion. These attitudinal barriers often confine them to their homes due to shame or fear of judgment. Additionally, such negative attitudes limit their access to essential support and services, as certain service providers perceive their inclusion as an additional burden. Moreover, policymakers often fail to recognize the need for specific provisions for persons with disabilities, and disability awareness in policymaking remains insufficient. To address these issues, advocacy groups have persistently called for awareness-raising efforts [18].

Policy Analysis: Disability Employment Context in the Philippines

As of January 2024, the overall employment rate in the Philippines was estimated at 95.5%, reflecting a slight increase from 95.2% in January 2023 [24]. This figure includes informal work and self-employment within the working-age population. However, the employment rate for persons with disabilities remains significantly low. In 2019, four out of ten individuals were not part of the labor force, including persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the employment-to-population ratio for persons with disabilities was only 20.5%, compared with 57.87% for persons without disabilities, according to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) [25, 26]. This disparity indicates the employment challenges faced by persons with disabilities, as they are employed at less than half the rate of the general population.

Institutional Enablers

The Philippines has implemented various institutional enablers to promote inclusive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The National Vocational Rehabilitation Center, established under RA No. 11179 and amended by RA No. 2615, provides vocational rehabilitation services, facilitating workforce integration through skills training and employment support [27, 28].

Complementing these efforts, the Inclusive Learners Act (RA No. 11650) mandates accessible and equitable education for learners with disabilities, ensuring their inclusion in mainstream education systems and enhancing future employment prospects [29].

Additionally, RA No. 10524 enforces an employment quota, requiring that at least 1% of positions in government agencies and offices be reserved for persons with disabilities. Non-compliance may result in administrative sanctions and potential budget reductions [30]. To further institutionalize support, RA No. 10070 mandates the establishment of Persons with Disability Affairs Offices (PDAOs) in every province, city, and municipality. These offices are responsible for implementing policies, programs, and services for persons with disabilities, particularly in areas pertaining to employment.

To incentivize employers, the government provides benefits for hiring persons with disabilities and modifying facilities to accommodate them [31]. Specifically, RA No. 7277, as amended by RA No. 9442 and RA No. 10754, offers tax deductions equivalent to 25% of the total salaries and wages paid to employees with disabilities, along with additional deductions for expenses incurred in modifying physical facilities to enhance accessibility. Furthermore, RA No. 10931, known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, grants free tuition and other fees at state and local universities and colleges, as well as state-run technical-vocational institutions, thereby enhancing access to higher education for persons with disabilities and improving their employment prospects [32].

Executive Order (EO) 417 further encourages economic independence by implementing a comprehensive livelihood and employment program for persons with disabilities, ensuring access to opportunities promoting self-reliance and economic participation [33]. Additionally, the Asia Foundation's Fully Abled Nation program, in collaboration with the Australian Embassy and The Asia Foundation in the Philippines, launched the "May 1% Ka Ba?" ("Do You Have 1%?") campaign to raise awareness and encourage compliance with the 1% employment quota for persons with disabilities [34].

Institutional Barriers to Inclusive Employment in the Philippines

Despite several supportive policies, significant institutional barriers continue to hinder the employment of persons with disabilities in the Philippines. These barriers stem from negative attitudes rooted in ignorance, myths, stereotypes, fear, and invisibility, along with a general lack of awareness and information about disability. Such factors contribute to widespread prejudice and discrimination. Persons with disabilities often experience unequal access to training and employment opportunities, limiting their ability to acquire essential skills. Additionally, several buildings, communication systems, and transportation networks remain inaccessible, while assistive devices, technology, support services, and critical information are often insufficiently available. Psychosocial barriers resulting from prolonged exclusion and discrimination further intensify these challenges. Moreover, inadequate policy support remains a pressing issue, characterized by weak legislation and poor enforcement of existing laws designed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The implementation of employment and training provisions is often inconsistent or lacking, further hindering the advancement of persons with disabilities in the workforce [35].

Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remain limited due to low awareness and prioritization within organizations. Enhancing their labor market inclusion requires a coordinated effort involving government bodies, employers, workers' organizations, social partners, and advocacy groups for persons with disabilities [36].

Furthermore, only a limited number of companies in the Philippines are willing to hire persons with disabilities. A major reason for this reluctance is the emphasis on profit and productivity [37].

National Plan of Action for Implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The goal of realizing the CRPD is reflected in various action and development plans, including the Philippine Human Rights Action Plan and the Philippine Development Plan (PDP). The Philippine Human Rights Action Plan (2018–23), particularly Chapter 5 on "Mainstreaming Persons with

Disabilities,” highlights initiatives to enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including providing training vouchers through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), organizing job fairs, and promoting legislative measures such as RA No. 10524, which mandates reserving positions for persons with disabilities [38].

Additionally, the PDP (2023–28) outlines specific targets to enhance support for persons with disabilities. These include establishing cash grants to cover disability-related costs, ensuring the full implementation of mandatory membership and exclusive packages in PhilHealth for persons with disabilities, and introducing a Disability Support Allowance to help manage the additional costs associated with disabilities [39].

Philippine State Report on the Implementation of the CRPD

The Philippine state report on the implementation of the CRPD highlights significant legislative and policy measures aimed at promoting equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. A key legislative milestone is RA No. 10524, which mandates that at least 1% of all positions in government agencies be reserved for persons with disabilities while encouraging private corporations with at least 100 employees to do the same. These companies are granted a tax deduction of 25% of the total amount paid to employees with disabilities. This law ensures that qualified persons with disabilities receive equal employment opportunities and are entitled to the same terms, conditions, compensation, and benefits as employees without disabilities.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has played a crucial role in supporting the employment of persons with disabilities, particularly women. Key initiatives include conducting workshops on disability-inclusive governance, formulating guidelines to assist workers in the informal economy, and organizing consultations that contribute to national employment strategies. Additionally, DOLE provides designated lanes for job seekers with disabilities at job fairs. The agency is also actively revising its guidelines to incorporate accessibility principles, ensuring these events are inclusive and accessible to all participants.

Further supporting these efforts, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)’s Cash-for-Work Program provides financial assistance to persons with disabilities in exchange for community service, thereby promoting economic inclusion and social engagement. This program also offers temporary employment opportunities for low-income households that include members with disabilities.

The NCDA collaborates with the Philippine Business and Disability Network (PBDN) to promote best practices in workplace disability inclusion. Additionally, the NCDA prioritizes providing persons with disabilities opportunities for leadership roles within PDAOs, fostering greater representation and advocacy.

Additionally, the Employees’ Compensation Commission (ECC) has introduced the Return-To-Work Assistance Program, which provides comprehensive rehabilitation services and support beyond standard medical care for workers with disabilities. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates the recovery and timely reintegration of persons with work-related disabilities into the workforce. The ECC guides workers and employers through a structured seven-step process, which includes treatment and rehabilitation, access to employment compensation benefits, pre-return assessments, development and implementation of a return-to-work plan, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation.

Through the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the state advances employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through the Strengthening Initiatives for Balanced Growth and Opportunities at the Localities Program. This initiative enhances the capabilities of the Public Employment Service Offices by providing accurate job information and specialized training for persons with disabilities, fostering investment and job creation in local communities.

Moreover, in celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the NCDA launched an Awards and Recognition Program to honor private employers and persons with disabilities who have

demonstrated outstanding workplace achievements. This initiative aligns with the global themes of disability-inclusive development in employment and efforts to reduce inequality.

These initiatives reflect a concerted effort by the Philippine government to ensure equitable employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through legislative measures, targeted programs, and incentives for private sector participation [40].

Situational Analysis

Overview of Alternative Reports by Civil Society Actors

In recent years, several alternative reports by civil society actors have emphasized the pertinent issues faced by persons with disabilities in the Philippines, particularly concerning employment. These reports highlight these persistent challenges and offer recommendations to improve the situation.

Initial Alternative Report by the Philippine Coalition on the UNCRPD (2011) [41]

The 2011 Alternative Report by the Philippine Coalition highlights the lack of effective employment policies concerning persons with disabilities despite existing government programs. It identifies several discriminatory barriers pertaining to hiring practices, maintaining employment, and career advancement, leading many persons with disabilities to rely on unstable, informal livelihoods. Moreover, the enforcement of hiring quotas in government agencies and the private sector, mandated by various laws, remains inconsistent and inadequately monitored.

The report further highlights discriminatory practices, such as unreasonable educational and licensing requirements for certain professions, which disproportionately affect persons with disabilities. Additionally, it emphasizes the inadequacy of support measures for persons with disabilities in urban and rural settings, limiting their access to meaningful employment opportunities.

Key recommendations from this report include:

1. Establishing comprehensive national labor targets for persons with disabilities, with annual monitoring at regional and local levels.
2. Removing discriminatory barriers in formal and informal employment sectors.
3. Enforcing hiring quotas for persons with disabilities at national and local government levels as well as in the private sector.

Report on the Implementation of the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (2016) [42]

The 2016 report by the Philippine Disabled People's Organization highlights that 50%–60% of persons with disabilities do not engage in income-generating activities. A significant gender disparity exists, with fewer women with disabilities engaging in such activities compared with men. Barriers to employment include the lack of assistive devices, inadequate support services such as personal assistance and sign language interpretation, and inaccessible built environments and transportation.

This report emphasizes the need to tackle these barriers through targeted interventions, vocational training, support for self-employment, and efforts to change discriminatory attitudes, especially in rural areas. It also recommends improving access to formal credit sources, such as bank loans and microfinance, to support entrepreneurial activities among persons with disabilities.

Report by the Philippine Alliance of Women with Disabilities for the 64th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2016) [43]

The report submitted by the Philippine Alliance of Women with Disabilities highlights employment-related issues specific to women with disabilities. It emphasizes the lack of comprehensive data on wage disparities between women with disabilities and women without disabilities, hampering effective policy

development, as well as the non-implementation of Executive Order 417, which mandates economic independence programs and procurement quotas for products made by persons with disabilities. The report calls for improved measures to promote the employment and financial independence of women with disabilities.

Getting It Right: Reporting on Disability in the Philippines [14]

This report highlights significant employment-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities. An informal survey conducted by VERA Files among persons with disabilities highlighted the need for media coverage of the lack of access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment. The report cites World Health Organization findings, indicating that persons with disabilities often experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes, including higher poverty rates, lower employment levels, and limited educational attainment. Despite over a century of special education in the Philippines, persons with disabilities still experience lower educational and employment outcomes compared to those without disabilities.

The report further cites a 2013 study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), which found that approximately half of persons with disabilities were employed, primarily in low-skilled jobs. Despite existing government efforts, the report highlights the need for further enhancements in employment opportunities. Moreover, the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities guarantees equal employment opportunities; however, unemployment rates remain high, and those with disabilities who do secure employment are often among the lowest paid.

Parallel Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (SDG 4, 5, 17) in line with the CRPD, The Philippines [44]

This report identifies several employment-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities, including inadequate access to facilities and transportation, which significantly hampers mobility to workplaces. A lack of professional training and development for teachers and service providers results in limited support for individuals with disabilities in educational and vocational settings. Furthermore, the report highlights the invisibility of persons with disabilities in data and monitoring systems, leading to ineffective policymaking and program implementation. Moreover, discriminatory attitudes and workplace bullying persist, further limiting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Despite existing policies promoting inclusive employment, their implementation remains inadequate owing to insufficient funding and weak regulatory frameworks.

These reports underscore ongoing challenges and propose actionable recommendations to improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the Philippines. Implementing these recommendations requires a concerted effort from the government, private sector, and civil society to foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

Review of Reports by Disability Organizations and Researchers

The Asia Foundation's research document, "Philippines Disability Sector Research: An Initial Analysis of Access to Social and Public Services, Education, Work and Employment, and Civic Participation and Governance," provides an in-depth examination of the challenges and progress related to the employment of persons with disabilities in the Philippines.

Employment Challenges of Persons with Disabilities

Despite progressive legislation such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA No. 7277, as amended) and RA No. 10524, which mandates a 1% employment quota for persons with disabilities in government agencies and encourages similar practices in private companies, high unemployment rates persist. This indicates a gap between policy and implementation. Discrimination in hiring processes and workplace environments remains prevalent, with many employers harboring misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, workplaces often lack the necessary accommodations, limiting employees' ability to perform their roles effectively.

Persons with disabilities are frequently confined to low-paying, informal sector jobs that lack security and benefits. This issue is further exacerbated by inaccessible infrastructure and transportation, making

commuting to work challenging and limiting employment opportunities. Moreover, vocational training programs tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities remain insufficient, leaving many unprepared for the job market.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Regular monitoring and evaluation are crucial to strengthen the enforcement of existing laws such as RA No. 7277 and RA No. 10524. Employers should be incentivized through tax breaks and grants for workplace modifications to foster inclusive work environments. Additionally, comprehensive vocational training programs focusing on soft and technical skills must be developed and implemented to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities. Moreover, public awareness campaigns targeting employers and the general public can help reduce stigma and promote inclusive hiring practices. Finally, improving accessibility in public transportation and infrastructure is crucial to supporting persons with disabilities in commuting and adapting to their respective work environments [45].

Ruh Global Study

A study by Ruh Global revealed that the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the Philippines remain limited despite existing legislation, such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA No. 7277) and RA 10524. These laws mandate that at least 1% of government positions be reserved for persons with disabilities and encourage similar initiatives in private corporations. However, compliance remains low due to limited awareness and understanding among employers, resulting in high unemployment rates for persons with disabilities that are often twice as high as those of the general population. Accessibility issues, including inaccessible buildings and non-inclusive software, further limit employment prospects. Additionally, persons with disabilities are often confined to specific job types, such as massage therapy, call centers, or music, despite possessing qualifications for a broader range of positions. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges, leading to significant job losses among persons with disabilities [46].

Employability Factors Study

A study on the factors affecting the employability of persons with disabilities in the Philippines identified several key determinants. Employers tend to prioritize soft and technical skills, with communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and computer proficiency being particularly valued. A college degree significantly enhances employment prospects; though vocational training can be sufficient for high school graduates. Younger persons, particularly males, are preferred, and physical impairments that minimally impact work processes are more readily accepted. However, behavioral challenges, low self-esteem, and workplace discrimination continue to serve as substantial barriers to employment [47].

Human Resource Practices in NGOs Study

A study on human resource management practices in selected NGOs in the Philippines examined their approach to inclusive employment for persons with disabilities. The findings indicate that NGOs offer substantial employment opportunities, ensuring equitable compensation based on job responsibilities and individual achievements. Recruitment practices prioritize potential and skill sets while promoting inclusivity and equal opportunity. NGOs also provide structured training and development programs and enforce policies to safeguard the health and well-being of employees with disabilities. While productivity is a recognized advantage, workplace adaptation remains a key challenge [48].

Job Matching and Market Alignment Study

A related study identified major challenges in employing persons with disabilities in the Philippines, particularly the misalignment between their skills and market demands. Training programs often fail to align with industry needs, contributing to a significant job-matching gap. Unlike government agencies, private institutions are not legally mandated to hire persons with disabilities, further limiting employment prospects. Additionally, insufficient support is available for persons with disabilities who acquire disabilities due to accidents or medical conditions, making workforce reintegration difficult. These findings highlight the need for better alignment between training programs and market demands, the introduction of legal mandates for inclusive hiring, and the development of robust support systems to facilitate workplace reintegration [49].

Employer Attitudes Study

The research paper “Dimensions of Filipino Employers’ Attitudes in Hiring Persons with Disability” highlights key concerns regarding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the Philippines. Employers often struggle with a job-matching gap due to the misalignment of training programs with labor market demands. Many remain reluctant to hire persons with disabilities, citing perceived additional costs and management challenges, such as training requirements and potential absenteeism. Additionally, gender biases also, resulting in fewer employment opportunities for females who face dual discrimination, compared with their male counterparts. Furthermore, employers tend to prefer hiring persons with disabilities for lower-skilled positions and prioritize those with higher educational qualifications or motor disabilities due to perceived social and management costs [50].

Overall Employment Landscape

The employment landscape for persons with disabilities in the Philippines presents significant challenges. Despite legislations such as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (RA No. 7277) and the Accessibility Law (Batas Pambansa Bilang 344), persons with disabilities continue to face substantial barriers to securing suitable employment. Key issues include poverty, limited access to quality education, societal exclusion, and negative employer perceptions. Many employers view persons with disabilities as less productive and costly to accommodate. Discrimination remains pervasive, intensified by insufficient awareness of their rights and weak enforcement of supportive laws. Additionally, a lack of vocational training aligned with market demands further limits their employment prospects. These factors contribute to lower labor force participation, higher unemployment rates, and limited career advancement for persons with disabilities [51].

Progressive Realization

Despite these challenges, the employment landscape for persons with disabilities in the Philippines is gradually improving through collaborative efforts across various sectors. Initiatives aimed at increasing employment opportunities and fostering inclusive workplaces are having a positive impact. These include:

1. **Project Inclusion Network (PIN):** This nonprofit organization collaborates with civil society and government stakeholders to enhance employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Through action research, coalition-building, and advocacy. PIN’s “Access to Work” model facilitates job matching and skills training. This initiative empowers persons with disabilities while supporting employers in creating inclusive workplaces [52].
2. **Philippine Business and Disability Network (PBDN):** Launched with the support of the ILO, the PBDN provides a platform for businesses to share best practices and collaborate on disability inclusion. The network aims to foster a culture of inclusivity within the private sector and expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities [53].
3. **Boldr and Virtualahan Partnership:** Boldr, an outsourcing company, in partnership with Virtualahan, an online training school for persons with disabilities, works to address employment barriers. This collaboration focuses on providing inclusive education and job readiness training, fostering work environments that accommodate persons with disabilities, and enhancing their employability through comprehensive support systems [54].

Success Stories and Positive Outcomes

Success stories highlight the potential of inclusive employment practices. For instance, PBDN’s first annual conference on disability inclusion showcased various businesses’ efforts to create inclusive workplaces, demonstrating the positive impact on companies and employees. Moreover, PIN’s initiatives have successfully facilitated employment for numerous persons with disabilities, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted support and advocacy [55].

Report on Interview with an Inclusive Employment Advocacy Organization [56]

Background and Experience

Mr. Grant Javier, Executive Director of PIN, shared insights into the organization’s mission and advocacy for the employment of persons with disabilities in the Philippines. PIN aims to foster a society

where persons with disabilities can realize their potential and actively contribute to their communities. Initially, convincing companies to hire persons with disabilities was challenging due to the lack of documented successes. This barrier was overcome through a research study demonstrating that employing persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities benefits employers and employees. The study played a crucial role in persuading more companies to adopt inclusive hiring practices.

Current Situation

Mr. Javier described the current employment landscape for persons with disabilities as significantly improved compared to a decade ago, with more companies taking proactive steps toward disability inclusion and offering better opportunities for career progression. Despite these advancements, significant challenges persist, including barriers in education and training, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient representation in governance. Additionally, the misalignment of skills with business needs continues to hinder many persons with disabilities from entering the workforce.

Policy and Programs

The Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (RA No. 10524) mandates that at least 1% of positions in government agencies be reserved for persons with disabilities and encourages private corporations to follow suit. While compliance is often driven by ethical considerations rather than legal or financial incentives, many companies have restructured their hiring processes to be non-discriminatory. Employee resource groups within these companies actively advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and provide continuous education on disability inclusion.

Gaps in Policies

Mr. Javier noted that the implementation of RA No. 10524 remains weak, particularly in the private sector, where compliance is merely encouraged rather than enforced. He suggested amending the legislation to make compliance mandatory and simplifying the process for claiming tax incentives to encourage more companies to hire persons with disabilities.

Success Stories and Best Practices

Mr. Javier highlighted several success stories, including a drugstore chain that employs over 30 individuals with Down Syndrome and autism, positively impacting company morale and customer experience. Additionally, an electronics manufacturing company successfully integrated Deaf employees by providing FSL training, which led to the certification of in-house trainers. The establishment of the PBDN has also been instrumental in promoting barrier-free workplaces and facilitating best practices among businesses.

Contributing Factors to Success

Key factors contributing to success include the genuine commitment of company leadership to inclusive hiring practices, openness to skills-based job matching, and the empowerment of PBDN members through training and the Access to Work Model.

Recommendations

Mr. Javier emphasized that inclusion should encompass the entire organization, from leadership to employees and service providers. He recommended adopting creative approaches to setting new standards for inclusive practices and encouraged companies to exceed the 1% employment quota for persons with disabilities, aiming for greater representation.

Report on Interview with a Foundation of the Blind [57]

Background and Experience

Mr. Lauro Purcil, President of the Center for Advocacy, Learning, and Livelihood (CALL) Foundation of the Blind Inc. and a founding member of the Steering Council of the ASEAN Disability Forum, shared insights into the organization's role as a leading advocate for employment opportunities for persons with visual impairment (VI) since its establishment in 1997. The foundation employs over 100 persons with visual impairments, primarily in massage therapy, with 60% of them being women. Most of the workforce comprises persons who are blind or have low-vision, supported by able-bodied

supervisors and guides. Remarkably, all board members of the foundation are blind, demonstrating strong representation of persons with disabilities in leadership roles.

Current Employment Situation for Persons with Disabilities

While CALL Foundation and similar organizations such as VIBES remain stable and comply with labor laws and social benefits such as Social Security Services, Philippine Health Insurance (PhilHealth), and Home Development Mutual Fund (PAG-IBIG Fund), the broader employment landscape for persons with disabilities in the Philippines remains challenging. The organization acknowledges that official government data on the employment status of persons with disabilities are outdated, making it challenging to provide a credible and comprehensive response overview of the national employment situation.

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities in the Job Market

Employment opportunities for persons with visual impairments are largely confined to specific sectors, such as massage therapy, with limited opportunities in other industries. The lack of updated data on the private sector employment of persons with disabilities, especially outside the massage industry, highlights a critical information gap. This gap further complicates efforts to assess employment trends and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in other sectors.

Policy and Programs

CALL Foundation recognizes the importance of international frameworks such as the UNCRPD and ASEAN commitments in promoting workforce inclusion. However, limited updated information is available regarding the implementation of these policies. The foundation calls for the NCDA to convene stakeholders to update and assess current policies and programs aimed at improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Gaps in Policies

While the foundation complies with national labor laws, it expresses concerns over the lack of updated information and collaboration among organizations advocating for the disability sector. Specifically, there has been a significant gap in receiving updated data from government agencies and international NGOs regarding the employment status of persons with disabilities. This information gap hinders the development of targeted interventions.

Success Stories and Best Practices

The massage industry stands out as a success story in employing persons with disabilities. Organizations such as the CALL Foundation have consistently complied with government-mandated benefits while providing stable employment opportunities. This success is attributed to years of experience, customer patronage, and investor support.

Recommendations

The foundation suggests that policymakers should take the following aspects into consideration:

- Increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities within government agencies, particularly within local government units (LGUs).
- Facilitate regular meetings between private employers and disability advocacy groups to share best practices and address emerging challenges.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This study's findings highlight significant challenges and barriers to the inclusive employment of persons with disabilities in the Philippines. Addressing these issues demands a comprehensive approach, involving policy enhancements, practical implementation, and collaborative efforts among various stakeholders.

Strengthening Legislative Frameworks and Enforcement

Although the Philippines has legislation promoting the rights and employment of persons with disabilities, its enforcement remains weak. The employment quota mandated by RA No. 10524, requiring at least 1% of positions in government agencies to be reserved for persons with disabilities, needs stricter enforcement and regular monitoring. Moreover, private-sector compliance should be encouraged through awareness campaigns and incentives. Strengthening enforcement involves establishing regular monitoring systems, conducting compliance audits, and imposing penalties for non-compliance, which can be achieved by enhancing the capacity of government bodies to enforce these laws effectively, in line with the UNCRPD. Additionally, the current quota system should be reevaluated, as it is poorly implemented and set at a relatively low target of 1%, which is considerably lower than similar systems in other countries. A critical discussion on these issues is crucial to address shortcomings and improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, amending the definition of disability to align directly with the UNCRPD is recommended to ensure consistency and comprehensive protection of rights [34–36].

Incentivizing Inclusive Employment Practices

The government should offer more robust incentives to private sector employers to hire persons with disabilities. These incentives should include tax deductions, accessible grants, and increased awareness among employers regarding these benefits. By implementing such measures, employers would be more motivated to hire persons with disabilities and make necessary workplace accommodations, thus promoting an inclusive work environment [3, 54, 56].

Improving Accessibility Infrastructure

Despite existing laws mandating accessibility, many public and private buildings, as well as digital platforms, remain inaccessible. Policies should focus on addressing this gap by ensuring that new constructions and renovations adhere to accessibility standards. This includes ensuring the accessibility of physical infrastructure, such as buildings and transportation systems, as well as ensuring that government websites and digital services adhere to international web accessibility guidelines [1, 15, 17].

Expanding Vocational Training and Employment Support

Vocational training programs tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities should be expanded to include soft and technical skills. They should align with current market demands to improve employability. Additionally, services such as job matching, inclusive job fairs, and specialized job search assistance should be enhanced to support persons with disabilities in securing suitable employment opportunities [35–36].

Enhancing Data Collection and Monitoring

Internationally comparable data collection and monitoring systems are crucial for effective policymaking. The Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities should be regularly updated to reflect the current status of persons with disabilities. Accurate and up-to-date data can inform targeted policies and programs, ensuring the efficient allocation of resources and effectively addressing the needs of persons with disabilities [6, 33].

Promoting Awareness and Reducing Stigma

Stigma and discrimination remain significant barriers for persons with disabilities, which can be tackled through public awareness campaigns and disability sensitivity training for government officials and private sector employees. These initiatives should educate the public about the capabilities and rights of persons with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and accepting society [35, 54].

Supporting Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities often experience dual discrimination. Policies should specifically address their needs by ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and support services. This includes fully implementing measures such as Executive Order 417, which encourages economic independence and enforces procurement quotas for products made by persons with disabilities [43].

Enhancing Emergency Preparedness and Response

Persons with disabilities often experience significant risks during emergencies; hence, policies must ensure that emergency planning and response mechanisms are inclusive and accessible. This involves making emergency information available in accessible formats and ensuring that shelters and evacuation routes are equipped to accommodate persons with disabilities [22].

Fostering Collaborative Efforts

Fostering an inclusive employment landscape requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government bodies, employers, workers' organizations, social partners, and advocacy groups for persons with disabilities. Programs such as the PIN and the PBDN should be supported and expanded to promote inclusive employment practices through partnerships and shared best practices [53–54].

Developing Comprehensive Support Systems

Comprehensive support systems are essential for the successful integration of persons with disabilities into the workforce. This includes access to assistive devices, technology, personal assistance, and accessible information. Expanding programs such as the DSWD's Cash-for-Work Program and the ECC's Return-To-Work Assistance Program can provide continuous support and improve the economic inclusion of persons with disabilities [39–40].

Next Steps Forward

Based on these findings, the next steps toward achieving inclusive employment for persons with disabilities in the Philippines should build upon existing initiatives while introducing new, targeted actions. These steps include:

1. **Enhance Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Establish a national task force dedicated to disability inclusion in employment, comprising representatives from government agencies, the private sector, NGOs, and advocacy groups for persons with disabilities. This task force should convene regularly to exchange best practices, address challenges, and develop coordinated strategies to ensure inclusive employment. Facilitating regular forums and workshops will help foster partnerships and encourage innovative solutions [53].
2. **Scale Up Successful Models and Programs:** Identify and expand successful initiatives such as the PIN and PBDN. Additional funding and resources should be allocated to these programs to replicate their best practices across different regions and sectors. Businesses should be encouraged to participate in these networks and adopt inclusive employment practices [53–54].
3. **Improve Accessibility of Public Services:** Ensure that public employment services, including job fairs and vocational training centers, are fully accessible to persons with disabilities. Accessibility audits should be conducted and necessary modifications to facilities and services must be made. Additionally, staff should be trained on disability sensitivity and inclusive service delivery to ensure the overall accessibility of employment services [1, 15, 17].
4. **Increase Funding and Support for Assistive Technologies:** Expand government and private sector investment in assistive technologies and workplace accommodations. Moreover, it is essential to introduce grant programs and financial incentives to encourage businesses to integrate assistive devices and technologies. Partnering with technology companies can drive innovation and provide cost-effective solutions for persons with disabilities [39].
5. **Addressing Barriers for Women with Disabilities:** Develop targeted employment programs and support services tailored to the needs of women with disabilities and collaborate with women's organizations and disability advocacy groups to design and implement these initiatives. These programs should address specific challenges such as access to childcare, flexible working arrangements, and protection from workplace discrimination [53].

6. **Creating Inclusive Economic Development Initiatives:** Integrate disability inclusion into broader economic development and poverty reduction strategies. Ensure that initiatives such as microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and community development projects explicitly include persons with disabilities. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the impact of these initiatives on disability inclusion [39].
7. **Advancing Legal Reforms and Policy Updates:** Conduct a comprehensive review of existing laws and policies to align them with current best practices and international standards. Moreover, stakeholders should actively engage in consultative processes to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Advocacy efforts should focus on new legislation that strengthens protections and support systems for persons with disabilities in the workplace [3].
8. **Enhancing Emergency and Disaster Preparedness:** Develop comprehensive emergency preparedness plans that are inclusive of persons with disabilities. These plans should incorporate accessible communication formats, clear evacuation procedures, and disability-friendly shelter accommodations. Additionally, emergency response personnel should receive specialized training in disability-inclusive practices [22].

Summary of Findings

This study identifies critical challenges to inclusive employment for persons with disabilities in the Philippines. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policies, effective implementation, and coordinated efforts among stakeholders.

Complementarity of Census Data and the Registry

The 2020 Census reported approximately 8.47 million individuals with functional difficulties, whereas the Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities documented 1,834,080 registered persons with disabilities. This discrepancy reflects the distinct purposes of these data sources: The Census data capture a broad demographic, including individuals with mild or temporary impairments, and the registry documents those with long-term disabilities who meet legal criteria for services. Together, these datasets provide valuable insights for policymaking. While the Census data identify general trends and needs, the registry offers detailed information essential for targeted services.

Social and Structural Barriers

Despite extensive data collection, social and structural barriers continue to impede the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. Pervasive stigma, insufficient support services, and limited accessibility in public spaces and digital platforms hinder equitable inclusion. Additionally, attitudinal biases among government bodies, families, and society at large further marginalize persons with disabilities, limiting their access to employment and educational opportunities.

Disability Employment Policy Deficits

The Philippines lacks key components in disability-inclusive employment policies, compared with other nations. Unlike countries with rigorous support mechanisms, such as Germany and Japan, which enforce disability employment quotas with penalties for non-compliance, the Philippines has limited enforcement measures. Accessibility to job applications and educational support remains inadequate, with minimal private-sector incentives to foster inclusive workplaces. Furthermore, national policies on reasonable accommodations and transportation access fall short of the standards set by countries such as the United States and Australia, thereby limiting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Employment Disparities

The employment-to-population ratio for persons with disabilities in the Philippines stands at 20.5%, significantly lower than the 57.87% ratio for the general population. Persistent discrimination in hiring, coupled with inadequate workplace accommodations, restricts employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, underscoring the need for stronger anti-discrimination measures.

Key Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Legal Enforcement:** Allocate additional resources to the Department of Justice, DOLE, and the Commission on Human Rights to enhance the monitoring and enforcement of disability laws.
2. **Enhance Private Sector Incentives:** Provide financial incentives, through DOLE and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), to encourage the hiring of persons with disabilities.
3. **Improve Accessibility Standards:** Mandate compliance with accessibility standards across public and private sectors, with enforcement carried out by the Department of Public Works and Highways and LGUs under the guidance of the NCDA.
4. **Expand Vocational Training:** Align vocational programs, offered through the TESDA, with market demands to improve the employment prospects of persons with disabilities.
5. **Enhance Data Collection:** Regularly update the Persons with Disabilities Registry, managed by the PSA, DOH, and DSWD, to inform policy development.
6. **Increase Public Awareness:** Launch nationwide awareness campaigns, led by the Philippine Information Agency and Department of Education (DepEd), to reduce stigma and highlight the abilities of persons with disabilities.
7. **Support Women with Disabilities:** Develop targeted programs, through DSWD and the Philippine Commission on Women, to address the specific challenges faced by women with disabilities.
8. **Inclusive Emergency Preparedness:** Ensure that emergency response plans, led by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, incorporate provisions for persons with disabilities.
9. **Foster Collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships among NCDA, DOLE, DTI, and advocacy organizations to create an inclusive employment ecosystem.
10. **Provide Comprehensive Support Systems:** Guarantee continuous access to assistive technology and personal support services through coordinated programs led by DOH and DSWD.

Gender Inequity and Diversity Considerations

Employment disparities are particularly severe for women with disabilities, who experience dual discrimination based on gender and disability. With an employment rate of 36%, compared with 60% for men, they encounter additional stigma and economic disadvantages [58]. However, gender is not the only factor influencing employment outcomes. Persons with disabilities in rural areas, as well as those with intellectual or severe disabilities, experience distinct and often overlooked barriers. Addressing these challenges requires an intersectional approach that considers geographic and socioeconomic disparities.

Geographical and Class Disparities

The registration rates of persons with disabilities vary significantly across regions, with areas such as CALABARZON reporting higher registration levels compared with regions such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. These disparities can be attributed to differences in access to social welfare services, healthcare, PDAO involvement, infrastructure availability, and logistical challenges in rural and conflict-affected areas. These discrepancies highlight access limitations and reinforce socioeconomic inequalities for persons with disabilities in underserved areas. Additionally, the existing 1% employment quota remains insufficient, falling below international standards and limiting economic opportunities. Therefore, to promote greater inclusion, policies must address structural and regional disparities.

Challenges to the Quota System

The 1% employment quota for persons with disabilities in the Philippines is largely ineffective due to weak enforcement mechanisms and the lack of penalties for non-compliance. In contrast, countries with more robust quota systems report higher employment rates among persons with disabilities, as these measures function as affirmative action policies. Strengthening the quota system by increasing target thresholds and enforcing stricter compliance measures can help foster equitable employment opportunities.

Path to Inclusive Employment

Achieving inclusive employment for persons with disabilities requires a multifaceted strategy. Strengthening legal frameworks, improving accessibility, and expanding vocational training programs can enhance employability, while cross-sector collaboration can foster a supportive ecosystem that promotes workforce inclusion.

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A CASE STUDY OF SRI LANKA

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Executive Summary

This study explores policies and practices related to disability-inclusive employment in Sri Lanka. It examines the status of persons with disabilities and identifies structural barriers to inclusive employment. Additionally, it evaluates the impact of employment policy interventions implemented in Sri Lanka to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the mainstream workforce.

The methodology adopted includes policy analysis, literature review, and in-depth interviews with relevant officials and representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). The study is structured around four key themes: first, a general contextual background; second, a policy analysis of employment practices; third, a situational analysis of employment trends; and fourth, policy implications, with recommendations aimed at enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream society.

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978, Article 12(1), stipulates that all persons in Sri Lanka are entitled to equal protection under the law [1]. Consequently, persons with disabilities are entitled to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Although the Constitution does not specifically refer to any social group, it applies to all Sri Lankans. The country has enacted the necessary policies and action plans to move toward a disability-inclusive society, including the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996 [2], the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka (2003) [3], and a comprehensive cross-ministerial National Plan of Action for Disability (2014) [4]. The national policy and action plan adopt a rights-based approach, striving to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka's social and economic activities as equal citizens. The country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2016 and committed to its implementation, although progress has been slow [5].

Sri Lanka lacks disability-disaggregated data for comprehensive analysis. The most recent Census of Population and Housing was conducted in 2012 and provides some statistical insights into the prevalence of disability. According to the census, the total population aged 5 years and above was 18,527,683, with 8.7% of individuals reported as having disabilities [6]. However, as shown in Table 1, district-based discrepancies exist, with the proportion of individuals with disabilities exceeding the national average in districts such as Kandy, Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee, Jaffna, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Rathnapura, Mullaitivu, Hambantota, Matale, Monaragala, Matara Kegalle, and Badulla districts. The total number of persons with disabilities in the country was 1,617,924, comprising 695,263 males and 922,661 females. The majority were Sinhalese (1,248,757), followed by Sri Lankan Tamils (177,720), Indian Tamils (75,615), Sri Lankan Moors (107,445), Burghers (3,523), Malays (3,382), and individuals from other ethnic groups (1,482). Moreover, only 28.7% of persons with disabilities of productive age were economically active, while 71.3% were classified as inactive [6]. Gender-based disparities in labor force participation are evident, with many women engaged in unpaid care services.

Persons with disabilities face significant barriers to labor market participation in Sri Lanka. Several factors contribute to low participation rates, including attitudinal, physical, and organizational barriers; inadequate opportunities for job preparation, career guidance, and counseling; the inability of the mainstream vocational training system to accommodate youth with disabilities; insufficient support for self-employment and microfinance; limited opportunities for mainstream employment; and the lack of

reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness among employers regarding how to interact with persons with disabilities. The broader environment also presents accessibility challenges, as public transportation and infrastructure remain largely inaccessible. The inadequate implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of the multisectoral approach to disability further limits progress in Sri Lanka. The country lacks sufficient budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive initiatives, and partnerships between the state, NGOs, and the private sector are limited. Furthermore, professional standards and ethical guidelines for disability-related work are lacking.

Two fundamental issues contribute to these challenges. First, the implementation of the National Disability Policy falls under the Ministry of Social Welfare, which reinforces a charity-based perspective rather than adopting a rights-based approach. Second, as disability policies are spread across multiple ministries, no single ministry has the authority to effectively coordinate inter-ministerial efforts. To address these challenges, it is recommended that a higher level National Commission for Disability be established to oversee policy implementation and bridge existing gaps in policy practice.

Contextual Background

This study explores policies and practices regarding disability-inclusive employment in Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on the status of persons with disabilities, sociocultural and structural barriers to inclusive employment, and policies implemented to improve their integration into mainstream society. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating policy analysis, literature review, and personal interviews with relevant officials and representatives of OPDs. The study is organized into four chapters: a general contextual background, a policy analysis of employment practices, a situational analysis of employment trends and policy implications concerning disability inclusion in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is an ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse country, administratively divided into 9 provinces, 25 districts, and 331 Divisional Secretary areas. *The Grama Niladhari* Division¹ represents the lowest administrative unit, which facilitates the implementation of most government programs at the grassroots level. The latest National Census of Population and Housing in Sri Lanka was conducted in 2012 [6], reporting a total population of 18,527,683 aged 5 years and above, with 8.7% of individuals reported as having disabilities. Population distribution varies significantly across provinces, with an all-island population density of 323 persons per square kilometer. The Western Province has the highest density, at 1,627 persons per square kilometer, while the North Central Province has the lowest, with just 66 persons per square kilometer. Additionally, 77.3% of the total population resided in rural areas, 18.3% in urban areas, and 4.4% in the state sector [6]. Comparatively, the urban sector benefits from better physical infrastructure and access to services, including healthcare, education, skills development, and employment opportunities. This disparity results in significant inequalities among the three sectors regarding opportunities and accessibility to essential services.

Census data show that the average literacy rate for individuals aged 10 years and above was 95.6%, with male literacy at 96.8% and female literacy at 94.6%. The average life expectancy was 74.9 years, with male life expectancy at 72.0 years and female life expectancy at 77.7 [6]. The economically active population aged 15 years and older constituted 51.9% of the total population, with a male participation rate of 78% and a female participation rate of 30%, highlighting a significant gender disparity in labor force participation. However, several women engage in unpaid caregiving services within their families and communities, which are not considered in economic activity assessments [6]. Despite the higher life expectancy of women, most unpaid female caregivers lack access to formal social protection mechanisms, making them a vulnerable group.

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978, Article 12(1), states that all persons in Sri Lanka are entitled to equal legal protection [1]. Consequently, persons with disabilities are entitled to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Although the Constitution does

¹ In Sri Lanka, the Grama Niladhari (GN) Division is an administrative subdivision of the Divisional Secretariat Division. It is the smallest administrative unit in the country, typically comprising a number of villages or parts of towns. Each GN Division is headed by a Grama Niladhari, who is a public officer appointed by the government to carry out various administrative functions at the local level.

not specifically mention any specific individual or social group, it applies to all persons in Sri Lanka [1]. The country has implemented specific social policies and action plans to enhance the integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream society. These policies include the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996, the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka (2003), and the comprehensive cross-ministerial National Plan of Action for Disability (2014), which was developed in collaboration with the Ministries of Social Services and Health [1, 3, 4]. The government of Sri Lanka ratified the UNCRPD in 2016 and has committed to its implementation, submitting an initial report under Article 35 of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [5].

In Sri Lanka, disability is legally defined as follows: “Persons with disabilities means any person who, as a result of any deficiency in his physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable by himself to ensure for himself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life” [2]. This definition is widely accepted as the legal framework for disability in the country. However, it is predominantly based on the medical model of disability and overlooks sociocultural and infrastructure barriers that contribute to disability. The definition narrowly conceptualizes disability as an individual or medical issue while overlooking the societal, structural, and environmental factors that may contribute to disabling conditions.

The Protection of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Act (1996) primarily facilitated the establishment of a National Council for Persons with Disabilities, tasked with promoting, advancing, and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka [2]. However, the Act contains limited mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the rights outlined in the legislation, particularly with regard to procedures for filing individual or group complaints [7]. In response to the limitations of existing legislation, a new bill was drafted in accordance with the UNCRPD and in collaboration with OPDs. The bill has been submitted to the Legal Draftsman’s Office for approval [2].

The National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka (2003) was formulated in response to the demands of disability movements in the country over the years. The model was developed through a participatory process that incorporated expert opinions as well as concerns raised by OPDs [3]. The Ministry of Social Welfare was tasked with drafting a comprehensive policy that enables persons with disabilities to exercise their rights and responsibilities, ensures equitable access to available resources, and includes them in the socio-economic mainstream. As stated, in the policy document:

“The National Policy on Disability promotes and protects the Rights of People who have Disability in the spirit of social justice. They will have opportunities for enjoying a full and satisfying life and for contributing to national development their knowledge, experience and particular skills and capabilities as equal citizens of Sri Lanka” [3].

The National Policy acknowledges that disability is a cross-cutting issue of significant dimensions and adopts a rights-based approach aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to participate in the country’s social and economic mainstream as equal citizens [3]. It considers the limitations of individuals in performing daily activities and the barriers to their participation in society. These challenges, combined with personal and environmental factors, affect persons with disabilities, restricting their ability to independently access the necessities of life [3]. The policy was formulated in alignment with the principles of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) [8]. Within this framework, disability is understood as an umbrella term encompassing a range of individual experiences, which are examined within the context of personal and environmental factors [8]. According to the National Policy, environmental factors include physical, social, and attitudinal aspects of the surroundings in which people live and interact. These factors are, in turn, influenced by cultural and religious practices and beliefs [3].

The National Census of Population and Housing (2012) defined disability in terms of “functional difficulties,” including physical and mental impairments. It states: “A person who is limited in the kind or number of activities that he or she can do because of ongoing difficulties due to a long-term physical condition, mental condition or health problem can be considered as disabled” [6]. Short-term disabilities resulting from temporary conditions, such as broken limbs or illnesses, were excluded from the census, with

only disabilities lasting more than six months being considered. The term “difficulties” was used in the census to identify persons with disabilities [6]. Additionally, the census employed the short questions set developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics to identify persons belonging to this group. The identified functional difficulties included impairments related to seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, selfcare, and communication difficulties [6]. However, this definition has limitations as the term “difficulties” may be misleading; individuals with impairments may not perceive themselves as experiencing difficulties in selfcare or communication. For instance, an in-depth interview with an individual with a visual disability revealed that they did not perceive themselves as experiencing functional difficulties, as they were able to manage their personal and professional lives independently. They explained:

“The questions set by the Washington Group were used in the census to identify persons with disabilities; however, I was not included in it as I did not have any functional difficulties.” (Personal interview 1 with representatives of OPDs).

The narrative highlights the limitations of the functional definitions used in the national census, which may lead to data gaps. Despite these shortcomings, the national census remains a comprehensive source of disability statistics across the country.

As indicated in the 2012 census, the proportion of the population with disabilities in Sri Lanka was 8.7%. However, some districts were found to have a higher proportion of people with disabilities than the national average, including Kandy (10.2%), Polonnaruwa (9.9%), Nuwara Eliya (9.8%), Trincomalee (9.7%), Jaffna (9.5%), Puttalam (9.5%), Kurunegala (9.4%), Rathnapura (9.3%), Mullaitivu (9.3%), Hambantota (9.2%), Matale (9.2%), Monaragala (9.2%), Matara (9.1%), Kegalle (9.0%), and Badulla (9.0%) [6]. Table 1 in the Annexure provides a detailed breakdown of the district-based distribution of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka as of 2012. The majority of individuals identified faced difficulties with seeing (5.3%) and walking (3.9%). The percentage of persons with hearing difficulties was 2.1%, cognition difficulties 1.9%, selfcare difficulties 1.1%, and communication difficulties 1.1% [6]. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the district-based distribution of persons with disabilities by the type of disability. By 2011, the total number of persons with disabilities in the country was 1,617,924, comprising 695,263 males and 922,661 females with diverse disabilities. Table 3 provides the district-based sex distribution of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The majority (1,248,757) were Sinhalese, while 177,720 were Sri Lankan Tamils, 75,615 were Indian Tamils, 107,445 were Sri Lankan Moors, 3,523 were Burghers, 3,382 were Malays, and 1,482 belonged to other categories. Only 28.7% of persons with disabilities of productive age were economically active, whereas 71.3% were classified as economically inactive [6]. Table 4 provides a detailed breakdown of the gender-based distribution of the employment status of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

The number of persons with disabilities is not static; it continues to increase due to factors such as population growth, aging, the increase in chronic diseases, and medical advancements that preserve and prolong life [9]. The Chronic Kidney Disease of uncertain etiology has become a critical health problem in dry-zone regions, contributing to the increasing number of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The country has also endured over three decades of civil war, leading to a rise in disability prevalence. According to the Ministry of Defense, approximately 40,000 military personnel have been identified as war-disabled, many of whom require ongoing medical care and rehabilitation [10]. The civilian population also bears the scars of war, with the Ministry of Health estimating that approximately 25,000 civilians are living with war-related disabilities, including physical and psychological impairments [11].

Sociocultural Construction of Disability in Sri Lanka

Disability has long been conceptualized from a charity perspective in Sri Lankan society. The ideology of “karma”² plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of disability and influencing societal responses toward

2 In Buddhism, “karma” refers to the concept of cause and effect, where a person’s actions in their current and past lives influence their future circumstances. When applied to disability, “karma” suggests that a person’s disability could be the result of actions (good or bad) from their past lives. This belief can shape how individuals and communities perceive and respond to disabilities, often viewing them as part of a larger spiritual journey or consequence rather than merely a physical condition.

persons with disabilities, often justifying the inequalities faced by individuals belonging to this group [12]. In Sri Lanka, karma is often invoked to explain the origins of disability, positioning the disabled body as a source of merit for persons without disabilities, who can accumulate further merit by caring for persons with disabilities. Evidence suggests that persons with significant disabilities as well as those with mild impairments who do not experience functional limitations, face challenges due to a rigidly imposed identity as “disabled.” This identity is reinforced by socially and culturally constructed prejudices and obstacles that amount to a form of social oppression further legitimized by the doctrine of karma [12]. The charity-based perspective promotes the idea that society cares for persons with disabilities, with the belief that caregivers are more fortunate than recipients, thereby perpetuating negative attitudes of inferiority [12].

As Campbell noted:

“In the Sri Lankan context, approaches to meeting the needs of people with disabilities through service delivery and, more recently, policy development and law reform have been shaped and influenced by the nation’s 500-year Judeo-Christian colonial heritage including models of welfare and charity and global, liberal (Western) conceptual frameworks instigated through the United Nations. Identifying specific representations of disability in the colonial period remains difficult due to a dearth of historical research undertaken around this theme” [7].

Campbell further explained:

“The beliefs of contemporary Buddhism imbued in the politics of the Sri Lankan State, namely, *karuna* (translated as ‘loving-kindness’) is loosely construed along the lines of the Christian concept of charity, where disabled people are largely viewed as passive recipients deprived of volition and agency-making capacity building a nonsensical task” [7].

Sociocultural barriers continue to exclude persons with disabilities from mainstream society. Although Sri Lanka has established policies designed to promote inclusive education and ensure equal access to free education for all children, regardless of their backgrounds [13, 14], their implementation remains inadequate. The Ministry of Education has reported that several children with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream classrooms and special education units within schools [15]. However, existing education policies fail to promote inclusive strategies and concrete action plans for children with disabilities. The attitudinal environment within the school system fosters segregation, resulting in the exclusion of children with disabilities from preschool education, while primary and secondary schools lack the necessary accommodations, resulting in high dropout rates [16]. Furthermore, children with disabilities fall under the jurisdiction of the special education branch of the Ministry of Education and the non-formal education department, effectively excluding them from accessing mainstream education. Consequently, the quality of secondary education available to students with disabilities remains insufficient, limiting their opportunities to pursue higher education [12].

Several drawbacks exist in the areas of health and rehabilitation. These include inadequate facilities for early detection and intervention, a lack of assistive technologies and devices, poor access to healthcare facilities and specialized services, insufficient rehabilitation facilities, and limited knowledge and skills in disability-related work. Urgent interventions are needed to address these issues and ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream society [17].

Similarly, several challenges exist in the fields of work and employment. Attitudinal, physical, and organizational barriers, along with inadequate opportunities for job preparation, career guidance, and counseling, contribute to the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Moreover, the mainstream vocational training system often fails to sufficiently include youth with disabilities, while the support provided for self-employment and microfinance is insufficient. Furthermore, limited opportunities for mainstream employment, the lack of reasonable accommodation in workplaces, and a general lack of awareness on how to interact with persons with disabilities further exacerbate these challenges [16, 17]. Despite the available opportunities, persons with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers to securing employment in Sri Lanka. One of the primary challenges faced by this group is the lack of

accessible transportation. Additionally, individuals living in remote or rural areas face further difficulties due to the unequal distribution of infrastructure across the country [16].

Sharing their experiences, one respondent noted:

“Finding employment, even for graduates with disabilities, remains a challenge due to discriminatory attitudes toward disability in mainstream society” (Personal interview 1 with representatives of OPDs).

The enabling environment also presents several pressing challenges. For instance, public transportation and the built environment remain largely inaccessible. Additionally, access to public accommodation and telecommunication services remains insufficient. There is no established mechanism for the implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of a multisectoral approach to disability inclusion in Sri Lanka [16]. The country also lacks sufficient budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive initiatives and meaningful partnerships between the government, NGOs, and the private sector. Furthermore, there are no standardized professional or ethical guidelines pertaining to disability-related work in Sri Lanka [17].

Policy Analysis

As indicated in the latest Census of Population and Housing in Sri Lanka, the ratio of the economically active population aged 15 years and older was 51.9%. The male participation rate was 75.8%, whereas the female participation rate was 30%, highlighting a significant gender disparity in labor force participation [6]. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is that the majority of women are engaged in unpaid caregiving services within their families, a factor not considered when calculating the country’s economically active population. The same statistical source indicates that only 28.7% of persons with disabilities were economically active, while the remaining 71.3% were economically inactive [6]. The largest portion of the economically inactive population with disabilities (35.7%) was dependent due to factors such as old age or functional limitations caused by their disability. However, a significant number of individuals (25.7%) were identified as economically inactive despite being engaged in household work, which was not considered in the assessment of the economically active population during the 2012 Census of Population and Housing [6]. Additionally, another 2.4% of persons with disabilities were categorized as engaging in non-economic activities. However, it remains unclear whether these activities involved unpaid care work or supplementary livelihoods within their families, as the census did not specify the nature of these non-economic activities.

This evidence suggests that, on the one hand, the participation of persons with disabilities in the economy was not adequately assessed during the national census, leading to an underestimation of their contributions. On the other hand, they face significant barriers to active economic participation due to sociocultural, structural, and systemic barriers, which are further explored in the situational analysis [3, 5, 16, 18].

Despite these limitations, persons with disabilities are offered employment opportunities in the public and private sectors, as well as in NGOs and through self-employment [5, 16, 19]. The Sri Lankan government has recognized the need to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in recruitment [5]. To this end, government initiatives often encourage the employment of individuals belonging to this group through quota systems and special recruitment drives. Furthermore, the government issued the 1988 Public Administration Circular, introducing a quota scheme for persons with disabilities in government, semi-government, and private sector employment [20]. Accordingly, 3% of government job opportunities are reserved for persons with disabilities [2, 3].

Various NGOs work toward the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. Self-employment and entrepreneurship are actively encouraged and supported by government and NGO programs, enabling several persons with disabilities to start their businesses. Some organizations specifically aim to employ persons with disabilities or cater to their needs [19]. Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Trade Union Relations has implemented policies prohibiting discrimination based on disability in

employment, especially in recruitment processes [5]. The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities has launched various initiatives to encourage self-employment among persons with disabilities. These include livelihood support for low-income families and mediation between private companies and persons with disabilities to create job opportunities. Furthermore, the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training has implemented an inclusive vocational training policy for persons with disabilities [5].

In 2000, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon established the "Employers' Network on Disability" to assist persons with disabilities in addressing employment-related challenges. The network conducts diverse, tailored programs to build the capacity of job seekers with disabilities [5]. Statistics from the Labor Ministry indicate that 30% of persons with disabilities are employed in the public sector, 40% in the private sector, 20% in NGOs, and 10% are self-employed [21]. Personal interviews with representatives of OPDs revealed a positive trend in private-sector employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. One representative stated:

"Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector are gradually increasing as most companies have their own diversity and inclusion policies and are willing to hire persons with disabilities. Although there is a growing trend of employment opportunities in the private sector, persons with disabilities often lack the required employability skills and the favorable attitudes needed to succeed in the evolving, competitive job market" (Personal interview 1 with a representative from an organization for persons with disabilities who has professional experience as a mediator between job seekers and relevant employers).

Despite the available opportunities, persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka encounter significant barriers to securing employment. They face multiple challenges, including accessibility issues [22], discrimination and stigma [23], lack of education and skills training [24], inadequate policy implementation [25], and limited employer awareness of disability-related needs, resulting in insufficient support [22]. Nearly 60% of those who are employed report facing significant accessibility issues, whereas 50% experience discrimination during the hiring process [3, 26]. Addressing these barriers is crucial to improving their employment prospects and ensuring an inclusive workforce.

As mentioned earlier, the primary disability-specific legislation in Sri Lanka is the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996, which was certified in October 1996. This Act established the National Council for Persons with Disabilities and provided the framework for the creation of a National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities to assist the Council in fulfilling its functions [5, 27]. The Act specifically guarantees nondiscrimination in employment, education, and access to the built environment [18]. It states that no person with a disability shall face discrimination on the grounds of disability in recruitment, employment, or admission to educational institutions. Among the Council's functions, two clauses explicitly refer to education and vocational training. However, the Act does not address other economic, civil, social, cultural, or political rights [28], limiting its scope of fully protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Government, through Public Administration Circular No. 27/88, dated 18 August 1988, instructed all ministries, departments, and corporations to reserve 3% of public sector job opportunities for persons with disabilities who have the requisite qualifications and whose disabilities do not hinder their job performance [29]. However, the effectiveness of this directive is limited. The National Disability Policy comprises 26 sectoral policy areas, with factors such as employment, vocational training, and skills development being the most relevant to this study. Each sector has formulated policy statements and broad strategies. While each sector is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies within its mandate, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities is tasked with coordinating policy implementation across all stakeholders, as well as monitoring and assessing its effectiveness. Action plans for all these areas have been developed [4].

The Visually Handicapped Trust Fund (1992) was established to support persons with visual impairments [30]. Its functions include providing educational and vocational training opportunities, creating

employment opportunities to reduce poverty, offering financial assistance and guidance for self-employment, and supporting the marketing of products made by persons with visual disabilities. Additionally, the Trust Fund provides housing assistance, implements welfare schemes, supports projects by registered NGOs working in this field, and takes necessary measures to eliminate barriers preventing persons with visual disabilities from accessing equal rights and opportunities [31].

When examining the historical evolution of vocational rehabilitation to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, Christian missionaries introduced the concept of establishing special schools for persons with disabilities in the early 20th century. In recent years, influenced by global trends and the advocacy of the ILO and other international agencies, Sri Lanka has increasingly recognized that the rights of persons with disabilities necessitate their inclusion in mainstream development processes [3]. Over the past few years, the disability movement and other advocacy efforts have successfully encouraged some mainstream vocational training centers to accommodate persons with disabilities. Additionally, a few employers have been convinced that employees with disabilities can perform at levels equal to or even exceeding those of their counterparts without disabilities. As a result, the approach is gradually shifting from isolation and segregation toward integration and inclusion [9, 31].

Several key government ministries are involved in implementing policies and overseeing services related to the vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Welfare serves as the main authority supporting the National Council for Persons with Disabilities in policy formulation, legislation, regulations, and work programs. It is also responsible for monitoring and assisting the government and NGOs in service provision and development. Vocational training programs for persons with disabilities are implemented through the Department of Social Services, which operates under the Ministry of Social Welfare [5]. The Council consists of 20 members appointed by the President, with at least 11 representing OPDs and related entities to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in policymaking. The remaining members, also appointed by the President, represent relevant ministries, departments, professionals, and NGOs [3]. The Council's role is to promote, advance, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka, with its primary functions including policy formulation, strategic planning, and program implementation [3]. Established in 1996, the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities was created to implement the decisions of the Council. One of its key responsibilities is the development of a national database for collecting and disseminating information [3]. Through its Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program, it implements interventions and gathers data on persons with disabilities. However, these interventions face limitations, as they primarily focus on providing welfare assistance to the most vulnerable persons rather than empowering them to challenge discrimination and advocate for their rights [32, 33].

The Ministry of Employment and Labor is responsible for implementing the government's employment policy. The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission serves as the policymaking and planning body for the country's vocational training sector, overseeing quality assurance and labor market reviews [31]. The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training, through the Skills Development Project, National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority, Vocational Training Authority, Department of Technical Education and Training, and National Youth Services Council, which operates under the purview of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, has established a network of 52 career guidance and counseling centers across the island. Additionally, the Ministry of Employment and Labor maintains a network of 30 career guidance centers [19]. However, mainstream vocational training opportunities for persons with disabilities remain limited. Only a small number of persons with disabilities typically apply for these opportunities, and an even smaller number successfully enroll in mainstream training centers. These centers face challenges in accommodating persons with disabilities, generally accepting only those who do not require modifications to training facilities and are able to integrate seamlessly with management and fellow trainees. As a result, individuals with special needs are rarely included. The experience of persons with disabilities indicates that vocational training centers are more inclined to admit amputees, those who can move independently using walking aids, and individuals who can communicate effectively with instructors [16]. This reluctance is primarily due to a lack of knowledge and skills to address special needs.

Given the current reduction in public financing, special project funding for instructor training, facility adaptations, and the development of inclusive training materials would likely incentivize mainstream vocational training centers to accept more trainees with disabilities. In many instances, vocational training center instructors and management have specifically requested training in areas such as sign language to better support trainees with disabilities. Currently, staff at segregated and mainstream skills training centers and employment-related services lack adequate training to address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities [34]. Consequently, most persons with disabilities primarily find opportunities in segregated vocational training centers operated by the Department of Social Services and affiliated NGOs. Personal interviews with representatives of OPDs reveal that these vocational training centers continue to offer traditional skill development programs that do not align with the demands of the modern competitive labor market (Personal interviews 1 and 2 with representatives of OPDs).

The initial report submitted to the UNCRPD Committee indicates that the country has adequate policies in place to integrate persons with disabilities into an inclusive labor market [5]. However, evidence from OPDs highlights significant gaps in securing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities [16, 18]. The concept of protected work environments remains underdeveloped in Sri Lanka. With limited access to open employment opportunities, self-employment often becomes the only viable option for persons with disabilities. However, even for those pursuing self-employment, vocational training opportunities are limited. Observations from community-based programs suggest that individuals already engaged in self-employment often rely on their innate abilities, skills acquired from family members and neighbors, or natural entrepreneurial skills to generate income. For those with strong entrepreneurial instincts, self-employment has proven to be a successful pathway.

Situational Analysis (Analysis in Practice)

The UN Periodic Review Reports submitted by OPDs (2017, 2023), the initial report submitted by the UNCRPD Committee (2019), and the annual reports of relevant government institutions, along with research articles on disability issues in Sri Lanka, were scrutinized to analyze the practical implementation of policies. Evidence from these sources indicates that the country has adequate disability policies in place and a comprehensive plan to include persons with disabilities in mainstream society; however, significant challenges persist regarding their implementation, enforcement, and accountability [5, 16, 18]. According to OPDs, Sri Lanka's disability policies have not been effectively implemented to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. Several individuals continue to experience discrimination in various spheres of their daily lives [12, 33, 35–41].

Despite some progress, several critical issues remain unresolved in areas such as the empowerment of persons with disabilities, healthcare and rehabilitation, education, employment, mainstreaming and enabling environments, as well as social and institutional cohesion [17]. As noted earlier, CBR serves as a government strategy for implementing interventions at the grassroots level. Self-help groups comprising persons with disabilities have been established at the divisional secretariat level to carry out relevant programs. These groups are supported by *Grama Niladhari* officers, the grassroots level administrative officers, and Social Service Officers responsible for executing interventions designed at the national level by the Ministry of Social Welfare [4]. However, empirical evidence suggests that these interventions were neither innovative nor sufficient to empower self-help groups to act as pressure groups advocating for their rights [32–33]. Instead, the focus has primarily been on providing welfare benefits to marginalized groups within the disabled community rather than empowering their independence, decision-making capacity, and ability to tackle discrimination [33].

A leader of a self-help group expressed:

“We do not need welfare assistance from the government, but we need some support for entrepreneurship. If we receive that, we can create job opportunities not only for persons with disabilities but also for able-bodied persons in our community. Our self-help group runs a farm on government-owned land, which we acquired through a long-term tenant scheme (99 years). We cultivate crops that are in demand in the market, and this program has successfully provided livelihoods for many persons with

disabilities and their families. However, a challenge we face is that, from time to time, government officers demand that we return the land, even in violation of the agreement we have already signed. This happens due to political influence” (Personal interview 2 with representatives of OPDs).

This experience of OPDs reveals a failure to recognize the voice of persons with disabilities, neglect in the use of sign language and other communication methodologies, a lack of control over their own lives, and the insufficient implementation of the ratified CRPD within the local context [16, 18].

The medical model plays a dominant role in addressing disability-related issues in Sri Lanka [12, 34]. However, several challenges persist in the health and rehabilitation sectors for persons with disabilities, including inadequate facilities for early detection and intervention, limited availability of assistive technologies and devices, poor access to healthcare facilities and specialized services, insufficient rehabilitation facilities, and a lack of knowledge, skills, and competency among healthcare providers working in disability care [12, 16, 33].

The education policy has failed to promote inclusive strategies and plans for children with disabilities. According to data from the 2012 census, 34% of school-aged children with disabilities do not receive any form of education. Furthermore, 20.3% of children of primary school age do not receive primary education [6]. The school system’s attitudinal environment contributes to the segregation of children with disabilities, often excluding them from receiving preschool education [34]. Primary and secondary schools are not adequately equipped to accommodate students with disabilities, resulting in high dropout rates. Administratively, children with disabilities fall under the purview of the special education branch of the Ministry of Education and the non-formal education department, thereby placing them outside mainstream education [40]. The quality of secondary education further limits the opportunities for students with disabilities to access higher education [16, 38, 39].

While special provisions exist for students with disabilities to enroll in higher education, their options remain limited. Higher education institutions do not provide the minimum expected standard of facilities necessary for students with disabilities, and these students often lack the freedom to opt for their preferred subject streams [16]. State parties have failed to implement meaningful initiatives to safeguard the educational rights of children with disabilities. The absence of qualified teachers in special education fields, coupled with insufficient access to schools, classrooms, and washrooms, intensifies their marginalization and discrimination [16, 33]. The lack of education and skills training among persons with disabilities remains one of the primary challenges in securing suitable employment opportunities.

Furthermore, there are several issues related to vocational training. Most training programs are not updated to meet the demands of the current job and labor markets. Furthermore, vocational training centers often lack adequate facilities to accommodate all trainees seeking training [16]. Limited access to primary and secondary education prevents persons with disabilities from meeting the entry qualifications for vocational training. Additionally, the admission of persons with disabilities to state and non-state vocational training centers remains significantly low due to physical inaccessibility, the lack of accessible or alternative communication facilities and training methodologies in accessible formats to support trainees with disabilities [16]. This issue stems from various systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing educational opportunities on an equal footing with their peers without disabilities. One of the primary challenges is the lack of inclusive educational facilities and resources to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Many schools and vocational training centers in Sri Lanka are not equipped with essential accommodations such as accessible classrooms, specialized teaching aids, or trained educators capable of effectively supporting students with disabilities [16, 33]. According to the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka, disparities in access to vocational training programs further intensify this issue, as many programs are not tailored to meet the specific learning needs and abilities of persons with disabilities [34]. Consequently, this limitation restricts their ability to acquire marketable skills and competencies necessary for employment in various sectors.

Despite legal provisions in Sri Lanka mandating equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, these policies have not been effectively implemented by state authorities [16].

According to Disability Organizations Join Front, persons with disabilities face discrimination in the job market for various reasons. They are often overlooked during the hiring process and denied opportunities, despite a 3% quota being reserved for them in government job opening; however, this quota is rarely enforced [16].

A representative of an organization for persons with disabilities highlighted this issue, stating:

“The government uses competitive exams to select suitable candidates among thousands of applicants for limited employment opportunities. While this is an effective mechanism for selecting qualified candidates, persons with disabilities face significant challenges due to the lack of reasonable accommodations during these exams. I can provide several examples. Recently, the government conducted a competitive exam to select graduate teachers for various subjects. However, the question paper was not provided in an accessible format (Braille) or even in the required language for applicants with disabilities. As a result, no candidates with disabilities qualified, rendering the allocated 3% quota meaningless. The relevant authorities lack sensitivity and awareness in this regard. We tried to communicate these issues to the authorities. Some governors agreed to provide an opportunity for applicants with disabilities in their provinces, but others remained indifferent and paid no attention to the matter” (Personal interview 3 with representatives of OPDs).

The evidence reveals that attitudinal, physical, and organizational barriers persist in the domains of work and employment. These gaps include inadequate opportunities for job preparation, career guidance, and counseling; the inability of the mainstream vocational training system to adequately include youth with disabilities; insufficient support for self-employment and microfinance opportunities; and limited access to mainstream employment opportunities. Additionally, there is a failure to provide reasonable accommodation in the work environment, and many employers lack the required knowledge on how to interact with persons with disabilities in the workplace. Many workplaces in Sri Lanka lack necessary modifications such as ramps and accessible restrooms, which significantly hinder mobility for persons with disabilities [16, 24]. Ramps are particularly essential for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments, as they allow for independent movement and access within buildings. Without ramps, these individuals may struggle to enter and move around offices, shops, or other public spaces. Similarly, accessible restrooms are crucial for those with mobility impairments or other disabilities requiring specialized facilities, such as grab bars, wider doors, and adequate space for maneuvering mobility aids [16]. The absence of these accommodations leads to social exclusion and limits employment opportunities and participation in community activities for persons with disabilities [24]. The lack of accessible infrastructure hinders physical access as well as perpetuates stigma and reinforces barriers to inclusion in society. To address these issues effectively, workplaces must comply with accessibility standards and guidelines set forth by regulatory bodies [42].

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities and monitors the implementation of accessibility measures in the public and private sectors [25]. However, inconsistent enforcement and gaps in employer awareness persist, and these issues must be addressed through comprehensive policies and proactive measures to promote inclusivity and accessibility in Sri Lanka [16]. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka provides insights into the specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities regarding accessibility, highlighting ongoing efforts and areas in need of improvement to foster a more inclusive environment [24–25]. Moreover, negative societal attitudes often lead to discrimination during hiring processes, thus affecting job prospects [26]. Discrimination and stigma against persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka significantly impact their opportunities and overall societal integration. This issue arises from deep-seated societal biases and misconceptions about disability, often leading to discriminatory practices in hiring [16]. Employers may harbor unfounded concerns about the capabilities and productivity of persons with disabilities, resulting in biased hiring decisions. These prejudices are intensified by a lack of awareness and understanding of the abilities and potential contributions of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Consequently, qualified candidates may be overlooked or denied employment opportunities based solely on their disability status.

According to the Sri Lanka Disability Rights Association, discriminatory hiring practices remain prevalent despite legal protections and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting equal employment opportunities [26]. The stigma associated with disabilities further marginalizes individuals, contributing to their exclusion from the workforce and broader society. Addressing discrimination and stigma requires comprehensive measures, including awareness-raising campaigns, training programs for employers on inclusive hiring practices, and effective enforcement of anti-discrimination laws [16, 18]. Organizations such as the ILO and local advocacy groups play crucial roles in championing the rights of persons with disabilities and promoting inclusive employment practices across Sri Lanka. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for employment opportunities, Sri Lanka can leverage the diverse talents and contributions of all individuals, irrespective of their disability status, to promote national development and enhance social cohesion. Information from the Sri Lanka Disability Rights Association and ILO provides insights into the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in hiring processes, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to combat stigma and promote inclusive employment practices [22, 26].

In our interviews with one of the representatives of OPDs, they stated the following:

“Young persons with disabilities face numerous difficulties in securing job opportunities due to a lack of required employability skills, such as proficiency in the English language, computer literacy, and soft skills, including favorable attitudes toward available job opportunities in the competitive job market” (Personal interview 1 with representatives of OPDs).

The respondent has professional experience in a managerial role at an organization that offers career guidance and support for persons with disabilities seeking job opportunities. They play a key role as a mediator, matching the needs of employers with those of job seekers to find tailored solutions to employment challenges. While sharing their professional experience, they stated:

“The private sector is interested in providing job opportunities for persons with disabilities as part of the company’s diversity and inclusion policies. However, persons with disabilities often lack the required competency and skills as well as a favorable perception toward available job opportunities. Many expect more benefits at the entry-level, including competitive salaries, access to a computer, and other facilities. For instance, a company recently planned to appoint nearly 45 persons with diverse disabilities following an orientation and a short training program. However, after the training concluded, only 14 individuals remained, while the others declined the positions offered because they did not align with their expected social status. Additionally, persons with disabilities often lack the necessary employability skills due to challenges in education and vocational training. Vocational training instructors also lack the skills needed to train persons with diverse disabilities, which discourages them from pursuing certain career options. Their lack of sensitivity and awareness negatively impacts persons with disabilities who seek their services” (Personal interview 1 with representatives of OPDs).

Moreover, societal attitudes and misconceptions about disability often result in lower expectations regarding the academic and vocational achievements of persons with disabilities. This, in turn, leads to reduced support and opportunities for educational advancement, perpetuating a cycle of limited access to quality education and vocational training. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to promote inclusive education policies, enhance accessibility in educational institutions, and provide specialized training and support services for students with disabilities [16]. Organizations such as the Ministry of Education and advocacy groups play crucial roles in advocating for inclusive educational practices and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for all persons, regardless of their disability status. By investing in inclusive education and vocational training initiatives, Sri Lanka can empower persons with disabilities to reach their full potential, enhance their employability, and contribute meaningfully to the workforce and society [34].

This evidence highlights the challenges faced by persons with disabilities regarding limited access to quality education and vocational training in Sri Lanka, highlighting the need for inclusive educational reforms and targeted interventions to enhance skill development and employability. Sri Lanka lacks

disability-disaggregated data; however, research findings indicate a strong connection between poverty and disability [43]. The country has achieved a higher level of human development through social policies such as free healthcare and education for all. However, disparities persist across sectors and regions [44]. The relationship between poverty and disability is complex, with poverty potentially being a cause and a consequence of disability [43]. Additionally, specific challenges affect women with disabilities, comprising 57% of the disability population in Sri Lanka [6]. They face a greater risk of abuse due to their gender and disability status [16]. Moreover, they are often subjected to multiple forms of discrimination in their daily lives and are particularly susceptible to unreported domestic discrimination as well as various forms of physical harassment. Furthermore, they often lack the opportunities to participate in the policymaking process that upholds their rights.

The situational analysis highlights significant gaps in disability policy implementation in Sri Lanka. Although adequate policies exist to support inclusive employment, their enforcement and implementation vary due to diverse reasons [25]. Despite the existence of legal frameworks and policies designed to promote equal opportunities, their application remains inconsistent. One of the key challenges is the lack of comprehensive guidelines and standards pertaining to workplace and public institution accessibility. While laws mandate accommodations such as ramps and accessible restrooms, enforcement mechanisms and oversight to ensure compliance are often insufficient [25]. As a result, disparities in accessibility persist across sectors and regions, limiting employment opportunities and social participation for persons with disabilities. Additionally, many employers and stakeholders lack awareness of their obligations under disability rights laws. This knowledge gap in adhering to inclusive employment practices further marginalizes persons with disabilities in the job market [22].

According to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms are essential for ensuring compliance with disability rights laws [25]. Strengthening enforcement measures alongside capacity-building initiatives for employers and public officials is crucial for promoting greater accessibility and inclusion. Advocacy organizations and civil society groups play a vital role in monitoring policy implementation and pushing for stronger enforcement of disability rights laws [16, 18]. By reinforcing these efforts and fostering partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and disability rights advocates, Sri Lanka can improve policy enforcement and promote greater accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities [16].

Policy Implications And Recommendations

Policy Implications

Sri Lanka's National Policy on Disability (2003) and the National Action Plan for Disability (2014) provide essential guidelines by highlighting the obligations of the government and other stakeholders in ensuring equal rights for persons with disabilities. These policies highlight that persons with disabilities should possess the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and choices as others in society. The national policy was formulated through a consultative and participatory process to address the demands of OPDs advocating for equal rights. It was developed considering the country's social, economic, and cultural ethos while aligning with global trends and standards [3]. Following the National Policy and the UNCRPD, all policy areas should be implemented based on the recognition of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity. This includes respect for their inherent dignity and autonomy, equal treatment without discrimination based on disability, empowerment through accessibility and opportunities, and full and effective participation in society. Additionally, policies must uphold gender equality and respect for the evolving capacities of children, ensuring their right to a full and decent life [35].

Both the National Policy on Disability concerning employment and Section 27 of the UNCRPD outline the conditions necessary to ensure the equal rights of persons with disabilities in the workforce. These provisions affirm their right to work through a free choice of employment in the public and private sectors, including wage and self-employment in formal and informal sectors. Persons with disabilities should have access to employment placement and support services. Additionally, employers are obligated to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure fair and favorable working conditions, including equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy work environments,

protection from harassment, mechanisms for redressing grievances, and opportunities for career advancement [3].

The policy further stipulates the required conditions for vocational training and skills development to ensure the employability of persons with disabilities. Youth and adults with disabilities should be integrated into mainstream vocational training and skills development programs, with reasonable accommodations provided to enable them to pursue their chosen skills. Additionally, personnel in vocational training institutions and skills development programs should be adequately trained to address the needs of persons with disabilities [3].

Despite Sri Lanka's comprehensive disability policy and action plan, implementation has fallen short of expectations, and there is little evidence of a significant impact of these policies on the lives of persons with disabilities [16, 18]. The available data indicate that they remain a marginalized segment of society facing economic vulnerability and exclusion from the job market. This marginalization is reflected in statistics: Of the 1,558,852 persons with disabilities aged over 15 years, only 29% are economically active, while 70.9% lack opportunities to contribute to national development [6]. These figures highlight the alarming extent to which youth and adults with disabilities are deprived of their economic rights [35]. As noted in previous chapters, persons with disabilities are often denied the opportunity to contribute to society as equal citizens due to various challenges, including environmental barriers, systemic and structural obstacles, and negative societal attitudes. Social perceptions frequently characterize persons with disabilities as dependent and incapable, reinforcing a charity-based approach to disability. This mindset results in resistance to implementing even basic workplace accommodations for job seekers with disabilities or improving public transportation accessibility, which would enable them to compete in the job market on an equal basis. Moreover, these challenges disproportionately impact women due to their disadvantaged position within Sri Lanka's patriarchal society [16, 18, 19].

It is evident that while the country has strong policies for persons with disabilities, aimed at shifting from a charity-based approach to a rights-based framework to foster a disability-inclusive society, it lacks context-specific strategies and adequate legislation necessary for effective policy implementation. As mentioned earlier, the "Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996" is the only legislation in Sri Lanka that supports policies for persons with disabilities. However, it does not include policy developments after 1996, including the National Policy on Disability (2003), Action Plan on Disability (2014), and UNCRPD, which Sri Lanka ratified in 2016. Recognizing the gaps in existing legislation, responsible authorities, in collaboration with OPDs, have attempted to draft a new bill since 2003. Although several drafts have been prepared, none have been proposed beyond the Legal Draftsman's Office [35]. The most recent draft was submitted to the Legal Draftsman in 2019; however, it remains stuck in an ongoing cycle of revision. Personal interviews with representatives of OPDs reveal dissatisfaction with the latest version, criticizing its lack of comprehensiveness in addressing the effective implementation of policies for persons with disabilities within the local social context [16, 18]. Conversely, interviews with relevant officials indicate that they face challenges in finalizing the bill while incorporating the diverse concerns of OPDs. As a result, some level of compromise is deemed necessary to advance the legislative process (Personal interviews 4 & 5 with relevant officials).

According to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms are essential for assessing compliance with disability rights laws and addressing enforcement challenges [25]. Strengthening enforcement measures, alongside capacity-building initiatives for employers and public officials, is crucial for enhancing accessibility and inclusion in Sri Lanka. Advocacy organizations and civil society groups play a vital role in monitoring policy implementation and advocating for stronger enforcement of disability rights laws [16]. By reinforcing these efforts and fostering partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and disability rights advocates, the country can enhance policy enforcement and ensure greater accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities [5]. Priority should be given to establishing a legislative framework that guarantees equal employment opportunities and appropriate workplace conditions for individuals in this group, with particular emphasis on women with disabilities, under the National Policy on Disabilities and National Employment Policy. Currently,

the responsibility for policy implementation rests with the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, as noted earlier, no single ministry can effectively coordinate disability-related initiatives across multiple ministries. Given that this is a multi-ministerial policy and action plan, an institutional shift is required to achieve a meaningful impact and foster a disability-inclusive society in Sri Lanka.

Recommendations

The country requires a twofold approach, the Social Welfare and Inclusive Development approaches, to be implemented simultaneously to address the complex and multidimensional issues related to disability and to achieve the expected goals outlined in the National Policy on Disability as well as in the UNCRPD, which was ratified in 2016. The goals of these policies include the following:

- The rights of persons with disabilities are fulfilled [5].
- Social justice for persons with disabilities is ensured [3].
- Persons with disabilities have opportunities and choices to contribute to national development through their knowledge, experience, and unique skills and capabilities, thereby participating as equal citizens [3].
- Persons with disabilities have opportunities and choices to lead fulfilling lives and experience enhanced well-being [3].

1. The Social Welfare Approach Should be Strengthened to Provide a Safety Net for Poor and Marginalized Persons with Disabilities

It is recommended to expand existing social welfare interventions to establish a comprehensive and effective safety net, improving the well-being of persons living below the poverty line and those who are particularly vulnerable. As Mendis and Perera noted, two key strategies are essential for implementing social welfare interventions: 1) Enhancing mechanisms for identifying persons with disabilities who are impoverished or in need and 2) Improving the quality and coverage of the social safety net to ensure equitable access to support services [35].

The Ministry of Social Welfare is currently responsible for implementing disability policies in Sri Lanka. The Department of Social Services already provides a range of social protection and welfare services, including monthly cash transfers, provision of assistive devices and technologies, special vocational training opportunities, educational grants, support for self-employment and medical care, assistance to Disabled Persons' Organizations and Self-Help Groups, and improved access to healthcare, rehabilitation, and social services. However, empirical evidence from progress reports of OPDs and personal interviews with representatives of these organizations indicate that these programs fall short in addressing the actual requirements of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, officials have confirmed that a significant number of eligible persons with disabilities are unable to access welfare benefits due to insufficient government funding.

Several factors contribute to this gap, including the lack of disability-disaggregated data for evidence-based planning, inadequate methodologies for identifying beneficiaries and their specific needs, and limited budget allocations for disability-related programs. To address these issues, it is recommended to introduce a digitalized system for identifying individuals in need and assessing their specific needs. Additionally, steps should be taken to allocate sufficient resources to meet the demands of persons with disabilities. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities should remain affiliated with the Ministry of Social Welfare. Additionally, it must strengthen collaboration with NGOs supporting persons with disabilities to optimize available resources and prevent duplication of efforts. Furthermore, OPDs must advocate for increased budgetary allocations to strengthen the social protection system for persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

2. Disability-Inclusive Development Approach to Strengthening an Inclusive Workforce:

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of a country's social and economic development is a cross-cutting issue. Strengthening the disability-inclusive development approach in Sri Lanka, as recommended by UNDP (2018), is essential to ensuring that all marginalized and excluded persons with disabilities have equal opportunities and choices for inclusion in the social and economic mainstream while also having their rights fulfilled. This approach facilitates the integration of disability-focused interventions with mainstream planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation strategies. A collaborative approach is essential for implementing multi-ministerial, multisectoral, and multilevel interventions. Since the disability policy and action plan involve multiple ministries, no single ministry can effectively coordinate disability-related efforts across government institutions. Currently, each ministry operates within its specific mandate in an isolated manner due to deficiencies in overall coordination mechanisms. To address this issue, it is recommended to establish a National Disability-Inclusive Commission at the highest level, directly under the office of the Executive, either the President or the Prime Minister. This commission will be responsible for implementing a multi-ministerial, multisectoral, and multilevel strategy. The proposed commission's functions may include policy formulation, legislative oversight, coordination, internal recording, reporting, and monitoring. Additionally, OPDs should be well-organized to advocate for the establishment of the National Disability-Inclusive Commission as a priority to effectively implement disability-inclusive policies in Sri Lanka.

3. Recommended Interventions for Inclusive Employment

To ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities in employment alongside others, the following specific interventions should be implemented by the proposed National Disability-Inclusive Commission:

- A. Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of policies for persons with disabilities concerning employment and identify gaps in equal employment opportunities.
- B. Eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in recruitment within the public and private sectors.
- C. Enforce the current 3% employment quota for persons with disabilities, making it mandatory for the state and private sectors. The government should also provide special provisions and reasonable accommodations to safeguard the employment rights of persons with disabilities.
- D. Address communication barriers by ensuring that government agencies provide information through alternative communication media such as sign language, Braille, and larger print formats.
- E. Establish a proper system that includes alternative communication facilities to integrate persons with disabilities into mainstream vocational training institutes based on the principles of inclusion.
- F. Improve the quality of special training centers and introduce new vocational training programs that align with the preferences of persons with disabilities as well as market trends. These courses should meet the National Vocational Qualifications standards. Furthermore, for candidates lacking the minimum educational qualifications due to limited access to primary and secondary education, a special admission methodology based on hands-on practical skills should be introduced. All vocational training centers, technical colleges, technology schools, and other training facilities should promote an inclusive, disability-friendly environment.

- G. Establish strong monitoring, implementation, and coordination mechanisms as outlined in Article 33 of the CRPD to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities. The government should expedite the passage of the upgraded Disability Rights Bill, which has been submitted to the Department of Legal Draftsman. Additionally, disability awareness initiatives should be implemented for employers, along with capacity-building programs to empower employees with disabilities to improve their performance and tackle workplace discrimination.

Concluding Remarks

Sri Lanka is an ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse country that has a well-established National Policy on Disability and a comprehensive National Action Plan for Disability. Moreover, the country also ratified the UNCRPD in 2016. The objective of this study was to examine the impact of these policies on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream workforce in Sri Lanka. It critically analyzed how sociocultural, structural, and systemic barriers influence persons with disabilities in their efforts to participate in the workforce on an equal basis with others. Compared with the rural and state sectors, the urban sector of the country is better equipped with physical infrastructure, access to services, and employment opportunities. In contrast, the majority of persons living in rural and state sectors face significant challenges in accessing services and opportunities.

The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996 provides a legal definition of disability in Sri Lanka; however, this definition has its limitations as it primarily focuses on the medical aspect of disability while overlooking sociocultural, structural, and systemic barriers. Consequently, within the local social context, disability is often conceptualized from a charity perspective. The ideology of karma plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of disability and reinforces societal inequalities between able-bodied individuals and persons with disabilities. Negative attitudes further contribute to discriminatory practices against persons with disabilities in their everyday lives.

A major challenge in addressing disability-related issues in Sri Lanka is the lack of disaggregated data necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing the workforce. However, the latest census indicates that only one-third of persons with disabilities above the age of 15 are economically active, while two-thirds remain economically inactive. This discrepancy is not solely due to functional limitations but also stems from diverse sociocultural, structural, and systemic barriers that hinder their participation in the workforce on an equal basis with others. Notably, the proportion of females with disabilities is higher than that of males; however, women's participation in the workforce remains particularly low. Moreover, women with disabilities face these barriers disproportionately due to their disadvantaged position within a patriarchal social structure.

This study has provided an in-depth discussion of the impact of disability policies on inclusive employment and the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the labor market. While government initiatives encourage the employment of persons with disabilities through quotas and special recruitment drives, significant challenges persist. The private sector has adopted diversity policies; however, multiple barriers remain, including attitudinal, physical, and organizational, inadequate opportunities for job preparation, career guidance, and counseling; the failure of mainstream vocational training systems to adequately accommodate youth with disabilities; limited support for self-employment and microfinance, limited opportunities for mainstream employment; and the failure to provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Additionally, there is a general lack of knowledge and sensitivity among employers and colleagues regarding how to effectively engage with persons with disabilities. Furthermore, mainstream public transportation and the built environment remain largely inaccessible. Although Sri Lanka has adequate policies to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities on an equal basis, systemic barriers persist with little significant impact on their daily lives. The situational analysis presented in this study reveals that a considerable number of persons with disabilities have encountered discrimination during the hiring process and face substantial barriers in securing employment. The country also lacks effective implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms necessary to operationalize multisectoral policies aimed at creating a disability-inclusive society in Sri Lanka.

Advocacy organizations and civil society groups play a vital role in monitoring policy implementation and advocating for stronger enforcement of disability rights laws in Sri Lanka. By strengthening these efforts and fostering partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and disability rights advocates, Sri Lanka can improve the enforcement of existing policies and ensure greater accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities. Priority should be given to instituting a legislative framework that guarantees equal employment opportunities and appropriate workplace conditions for persons with disabilities, based on the National Policy on Disabilities and the National Employment Policy. Policy implementation currently falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, as previously discussed, no single ministry can effectively coordinate disability-related initiatives across multiple government entities. The evidence suggests that institutional reform is necessary to implement disability policies effectively and to foster a truly disability-inclusive society in Sri Lanka. By strengthening these efforts and fostering partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and disability rights advocates, Sri Lanka can enhance the enforcement of existing policies and ensure greater accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.

The findings of this analysis suggest a twofold approach to addressing the complex and multidimensional nature of disability-related issues in Sri Lanka. The social welfare approach is significant in providing a safety net for poor, vulnerable, and marginalized persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, the disability-inclusive development approach employs powerful strategies to integrate persons with disabilities into mainstream society by eliminating structural and systemic barriers that deny them their rights. A large-scale sensitization and awareness-raising campaign is required to address the deep-rooted sociocultural and attitudinal barriers that persons with disabilities face in all aspects of their lives. Discriminatory practices often begin within families and expand to communities and broader social institutions. Therefore, a well-organized national disability awareness campaign is necessary to educate society while simultaneously empowering persons with disabilities to advocate for their rights. The role of OPDs in Sri Lanka remains limited in this regard. Most OPDs in the country are structured in a segregated manner, focusing on specific advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities; however, the country requires a strong, unified disability movement that includes all disability types. Achieving this goal necessitates a comprehensive capacity-building program for leaders and members of OPDs.

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Annexures

TABLE 1
PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION (AGED 5 YEARS AND OVER) WITH DISABILITIES BY DISTRICT

District	Proportion of the population (aged 5 years and over) with disabilities by district (both sexes)
Colombo	6.6%
Gampaha	7.4%
Kaluthara	8.8%
Kandy	10.2%
Matale	9.2%
Nuwara Eliya	9.8%
Galle	7.9%
Matara	9.1%
Hambanthota	9.2%
Jaffna	9.5%
Mannar	8.8%
Vavuniya	9.0%
Mullaitivu	9.3%
Kilinochchi	8.3%
Bataloa	6.8%
Ampara	7.8%
Trincomalee	9.7%
Kurunegala	9.4%
Puttalam	9.5%
Anuradhapura	8.5%
Polonnaruwa	9.9%
Badulla	9.0%
Monaragala	9.2%
Rathnapura	9.3%
Kegalle	9.0%

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2012 [6].

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF POPULATION (AGED 5 YEARS AND OVER) WITH DISABILITIES BY DISTRICT AND TYPE OF DISABILITY

District	Proportion of the population (aged 5 years and over) with disabilities by district and type of disability					
	Seeing	Hearing	Walking	Cognition	Selfcare	Communication
Colombo	3.9%	1.6%	3.0%	1.4%	1.0%	0.8%
Gampaha	4.4%	1.9%	3.5%	1.8%	1.1%	0.9%
Kaluthara	5.3%	2.1%	4.1%	1.8%	1.0%	0.8%
Kandy	6.3%	2.2%	4.9%	2.1%	1.2%	1.1%
Matale	5.6%	2.3%	4.1%	1.9%	0.9%	0.8%
Nuwara Eliya	5.8%	1.9%	5.2%	2.1%	1.1%	1.0%
Galle	4.9%	2.3%	3.4%	1.9%	1.1%	0.9%
Matara	5.9%	2.6%	4.0%	2.2%	1.3%	1.1%
Hambanthota	6.0%	2.3%	4.1%	2.0%	1.1%	0.9%
Jaffna	5.2%	2.2%	4.3%	1.9%	1.0%	1.2%
Mannar	5.2%	1.8%	3.9%	1.8%	1.1%	1.6%
Vavuniya	5.4%	2.2%	4.3%	3.0%	1.3%	2.3%
Mullaitivu	5.6%	1.4%	3.7%	1.7%	0.7%	1.0%
Kilinochchi	3.8%	1.7%	4.1%	1.5%	1.0%	1.8%
Bataloa	3.5%	1.3%	3.5%	1.4%	0.7%	1.0%
Ampara	5.2%	1.5%	3.4%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%
Trincomalee	6.1%	2.1%	4.4%	2.3%	1.3%	1.6%
Kurunegala	5.9%	2.5%	4.5%	2.2%	1.4%	1.0%
Puttalam	6.2%	2.0%	4.0%	1.8%	1.0%	1.0%
Anuradhapura	5.4%	2.1%	3.8%	1.8%	1.0%	0.8%
Polonnaruwa	6.3%	1.9%	4.3%	2.0%	1.3%	0.9%
Badulla	5.7%	2.3%	3.9%	1.8%	1.2%	1.1%
Monaragala	6.2%	2.6%	4.3%	1.9%	1.1%	0.9%
Rathnapura	6.2%	2.6%	4.1%	2.1%	1.1%	0.9%
Kegalle	5.4%	2.7%	4.1%	2.1%	1.0%	0.9%

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2012 [6].

TABLE 3

PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION (AGED 5 YEARS AND OVER) WITH DISABILITIES BY SEX

District	Proportion of the population (aged 5 years and over) with disabilities by sex	
	Male	Female
Colombo	5.5%	7.6%
Gampaha	6.2%	8.4%
Kaluthara	7.8%	9.7%
Kandy	9.1%	11.2%
Matale	8.1%	10.2%
Nuwara Eliya	9.4%	10.2%
Galle	7.2%	8.6%
Matara	8.0%	10.1%
Hambanthota	8.3%	10.1%
Jaffna	8.8%	10.1%
Mannar	8.2%	9.3%
Vavuniya	8.3%	9.6%
Mullaitivu	9.0%	9.7%
Kilinochchi	7.5%	9.1%
Bataloa	6.3%	7.3%
Ampara	7.2%	8.5%
Trincomalee	8.6%	10.7%
Kurunegala	8.2%	10.5%
Puttalam	8.1%	10.7%
Anuradhapura	7.6%	9.4%
Polonnaruwa	9.2%	10.6%
Badulla	8.3%	9.7%
Monaragala	8.5%	10.0%
Rathnapura	8.6%	10.0%
Kegalle	8.1%	9.8%

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2012 [6].

TABLE 4

PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION (AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER) WITH DISABILITIES BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND GENDER

District	Proportion of the population (aged 15 years and over) with disabilities by district and gender			
	Male		Female	
	Employment	Unemployment	Employment	Unemployment
Colombo	37.9%	1.0%	13.0%	0.6%
Gampaha	36.9%	0.9%	11.4%	0.3%
Kaluthara	37.8%	0.9%	12.2%	0.6%
Kandy	47.3%	1.0%	17.6%	0.4%
Matale	47.3%	0.1%	16.9%	0.3%
Nuwara Eliya	48.4%	1.4%	29.1%	1.5%
Galle	36.3%	0.6%	15.1%	0.7%
Matara	37.6%	0.9%	13.8%	0.7%
Hambanthota	49.0%	0.5%	15.7%	0.5%
Jaffna	42.3%	0.9%	9.3%	0.4%
Mannar	49.3%	1.7%	7.0%	0.7%
Vavuniya	46.1%	2.8%	8.7%	0.4%
Mullaitivu	55.4%	0.9%	12.9%	1.0%
Kilinochchi	54.1%	0.5%	5.6%	0.9%
Bataloa	51.8%	1.0%	13.7%	0.6%
Ampara	56.9%	1.4%	12.6%	0.4%
Trincomalee	58.6%	1.3%	15.8%	0.4%
Kurunegala	44.6%	0.5%	13.3%	0.2%
Puttalam	52.5%	0.8%	18.5%	0.4%
Anuradhapura	56.0%	0.8%	22.4%	0.5%
Polonnaruwa	56.4%	1.1%	13.7%	0.4%
Badulla	46.6%	0.5%	20.8%	0.5%
Monaragala	61.1%	0.3%	22.7%	0.4%
Rathnapura	45.3%	0.6%	19.5%	0.6%
Kegalle	41.2%	0.7%	14.7%	0.3%

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2012 [6].

A CASE STUDY OF TURKIYE

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Executive Summary

The inclusion of persons with disabilities as productive members of the workforce is considered a fundamental component of sustainable development. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize their human rights and achieve social inclusion.

In Türkiye, persons with disabilities face various challenges in exercising their rights and participating equally in all areas of social life, including employment. Historically, traditional and medical approaches to disability have fostered negative attitudes, characterized by stereotypes and prejudices. Disability has often been conceptualized in terms of inability, perceived as an individual problem. Based on this understanding, policy measures have predominantly focused on protection, charity, treatment, rehabilitation, and care, with efforts to improve the labor market participation of persons with disabilities emerging much later.

However, demands from organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), along with global policy transformations, have led to the recognition of disability as a social issue rather than merely an individual one. Consequently, policy approaches have begun shifting toward social inclusion by ensuring the recognition of human rights for persons with disabilities.

In Türkiye, the impacts of this transformation, which became apparent after the 1980s, raise an important question: To what extent has this transformation contributed to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities as productive members of society today?

This study aims to examine policy transformations in the field of disability in Türkiye, a member of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO). It explores potential challenges, policy measures, relevant legal regulations, institutional transformations, and practices aimed at achieving inclusive employment as a fundamental aspect of social inclusion. Additionally, the study offers recommendations for addressing potential challenges. The study is primarily structured around four sections: contextual background, policy analysis, situational analysis, and policy implications and recommendations. A literature review was employed as the primary data collection method. In this regard, academic studies, policy documents, legal regulations, survey reports, and the websites of relevant institutions and organizations were reviewed. The aim was to construct a comprehensive framework, utilizing primary data sources whenever possible and secondary data sources when necessary. However, a significant limitation of this study is the lack of comparable, valid, reliable, and up-to-date data on disability.

The study's findings reveal that Türkiye has increasingly emphasized ensuring the equal participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of social life, including employment. Legislative and institutional developments have been instrumental in implementing this inclusive approach. The legal framework guarantees the involvement of persons with disabilities in policy formulation and implementation. Key legislative milestones include the Turkish Disability Act No. 5378, enacted in 2005; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Türkiye ratified and incorporated into its domestic legislation in 2009; and the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document, launched in 2021 as a national roadmap for disability inclusion.

In line with these efforts, the employment of persons with disabilities in an open, accessible, and inclusive labor market has been prioritized. Measures such as quota/levy schemes, supported

employment, sheltered employment, and incentives for employers, employees with disabilities, and entrepreneurs with disabilities have been implemented. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of civil servants with disabilities in the public sector in recent years. However, the limited availability of employment data for persons with disabilities makes it challenging to fully assess the impact of these measures. The study findings and perspectives of persons with disabilities indicate that existing initiatives have not yet achieved the expected level of effectiveness in facilitating their participation in the workforce in Türkiye.

Contextual Background

Although the criteria for defining disability vary among countries, data obtained through the disability module utilizing the UN Washington Group Short Set of Questions, as part of the 2011 “National Survey on Population and Housing” revealed that persons with disabilities constitute 6.9% of the total population [1].

Persons with disabilities in Türkiye, as in the rest of the world, experience higher levels of discrimination compared with those without disabilities, hindering their ability to effectively exercise their human rights, encompassing accessibility, healthcare, education, employment, access to justice, and participation in political and public life [2].

Social attitudes toward persons with disabilities are at the core of the discrimination and social exclusion experienced by this group. The persistence of traditional and medical approaches in society and their influence on policies, institutional structures, and implementation have posed significant challenges to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Türkiye. One example of this traditional perspective is illustrated as follows:

“In Türkiye, military service is traditionally considered very important. The exemption of persons with disabilities from military service—meaning they do not serve—is often viewed as making them ‘half a man.’ This perception has perpetuated the victimization of persons with disabilities. While a man with a disability is seen as ‘half,’ a woman with a disability is viewed as even more incapable. This situation reinforces the notion of incapability among persons with disabilities” (Personal interview with a representative of OPDs).

In fact, Türkiye has experienced significant developments concerning the participation of persons with disabilities in social life, reflecting global trends. The emergence of new social movements in the 1950s worldwide further influenced Türkiye’s approach to disability inclusion. During this period, OPDs were established for different disability groups. However, unlike the advocacy-driven activities seen globally, these organizations in Türkiye primarily aimed to secure government support and encouragement [3]. OPDs began participating in policy-making processes in the 1980s, influenced by international policy transformations driven by OPDs worldwide [4].

A key development in this regard was the establishment of the National Coordinating Committee for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, in which OPDs were also represented [5], to increase the social participation of persons with disabilities. The formation of an umbrella association, the Türkiye Confederation of the Disabled, alongside four sub-federations, including the Federation of Persons with Visual Disabilities, Federation of Persons with Hearing Disabilities, Federation of Persons with Orthopedic Disabilities, and Federation of Persons with Mental Disabilities in 1983, played a crucial role in the establishment of this Committee [4].

In response to the demands of OPDs, the Administration for Persons with Disabilities (OZIDA) was established in 1997 under the Prime Ministry to perform the coordination functions of the Committee with administrative authority. OZIDA was responsible for identifying issues and promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in social life on an equal basis with other individuals. Furthermore, it carried out these tasks within the framework of the resolutions of High Boards and Councils, involving public institutions, OPDs, and academics [5].

During this period, various legal regulations, research, and scientific studies were conducted, alongside awareness-raising activities in multiple areas, including education and employment, to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

In 2002, the Survey on Persons with Disabilities in Türkiye was conducted in cooperation with the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) and OZIDA to collect national disability data. According to the survey, the proportion of persons with disabilities, including those with chronic illnesses, relative to the total population in Türkiye was 12.29% [6]. This survey was significant as it was the first to reveal the prevalence of disability as well as the circumstances of persons with disabilities in various areas, such as employment and education. However, it faced criticism for defining disability through a medical model, failing to provide internationally comparable data [7–9].

The subsequent nationwide survey, the Population and Housing Survey, was conducted in 2011 by TURKSTAT in coordination with the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly (EYHGM). This survey was particularly important as it includes a disability module based on The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS), which adheres to the biopsychosocial model. It conceptualizes disability as the interaction between a person's functional limitations and environmental barriers, whether physical, social, cultural, or legislative, that may limit their participation in society. According to the results of the Population and Housing Survey, 6.9% of the population aged 3 years and older have at least one type of disability [1].

The Turkish Disability Act (TDA), a framework law developed with the advocacy and participation of persons with disabilities, came into effect in 2005 [10]. The Act defines the participation of persons with disabilities and their families in decision-making processes and the fight against disability-based discrimination as fundamental principles. Additionally, accessibility was made compulsory, and measures were introduced to ensure that persons with disabilities could participate in education and employment as productive individuals without discrimination. However, one limitation of the Act was that it defined disability as an individual problem caused by disability.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was signed by the government of the Republic of Türkiye in 2007 and ratified in 2009. As a human rights agreement enacted under Article 90 of the Constitution, the CRPD serves as a basis for all legal and administrative regulations as well as constitutes a principle of law to which independent Turkish courts can directly refer [11].

As part of the transposition of the CRPD into domestic law, terminology with negative connotations, such as “handicap,” “faulty,” or “impaired,” was replaced with “person with disability” in 2013. This change aimed to encourage a rights-based approach in policies and practices for persons with disabilities and to reflect the paradigm shift from a medical to a social perspective [12].

In 2014, the TDA was revised in line with the CRPD. The objectives and principles of the law were restructured to adopt a right-based approach, introducing terms such as “disability-based discrimination,” “forms of discrimination,” “reasonable accommodation,” and “accessibility.” Discrimination was explicitly prohibited in a separate article, and the obligation to implement reasonable accommodation measures was stipulated to ensure equality. Furthermore, the previous medical-oriented definition of disability, which emphasized deficiency or incapability, was replaced with one that addressed disability as an interaction between individuals and their social environment (Art. 3) [13].

However, persons with disabilities can access relevant programs and services, including education, employment, healthcare, social services, incentives, and support, based on their Disability Health Board Reports issued by authorized hospitals in the country, which are primarily medically oriented.

Established in 2011 under the Ministry of Family and Social Services (ASHB), the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly (EYHGM)¹ serves as the focal point responsible for promoting, ensuring, and monitoring the implementation of the CRPD at the governmental level.

¹ OZIDA was closed and its duties were transferred to EYHGM.

As the coordination mechanism for implementing and monitoring the CRPD, the Monitoring and Evaluation Board on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established in 2013 to safeguard and strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities. In 2021, a presidential circular revised the Board's structure to enhance the participation of OPDs. In this regard, the Board, comprising senior representatives of public institutions and two OPDs with the highest national-level representation, works to implement the Republic of Türkiye's national disability policy [14].

Furthermore, as an independent mechanism for monitoring CRPD implementation, the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TIHEK) was established in 2016 to tackle, among other issues, discrimination against persons with disabilities. TIHEK, which also receives complaints regarding human rights violations from persons with disabilities, has the authority to impose administrative fines in cases of rights violations [15].

Additionally, the Ombudsman, appointed by the National Assembly in 2012, functions as another independent mechanism to address complaints regarding public service delivery. It investigates and provides recommendations on the legality and fairness of administrative actions, decisions, and conduct, ensuring respect for human rights [16].

Despite these legal and institutional advancements, certain challenges remain. Traditional approaches remain widely used, disaggregated data is still often fragmented, and accessibility issues, including access to information and communication technologies, persist. Furthermore, persons with disabilities encounter barriers to participation in various aspects of social life, including education and employment [17].

To address these challenges, the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document was introduced in 2021 as Türkiye's roadmap for meeting legal, institutional, and implementation requirements, aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Adopting a rights-based and inclusive approach with strong coordination, the national vision aspires to create "an inclusive society where persons with disabilities can realize their potential as equal citizens." The framework is structured around eight policy areas: Inclusive and Accessible Society, Protection of Rights and Justice, Health and Well-Being, Inclusive Education, Economic Security, Independent Living, Disaster Humanitarian Emergencies, and Implementation and Monitoring, as well as 31 goals [17]. To operationalize these objectives, the first National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2023–25) was launched on 2 December 2022. However, although the first year of the Action Plan's implementation has concluded, the official monitoring report has yet to be published [18].

Policy Analysis

One of the prerequisites for a life of dignity for persons with disabilities, as for all individuals, is economic security. In this regard, Türkiye implements policy measures and programs to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to vocational training, employment opportunities, and the required support while benefiting from these services. Additionally, measures are in place to support them in achieving an adequate standard of living. By facilitating participation in the workforce, these initiatives encourage persons with disabilities to acquire a profession and realize their potential. Furthermore, social protection measures are implemented to safeguard them from poverty [17].

However, persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to employment due to discrimination, stigmatization, prejudices, and challenges in accessing assistive technologies, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility in general. Additionally, limited participation in education further intensifies these challenges [19].

In Türkiye, constitutional measures have been adopted to enable persons with disabilities to contribute to economic development by accessing meaningful employment opportunities. Work is a constitutional right for all citizens, including those with disabilities, and the state bears the responsibility of taking necessary measures to ensure that all individuals can exercise their rights to a dignified life in an inclusive society [20]. Moreover, with the 2010 amendment to Article 10 of the Constitution, ensuring

equality before the law, positive measures aimed at achieving equality for certain groups, including persons with disabilities, are explicitly recognized as not violating the principle of equality (paragraph added in 2010 by Law No. 5982).

The TDA prohibits disability-based discrimination in all aspects of employment, including job application, recruitment, working hours and conditions, employment continuity, career development, and occupational health and safety. Furthermore, it mandates that employers provide reasonable accommodations tailored to the specific needs of employees with disabilities (Art. 14) [10].

A significant development in tackling disability-based discrimination, welcomed by OPDs, was the 2005 amendment to the Turkish Criminal Code, which introduced penal sanctions for discriminatory actions based on disability. However, an amendment to the regulation in 2013 linked discrimination to motives of hatred (Art. 122). Since proving hateful intent is legally challenging, OPDs continue to criticize this amendment [9, 10, 21, 22]. The same concern was reflected in the 2019 Concluding Observations issued by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for Türkiye [23].

Additionally, an amendment to Article 5 of Labor Law No. 4857 in 2014 explicitly prohibited employment discrimination based on disability, reinforcing the principle of equal treatment for persons with disabilities (paragraph revised by Law No. 6518).

Türkiye prioritizes the employment of persons with disabilities in an open, inclusive, and accessible environment. The main policy measures supporting the right to work for persons with disabilities include the quota/levy scheme, self-employment, sheltered employment, and supported employment. Furthermore, incentives and financial support mechanisms are in place to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, benefiting employers, employees with disabilities, and entrepreneurs with disabilities alike [17].

Policy measures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities have primarily been based on quota and quota/levy schemes for the public and private sectors since their origins in the 1970s. The quota scheme also applies to civil servants. Labor Law No. 1475, enacted in 1971, required private and public employers to ensure that persons with disabilities constituted 2% of the total workforce in a given workplace. With Decree Law No. 572, enacted in 1997, this rate was increased to 3% (effective from 1999), and with the amendment to the new Labor Law No. 4857 in 2008, the quota requirement for public workplaces was further increased to 4% (Art. 30) [19].

Since 1998, employers failing to meet the quota target were required to pay an administrative fine (Art. 101), which amounted to USD447 per month in 2023 [24] for each unfulfilled quota position. These fines are collected in the Administrative Fine Fund under the authority of the State Employment Agency (ISKUR) and allocated to projects that promote self-employment, assistive technologies, job placements, and workplace adaptations. Additionally, employers can access this fund to acquire new technologies and necessary tools to enhance the productivity of employees with disabilities. The allocation of the fund's resources to such projects has been a significant step toward improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities [19]. As of March 2024, the total amount collected in the fund was USD6,703,458 [25].

According to the data provided by ISKUR, the authority responsible for implementing the relevant regulations under Labor Law No. 4857, as of the end of 2023, the total number of employed persons with disabilities stood at 144,178, with 22,449 working in the public sector and 121,729 in the private sector [26].

With the enactment of Civil Servants Law No. 657, the employment of persons with disabilities as civil servants gained prominence in 1983. Under Article 53, public institutions were initially required to reserve 2% of their total staff positions to persons with disabilities. This rate was increased to 3% of filled staff positions in 1999 through Decree Law No. 572 (1997).

Regarding the recruitment process under this system, the Public Employees Selection Exam for Persons with Disabilities (EKPSS), a centralized examination specifically designed for persons with disabilities, has been administered biennially since 2012. The Measuring, Selection and Placement Center (OSYM) is responsible for conducting these exams, ensuring accessibility in facilities and exam content. The exam questions are tailored to take into account the educational background and disability condition of the candidates. To encourage participation, approximately 80% of the EKPSS application fees are subsidized by the general budget. As the total application fee is set at USD10.87, applicants with disabilities are required to pay only USD2.20 [27].

There has been a significant increase in the number of civil servants with disabilities employed, mainly due to the EKPSS method over the years. The number of civil servants with disabilities, which was 5,777 in 2002, reached 68,396 as of July 2024 [28].

Entrepreneurship Grant Support is provided to persons with disabilities who wish to start their businesses. This support aims to promote qualified employment in sustainable business sectors by offering entrepreneurship training to persons with disabilities. The costs associated with the establishment and operation of these enterprises are covered by the Administrative Fine Fund. Meanwhile, efforts are underway to increase sectoral diversity in grant support [24].

Additionally, sheltered workplaces, which employ persons with mental and intellectual disabilities who face difficulties securing employment in the open labor market, receive financial and technical support from the state. According to the Regulation on Sheltered Workplaces introduced in 2022, it is stipulated that at least half of the total workforce in these workplaces must comprise persons with disabilities. As of the end of 2023, 129 persons with disabilities were employed in 14 sheltered workplaces [29].

The supported employment model, designed to assist persons with disabilities in securing and maintaining income-generating jobs in the open labor market, has gained permanence in Türkiye in recent years. A pilot project implementing this model was conducted between 2014 and 2017. Under this approach, persons with disabilities are matched with suitable jobs, and job adaptation and follow-up processes are facilitated by job coaches. A job adaptation program, focusing on the abilities of persons with disabilities, is also in place [19]. Despite ISKUR's efforts to expand the model across Türkiye based on the project's positive results, legal regulations to formalize the model have yet to be established. By the end of 2023, job coaching for persons with disabilities was available in 120 units across all 81 provinces, as part of the expansion of job and vocational counseling services, [30].

In Türkiye, various incentives are provided to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities, including, insurance premium support for employers and tax reductions for employees. In this context, the state covers the insurance premium payments for employers who hire persons with disabilities, including those in sheltered workplaces. Additionally, sheltered workplaces benefit from reduced income and corporate taxes, as well as an exemption from the environmental cleaning tax. A portion of the salaries of persons with disabilities employed in these workplaces is also covered by the government. A person working in a sheltered workplace earns a minimum wage of approximately USD500, of which USD147 is subsidized by the government, following the 2016 regulation on employer payments for the wages of employees with disabilities in sheltered workplaces. In 2023, an incentive payment of approximately USD51,016 was allocated to sheltered workplaces [29].

In addition to incentives for employers, various measures have been introduced to support persons with disabilities. Income tax deductions are applied at varying rates depending on the severity of disability to help offset expenses directly related to disabilities, as stipulated in Income Tax Law No.193.

Education and training programs have also been implemented to enhance the occupational skills of persons with disabilities. Moreover, vocational education and training are provided by the Ministry of National Education and ISKUR. These training programs can be provided in mainstream schools and courses, as well as in specialized institutions designed for persons with disabilities [31].

Accessibility is a fundamental prerequisite for the participation of persons with disabilities in employment and all other aspects of social life. According to the TDA, the accessibility of public spaces, including workplaces, the built environment, public transport systems, information services, and information and communication technologies, is mandatory (Art. 7). Accessibility Monitoring and Auditing Commissions, comprising representatives from relevant public institutions and OPDs, operate in all provinces to inspect the accessibility of buildings, public spaces, and structures. Under the Commission's inspection authority, administrative fines are imposed on non-accessible buildings, while accessibility certificates are issued to those that meet accessibility standards, based on the regulation on monitoring and auditing of accessibility, which came into effect in 2013. However, the monitoring and auditing process has been criticized for its limited focus on the built environment, excluding information and communication technologies [7]. Since 2012, informative and technical training sessions have been provided for staff in various public institutions, alongside technical support to promote accessibility [29].

In Türkiye, persons with disabilities with a disability degree of 40% and higher, as well as companions of persons with severe disabilities, have been entitled to free public transportation since 2013, under Article 1 of Law No. 4736, which aims to encourage their independent and active participation in social life. To support this initiative, income support for private vehicle owners in public transportation is funded through the general budget. In 2023, approximately USD14,569,772 was allocated from the general budget to private vehicle owners providing free public transport services [29].

Like everyone else, persons with disabilities require a minimum and regular income to maintain an adequate standard of living. Governments address this need through social assistance systems, particularly for vulnerable groups facing employment challenges. In Türkiye, citizens with disabilities over the age of 18 who lack social security and have a per capita household income below one-third of the net minimum wage (USD172 for 2024) qualify for a Disability Allowance. Moreover, families of persons with disabilities aged 0 to 18 are eligible for the Allowance for Relatives of Persons with Disabilities. Additionally, the Disability Living Allowance is provided to help individuals acquire tools and equipment that support independent living. Since 2006, a monthly Home Care Allowance of USD230 (as of 2024) has been granted to family members or relatives caring for persons with disabilities. As of January 2024, approximately 558,739 individuals have benefited from this allowance [28, 29].

Furthermore, under the Regulation on Employment of Benefit Recipients introduced in 2018, recipients of disability allowances who are deemed “fit to work” are required to participate in vocational rehabilitation. This regulation aligns with the objective of “strengthening the link between employment and social protection,” outlined in the National Strategy Paper and Action Plan on Employment 2017–19 [32].

The 2030 Barrier-Free Vision underscores the importance of creating decent job opportunities and sustainable livelihoods that uphold human dignity for all persons, including those with disabilities. In line with this vision, the National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2023–25) outlines governmental commitments to diversifying and strengthening employment models in open, inclusive, and accessible environments. The plan also includes provisions for reasonable accommodations, support for self-employment, and financial benefits such as income support and tax incentives for persons with disabilities [18].

Situational Analysis

Despite efforts to produce data and statistics on disability in Türkiye, especially over the last two decades, the limited availability of up-to-date, comparable, and disaggregated data within a standardized framework continues to hinder assessments of the prevalence of persons with disabilities in the general population as well as their social circumstances [7–9].

As of the end of 2023, Türkiye's total population, based on the address-based population registration system, is approximately 85 million [33]. According to the Türkiye Disability Survey (2002), which adopts a medical definition of disability stating: “A person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of social life, as a result of deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or

her physical capabilities,” persons with disabilities (including those with chronic illnesses) constitute 12.29 % of the total population. This proportion is higher for females (13.45%) than for males (11.10%). Additionally, 9.7% of the total population has chronic illnesses, while persons with physical, mental, speech and language, hearing, and visual disabilities collectively account for approximately 2.8%. Unsurprisingly, the age distribution of persons with disabilities indicates that prevalence increases with age, particularly among those with chronic illnesses [34].

Conversely, the Population and Housing Survey (2011), which includes a disability module based on WG-SS, estimates that 6.9% of the total population has at least one disability. Again, the proportion is higher for females (7.9%) than for males (5.9%). Within the total population, 3.3% experience difficulty walking or climbing stairs, 1.4% have difficulty seeing, 1.1% have difficulty hearing, 0.7% have difficulty speaking, 2% struggle with learning, performing simple calculations, remembering, or concentrating compared with their peers, and 4.1% have difficulty holding or lifting items. As with previous findings, disability prevalence increases with age [1].

Although these two surveys are not structurally comparable, both indicate that educational attainment among persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of the general population across all education categories. Furthermore, both studies reveal that women with disabilities attain lower education levels than men with disabilities [34, 1]. Although the literacy rate of the general population stands at 95.5%, it drops to 76.7% among persons with disabilities. This rate further varies by gender, with 89.1% literacy among males with disabilities and only 67.6% among females with disabilities. Moreover, in contrast to the increasing education levels observed in the general population, educational attainment for persons with disabilities tends to decline as the severity of disability increases [1].

Regarding employment, both surveys highlight consistently low levels of labor force participation and employment, coupled with higher unemployment rates, among persons with disabilities compared with the general population [34, 1]. In 2002, while the labor force participation rate was 49.6%, the employment rate was 43.3% [35] and the unemployment rate stood at 10.3% for the general population [36]. These figures were significantly less favorable for persons with disabilities as shown in Table 1. Additionally, regional disparities are evident, with persons in rural areas experiencing greater disadvantages compared with those living in urban settings, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN TURKIYE (2002)

	Labor force participation rate (%)	Employment rate (%)*	Unemployment rate (%)
Total	21.71	18.36	15.46
Urban	25.61	21.15	17.43
Rural	17.76	15.53	12.58
Male	32.22	27.52	14.57
Female	6.71	5.27	21.54

* Ratio of the number of working persons with disabilities to the total population with disabilities aged 15 and over, calculated by the author based on data from the 2002 Turkiye Disability Survey.

Source: TURKSTAT (2004:45) [34].

Despite a slight improvement, similar trends were observed in 2011. The participation rate for the general population was 47.5%, the employment rate was 43.7%, and the unemployment rate was 7.9%. Table 2 indicates that the corresponding figures for persons with disabilities were 22.1%, 20.1%, and 8.8%, respectively. This indicates that labor force participation and employment rates among persons with disabilities remained low compared with the general population. Additionally, although there has been a significant decrease in the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities compared with the 2002 survey results, it still remains higher than that of the general population. Contrary to the 2002 survey results, it is noteworthy that the unemployment rate among women with disabilities was lower than that of men with disabilities [1].

TABLE 2

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN TURKIYE (2011)

	Labor force participation rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
Total	22.1	20.1	8.8
Male	35.4	32	9.5
Female	12.5	11.6	7.3

Source: TURKSTAT (2011:99) [1].

Although the results of these surveys are not directly comparable, both indicate that the overall participation of persons with disabilities in education and employment remains significantly lower compared with that of the general population. The low employment rate increases the risk of poverty and limits their participation in social life, further intensifying their vulnerable position.

However, an upward trend is observed in the number of registered workers with disabilities employed under the quota system, as shown in Table 3. By the end of 2023, the total number of such workers had reached 144,178.

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES EMPLOYED IN WORKPLACES SUBJECT TO THE QUOTA REQUIREMENT

Years	Public	Private	Total
2023	22,449	121,729	144,178
2022	31,309	110,160	131,469
2021	21,355	103,426	123,722
2020	15,375	85,614	100,989
2019	16,965	109,705	126,670
2018	14,453	97,893	112,346
2017	10,323	102,751	113,074
2016	10,822	92,413	103,235
2015	10,696	84,370	95,066
2014	10,422	84,706	95,128
2013	11,804	80,434	92,238

Source: ISKUR, Annual Statistics [26].

In 2023, the total number of job placements for persons with disabilities under the quota system was 34,817. Of these, 79% were men, while only 21% were women. As the figures in Table 4 illustrate, a significant number of workers with disabilities, whom employers are required to hire under the quota system, remain unemployed over the years. As of the end of 2023, there was a shortfall of 24,762 persons [26]. The private sector's disability quota occupancy rate stood at 89% by the end of 2023 [30].

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES EMPLOYERS ARE REQUIRED TO HIRE BUT HAVE NOT EMPLOYED UNDER THE QUOTA SYSTEM

Years	Public	Private	Total
2023	3,532	21,230	24,762
2022	3,849	24,216	28,065

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Years	Public	Private	Total
2021	4,205	20,744	24,949
2020	4,092	16,875	20,967
2019	3,958	16,938	20,986
2018	4,775	17,871	22,646
2017	466	23,232	23,698
2016	387	20,336	20,723
2015	472	22,037	22,509
2014	712	23,637	24,349
2013	700	23,075	23,775

Source: ISKUR, Annual Statistics [26].

Similarly, an increasing number of civil servants with disabilities have been employed under the quota system over the years, as shown in Table 5. Among civil servants with disabilities in public institutions, 27% were women and 73% were men. As of June 2024, the quota system required 77,549 positions to be filled by persons with disabilities in public service; however, there remained a deficit of 9,153 positions [28].

TABLE 5

NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS WITH DISABILITIES UNDER THE QUOTA SCHEME

Years	Number of civil servants with disabilities
2024*	68,396
2023	68,108
2022	65,662
2021	62,356
2020	57,408
2019	55,196
2018	51,814
2017	49,873
2016	48,134
2015	40,655
2014	34,078
2013	32,787
2012	27,314

*As of June 2024. Data obtained from the EYHGM Official Statistics of July 2024 [28].

Source: EYHGM, Monthly Statistical Bulletin, December 2024 [37].

Table 6 presents the education levels of persons with disabilities appointed through the EKPSS between 2012 and 2018. While there is year-to-year variation, the data indicate an increase in appointments at the higher education level in recent years. However, the majority of appointees still hold secondary-level qualifications.

TABLE 6

EDUCATION LEVELS OF CIVIL SERVANTS APPOINTED THROUGH THE EKPSS

Years	Education Level				
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Bachelor's degree	Total
2012	988	2,174	1,093	999	5,254
2013	591	3,378	1,343	614	5,926

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Years	Education Level				
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Bachelor's degree	Total
2014	234	1,809	1,374	2,150	5,567
2015	680	4,144	735	702	6,271
2016	1,220	2,466	1,233	893	5,812
2017	246	386	458	1,273	2,363
2018	527	1,036	888	1,700	4,451
Total	4,486	15,393	7,424	8,341	35,644

Source: Aver, 2019 [31].

Table 7 shows the distribution of civil servants with disabilities by type of disabilities and sex. The largest group consists of persons with physical disabilities, followed by those with visual disabilities and chronic illnesses. Notably, the number of persons with language and speech disabilities remains the lowest.

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF CIVIL SERVANTS BY TYPE OF DISABILITY AND SEX

Type of Disability	Female	Male	Total
Language and speech	124	331	455
Visual	2,460	7,990	10,450
Hearing and speech	1,076	2,426	3,502
Physical	3,914	10,979	14,893
Mental	270	1,100	1,370
Chronic illnesses	1,556	4,535	6,091
Intellectual	611	2,731	3,342
Unclassifiable	3,183	9,731	12,914
Total	13,194	39,823	53,017

Source: Aver, 2019 [31].

Although significant progress has been made in Türkiye regarding policy approaches and relevant legislation to ensure inclusive employment, these developments have yet to be meaningfully integrated into the lives of persons with disabilities, particularly in the workplace [23]. As Barnes and Mercer argue, cited in Yılmaz [38], employment for persons with disabilities cannot be addressed in isolation, as the issue is embedded within the broader social and economic environment.

In Türkiye, as in other countries, persons with disabilities face discrimination in accessing the labor market and other areas of social life. The primary source of such discrimination is society's persistent traditional and medical view of disability, which continues to exert a strong influence on all aspects of their lives, including employment and education.

The results of the nationwide Survey on How Society Perceives Disability, conducted in 2010, revealed that 46% of respondents recognized the existence of negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities in Türkiye. These attitudes are often expressed through pity, reluctance to include persons with disabilities in certain social environments, assumptions about their incapability, and support for segregated education in specialized institutions. Furthermore, persons with intellectual disabilities are less likely to be considered suitable spouses, coworkers, or neighbors compared to individuals belonging to other disability groups [2].

One interviewee articulated society's perception of incapability as follows:

“Society perceives persons with disabilities as those in need of help or dependent on assistance, leading to discrimination. Although recent improvements in accessibility and the increasing presence

of persons with disabilities in employment and education have enhanced their visibility, the long-standing perception of pity is unlikely to change quickly. However, as society becomes more accustomed to interacting with persons with disabilities, this perception will begin to shift in a positive direction. Social perception, beginning within the family, influences broader societal structures and, consequently, policies. Families, employers, and colleagues are key actors in this process.” (personal interview with a representative of OPDs).

Additionally, the Research on the Measurement of Disability Discrimination in Türkiye, conducted in 2010 with 1,507 participants who were members of OPDs, aimed to assess the perceptions and experiences of persons with disabilities regarding discrimination in various domains, including education, employment, healthcare, political participation, access to justice, social life, and information access. The findings indicated that similar to the general population, persons with mental disabilities face the highest levels of discrimination, followed by those with visual and hearing disabilities, while persons with physical disabilities are perceived to experience relatively lower levels of discrimination [39]. The lack of adequate awareness-raising activities promoting a human rights-based approach to disability has been identified as a contributing factor to this situation [7, 9, 21].

Among the areas where discrimination is reported, employment and work life rank the highest, with 71.8% of respondents stating they experience discrimination all or most of the time, followed by education at 59.4%. Discrimination in employment manifests in various forms, including biased recruitment practices, unfavorable working conditions, and inaccessible physical environments. Specifically, 35% of respondents reported not being hired despite possessing equal or higher qualifications compared with candidates without disabilities, while 43% cited workplace discrimination due to a lack of reasonable accommodations.

In education, 46% of respondents experienced discrimination due to the lack of appropriate communication tools and technologies, while 47.4% highlighted a lack of awareness among teachers. Regarding access to information, 65.2% perceived discrimination due to inadequate access to communication technologies and services, 66.2% stated that public information remains inaccessible to persons with disabilities, while 53.2% reported the same for information on public services [39]. These challenges in accessing information have also been highlighted in Alternative Reports [7, 40].

Research on the status, needs, and priorities of women with disabilities in Türkiye, conducted in 2024, shows that women and girls with disabilities are more likely to experience discrimination. The study revealed that they face intersecting inequalities, particularly in accessing quality education, employment, and healthcare services. Nearly half of the participants (44.5%) reported that they were unable to continue their education at the desired level due to factors such as economic difficulties, accessibility barriers, and lack of family support. These educational barriers have also affected employment opportunities, with 62.3% of the surveyed women with disabilities stating that they are not engaged in income-generating jobs. Additionally, many reported facing discrimination during the job search process, along with a mismatch between their education qualifications and the jobs they hold [41].

According to the Survey on the Analysis of the Labor Market Based on Disability, conducted in 2011 to examine employers’ attitudes and expectations regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, employment rates differed by sector. In the construction industry, the employment rate was 1.3%, while it ranged from 2.1% to 2.8% in the culture, arts, entertainment, sports, and leisure sectors. The real estate (51.4%) and construction (38.6%) sectors reported the lowest percentages of enterprises complying with disability employment requirements, whereas human health and social services (82.8%) and manufacturing (79.5%) had the highest compliance rates. The survey also found that smaller businesses were generally less compliant than larger ones. Moreover, this study highlighted gender disparities, revealing that females with disabilities had lower employment rates than their male counterparts, mirroring overall employment trends. However, the human health and social services sector was the only sector where the number of female workers with disabilities was nearly equal to that of male workers with disabilities [42].

Among all workers with disabilities, only 48% had completed elementary school, 45% had attained secondary education, and just 7% had a university degree. Those with lower educational attainment were mostly employed in the manufacturing, wholesale, and retail sectors, while university graduates were more likely to work in the information and communication or banking and insurance sectors. Due to their lower levels of education, most workers with disabilities were employed in elementary occupations (35.5%) or clerical support roles (31.3%), while only 7.9% held professional positions, aligning with the percentage of university graduates [42].

Additionally, the majority of employers (71%) were aware of their legal responsibilities regarding the mandatory employment of persons with disabilities. Findings also showed that awareness of disability employment laws and legal obligations increased with business size. However, most employers reported that their primary reason for hiring persons with disabilities was legal compliance. Only 7% of employers stated that they hired persons with disabilities based on their qualifications for a specific position. Employers who did not hire individuals with disabilities cited difficulties in finding qualified candidates suitable for their sector or job requirements [42].

Finally, the study findings suggested that employers' attitudes toward hiring persons with disabilities varied by the type of disability. The most preferred group comprised persons with physical disabilities (40.9%), while the least preferred group included persons with intellectual disabilities (4%) [42].

Within the scope of the "Analysis of Disability Employment in the Public Sector Project," a survey was conducted in 2014, involving persons with disabilities and other employees and managers. The survey revealed several key findings: Civil servants with disabilities faced difficulties in accessing the workplace, job descriptions required clarification, flexible or telecommuting work models needed development, workplace conditions were often unsuitable for persons with disabilities, and career advancement prospects for civil servants with disabilities were limited. Additionally, the survey highlighted the importance of providing training to managers on the rights and responsibilities of civil servants with disabilities [43].

Alternative reports prepared by OPDs regarding the State Report submitted by Turkiye under the national implementation of the CRPD emphasized the lack of an active and sustainable employment policy. Access to assistive devices and technologies was reportedly limited due to insufficient financial support from the government. These reports also reiterated that, especially in public institutions, persons with disabilities lacked adequate career development opportunities and were often assigned to roles without considering their educational qualifications and abilities. For instance, persons with visual disabilities were frequently assigned to call center positions or denied promotions to senior roles. The reports further criticized the lack of administrative fines for public institutions that failed to meet the quota requirements for employing persons with disabilities. Additionally, the support provided to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities and the financial aid necessary for maintaining an adequate standard of living were deemed insufficient [7].

Despite the provision of free public transportation for persons with disabilities, concerns were raised regarding the inaccessibility of public transportation systems [7]. A monitoring study conducted by OPDs revealed that 81.4% of 285,871 pedestrian routes in 41 provinces lacked ramps, while 96.1% were without tactile surfaces. Data from 51 provinces further revealed that 59% of 26,463 public vehicles lacked ramps or elevators, 73.1% were not equipped with audible warning systems, and 70.4% lacked visual warning systems [40].

Interviews with members of OPDs further highlighted that regulation gaps in different areas, including education and accessibility, created barriers to employment. For example, low educational attainment was identified as a significant challenge, with persons possessing only primary or secondary education struggling more to secure employment compared with university graduates. However, it was also noted that employment barriers were not only linked to education levels; even highly educated persons with disabilities were frequently placed in lower-level positions. Furthermore, it was reported that persons

with disabilities were unable to effectively benefit from skill development programs for emerging professions [38]. As one interviewee explained:

“The main issues in employing individuals with disabilities in an inclusive manner are accessibility and quality education. Well-educated persons with disabilities can access better employment opportunities. However, prejudices can prevent even highly educated persons with disabilities from being employed or lead them to work in low-skilled jobs. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the awareness of disability, disability rights, and the actions needed to realize those rights among society, teachers, families, employers, and persons with disabilities themselves. Collaboration with OPDs is crucial in this process. There is also a need to strengthen the capacities of OPDs in raising awareness.” (Personal interview with a representative of OPDs).

Moreover, interviewees reported that persons with disabilities faced discriminatory practices such as pseudo employment (employment without actual job responsibilities), low wages, and limited access to social support. The quota system was evaluated as ineffective in creating sustainable and meaningful employment opportunities. Some interviews acknowledged that sheltered workplaces facilitated the employment of persons with disabilities who faced significant barriers to employment; however, this model was also criticized for being discriminatory. Additionally, concerns were raised that the discontinuation of social assistance upon gaining employment could negatively affect job-seeking motivation among persons with disabilities [7, 38].

Policy Implications and Recommendations

A fundamental prerequisite for persons with disabilities to live a life of dignity, equal to that of others and alongside them, is access to an adequate standard of living. Ensuring this standard requires economic security.

To achieve economic security, persons with disabilities must have access to dignified employment opportunities, education, and skills development programs relevant to their professions, along with the necessary support to accommodate their disabilities.

The commitment to “leave no one behind,” as outlined in the SDGs, necessitates the participation of all segments of society, including persons with disabilities, in development processes through an inclusive, equality-based approach.

A key condition for persons with disabilities to contribute as productive individuals to economic and social development is the realization of their right to work.

In this context, Türkiye’s disability policy, aligned with the international development agenda, aims to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate independently in all aspects of social life, such as education, healthcare, and employment, free from discrimination and with access to equal opportunities. To foster a disability-inclusive society, employment policies have been developed to accommodate the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, accompanied by institutional transformations.

Legal frameworks guarantee the right to work for persons with disabilities, with high-level policy documents outlining measures to implement this right. Accordingly, initiatives have been introduced to enhance vocational and employment opportunities, provide necessary support services, and ensure financial stability for individuals who experience delays in securing employment. These efforts have contributed to a year-over-year increase in employment rates for persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors.

However, as reflected in the available, though limited, data and statistics, significant challenges remain. Discriminatory behaviors and social prejudices persist, limiting participation in education and employment. Accessibility barriers, unaffordable assistive tools and equipment, non-inclusive employment models, and inadequate social support systems continue to hinder full inclusion.

In this context, it is essential to provide comparable, up-to-date, and disaggregated data and statistics. In particular, disaggregated data on women and immigrants with disabilities—who face intersectional discrimination—is critical. As proposed in the National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2023–25) [18], developing and enhancing disaggregated disability data by incorporating a disability module based on the WG-SS into mainstream surveys and improving administrative records on a sectoral basis is vital. This initiative should be implemented in the short term through the collaboration of all relevant stakeholders, including OPDs.

Meanwhile, continuous and sustainable awareness-raising activities should be carried out by relevant stakeholders, particularly the CRPD focal point, ASHB, to promote a rights-based approach. In this regard, awareness campaigns targeting employers, managers, colleagues, and persons with disabilities themselves are of particular importance [18].

Additionally, improving accessibility is crucial to ensuring that persons with disabilities can participate equally in education, employment, and all areas of social life. This includes enhancing the accessibility of the built environment, public transportation systems, information services, and ICTs. Furthermore, studies should be carried out for monitoring the accessibility of ICTs and information services by the coordination of ASHB in the short term.

Moreover, assistive tools and equipment, critical for persons with disabilities, should be made more affordable through government support. To this end, the amount of financial assistance provided should be increased, and support should be diversified in line with technological innovations in the short term [18].

Furthermore, social benefits for persons with disabilities should be enhanced in the short term by ASHB, considering the country’s economic situation. These benefits should be designed to empower individuals rather than create dependency, ensuring their active participation in social and economic development.

Finally, inclusive educational opportunities should be established by the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) to align with the interests and abilities of persons with disabilities, enabling their full participation in society as productive individuals. Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security should implement disability-inclusive and gender-responsive employment opportunities that emphasize the abilities of persons with disabilities. In this regard, creating an accessible workplace and ensuring reasonable accommodations are essential. Increasing government support for such accommodations is therefore necessary.

Alongside existing employment methods, self-employment and supported employment models should be promoted and expanded by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including social partners and OPDs. For persons with mental and intellectual disabilities who face challenges in the open labor market, employment models should prioritize inclusivity rather than relying on sheltered employment.

Concluding Remarks

This research highlights significant efforts to strengthen the participation of persons with disabilities in employment in Türkiye, thereby promoting their social inclusion. Notably, since the second half of the 1990s, legal, institutional, and practical transformations have reflected Türkiye’s evolving social perspective on disability.

The establishment of OZIDA as a coordination body in 1997, in alignment with international developments, represents a significant step in disseminating the social perspective on disability to all stakeholders. This institution has played a key role in shaping policies and services within this framework and addressing disability at a higher level. Additionally, the high-level councils and forums organized by OZIDA, which include the participation of persons with disabilities, have significantly contributed to transforming this field, strengthening related resources, and fostering new initiatives. Furthermore,

the appointment of the Ombudsman by the National Assembly in 2012 to address disability-related issues and the establishment of TİHEK as an independent monitoring mechanism in 2016 are also regarded as significant advancements in this field.

The nationwide surveys conducted in 2002 and 2011 to assess the status of persons with disabilities have laid the foundation for evidence-based policy development. Notably, the shift from a medical approach in the 2002 survey to a functional perspective in 2011 illustrates the transformation that has taken place during this period.

Moreover, the adoption of the TDA in 2005, which embraced the principle of participation of persons with disabilities, along with Türkiye's commitment to the CRPD in 2009, has been instrumental in advancing disability rights. Additionally, the inclusion of a social approach to disability in national development plans and the announcement of the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document in 2021, developed with the involvement of all stakeholders, including OPDs, mark significant developments in enhancing social inclusion.

The measures implemented to promote the employment of persons with disabilities have had a positive impact on increasing their participation in the workforce. However, as revealed through interviews, survey results, and reports, these measures need to be implemented and improved by incorporating the perspectives of persons with disabilities and utilizing sustainable methods.

As indicated by the research findings, challenges related to the employment of persons with disabilities in Türkiye stem primarily from the lingering effects of traditional societal attitudes, similar to those observed in many other countries. Consequently, persons with disabilities continue to experience discrimination, preventing them from fully and effectively participating in various aspects of social life as equal members of society.

Traditional approaches and existing stereotypes about disability shape societal perspectives, beginning within the family unit. Consequently, barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in professional life extend beyond employment. Due to discrimination, they experience difficulties in accessing equal opportunities across various services and supports, including education, transportation systems, information and communication technologies, and assistive technologies essential for independent living. Specifically, regarding employment, inaccessible hiring processes such as non-inclusive job applications and insufficient reasonable accommodations for disability-related needs hinder the achievement of inclusive employment.

Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a rights-based approach to build an inclusive society where persons with disabilities can realize their potential. This includes enhancing their participation in social and cultural activities; ensuring the accessibility of public spaces, transportation systems, services, and ICTs; collecting disaggregated data; and enhancing the advocacy capacities of OPDs.

Key issues to address for improving the employment of persons with disabilities in Türkiye include:

- Enhancing existing employment models to account for the diversity among persons with disabilities, especially those with mental and intellectual disabilities, as well as women and refugees with disabilities.
- Generating disaggregated employment data and statistics, with a particular focus on women and immigrants with disabilities.
- Boosting the job-seeking motivation of persons with disabilities.
- Implementing initiatives that ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to career opportunities.
- Establishing a legal framework for supported employment, which has gained prominence recently, to ensure it is structured and sustainable.

- Ensuring sectoral diversity in the project support provided to persons with disabilities, particularly in emerging sectors.
- Promoting income generation in the burgeoning e-commerce sector by enhancing digital literacy among persons with disabilities.
- Strengthening inclusive entrepreneurship training programs for persons with disabilities.
- Developing measures to offset additional costs incurred due to disabilities.

Finally, it is essential to emphasize the importance of international cooperation in realizing the rights of persons with disabilities and fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable environment worldwide.

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OVERALL POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

From this chapter onward, the findings presented are based on national reports. The chapter first examines policy analysis related to the UNCRPD, followed by the definition of disability, disability statistics, and finally, national disability laws and policies.

Information Related to the UNCRPD

All the selected countries have ratified the UNCRPD. The correlatively swift ratification of the Convention across all countries reflects their commitment to disability rights, and, in some cases, the challenges of aligning domestic laws with international obligations [21]. For instance, Finland and Japan ratified the Convention in 2016 and 2014, respectively, making them among the later countries do so. Their delayed ratification was primarily due to the time spent amending domestic laws to ensure compliance.

Bangladesh, Mongolia, and Turkiye have also ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention, allowing individuals to submit complaints to the Committee after exhausting domestic legal remedies.

State parties are required to submit their initial state report within two years of ratification and then at four-year intervals thereafter. All selected countries submitted their initial state reports, except for Cambodia. The Philippines and Mongolia are the only countries that have also submitted their second state reports. However, due to the high volume of initial state reports, the Committee has faced delays in publishing its concluding observations, which has, in turn, impacted the timely submission of the second state reports.

TABLE 1

LEGAL ANALYSIS: CRPD RATIFICATION, SIGNATORY STATUS, AND STATE REPORT SUBMISSION STATUS

Country	CRPD Ratification	CRPD signatory	Optional protocol ratification	Optional protocol signatory	Initial state report submission	Second state report submission
Bangladesh	30 Nov 2007	9 May 2007	12 May 2008	-	18 Apr 2017	-
Cambodia	20 Dec 2012	1 Oct 2007	-	1 Oct 2007	-	-
Lao PDR	25 Sep 2009	15 Jan 2008	-	-	25 May 2016	-
Mongolia	13 May 2009	12 June 2009	13 May 2009	-	23 Feb 2012	5 Oct 2023
The Philippines	14 Apr 2008	25 Sep 2007	-	-	24 Nov 2014	17 Oct 2023
Sri Lanka	8 Feb 2016	30 Mar 2007	-	-	18 Oct 2019	-
Turkiye	28 Sep 2009	30 Mar 2007	26 Mar 2015	28 Sep 2009	3 Aug 2015	-

Notes: CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Source: [22].

Definition of Disability

According to the national reports, the definitions of disability (see Table 2) continue to vary, reflecting different conceptual approaches. Some countries, such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka, lean toward a medical model, while others, such as Bangladesh and Türkiye, adopt a human rights-based approach. Further, Mongolia adopts a mixed approach. Türkiye's definition of disability fully aligns with the CRPD, explicitly addressing disability-based discrimination, forms of discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility. Its legal framework recognizes that accommodating disability is an essential aspect of interaction between individuals and their social environment. However, in most of the selected countries, the process of revising domestic laws to comply with the CRPD remain ongoing. This variation makes cross-country comparisons difficult and underscores the significant disparities in employment policies and practices among the seven countries. Table 2 illustrates these differences.

TABLE 2

DEFINITION OF DISABILITY AND LAWS DEFINING DISABILITY

Country	Definition of disability	Relevant law
Bangladesh	Aligns with the CRPD	The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPPDA) 2013
Cambodia	A medical model	Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2009
Lao PDR	A medical model and International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)	Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Mongolia	A medical model, ICF, and a human rights-centered model	Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016 (revised in 2021–23)
The Philippines	A medical model	The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, later amended (Republic Act No. 7277, in 1991)
Sri Lanka	A medical model	Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996
Türkiye	Aligns with the CRPD	The Disability Act of 2005 (revised in 2014)

Notes: RPPDA, The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act; CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; ICF, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

Source: National Reports.

Statistics on Disability

The ratio of persons with disabilities to those without disabilities in the selected countries (see Table 3) ranges from a few percentage points to nearly 9%. Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye utilize the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning, which facilitates international comparisons. Countries that employed the Short Set of Questions generally reported higher disability prevalence rates compared with those that did not. Since these questions focus on functioning rather than disabilities shaped by environmental factors, careful attention is required in data analysis. The selected countries rely on different statistical sources depending on whether they conducted a survey, leading to concerns about the accuracy and comparability of the reported numbers. Moreover, observers have frequently questioned or even criticized these numbers. One significant disparity is the gender imbalance in disability statistics: in Bangladesh, the number of women with disabilities is significantly lower than that of men. This might reflect broader gender disparities, as highlighted in the Committee's Concluding Observations, which call on Bangladesh to address statistical inconsistencies [21]. Another notable disparity concerns the gap between the total number of persons with disabilities and those officially registered as having disabilities, which determines eligibility for disability benefits. In both Bangladesh and the Philippines, reports explicitly highlight that the majority of persons with disabilities remain unregistered and, thus, cannot access disability benefits and services. All national reports, though implicitly, indicate that disability benefits and services frequently fail to reach all eligible individuals.

Disability statistics from Bangladesh and Cambodia also reveal disparities between urban and rural populations. The higher prevalence of disabilities in rural areas likely reflects more severe living conditions and the impact of poverty on disability [23]. Sri Lanka explicitly attributes its disability statistics to the lasting effects of its past civil war. While this may also hold true for Cambodia, the country report does not specifically mention it. In all the studied countries, the reported ratio of persons with disabilities to those without disabilities remains well below the 16% global estimate provided by the WHO [2]. This discrepancy implies deficiencies in national data collection systems, particularly in gathering comprehensive and disaggregated disability data.

TABLE 3

RATIO OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO THOSE WITHOUT AND ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION

Country	Ratio of persons with disabilities	Additional information
Bangladesh	2.80%: 3.29% of men with disabilities and 2.34% of women with disabilities; 2.92% in rural areas and 2.45% in urban areas (National Survey of 2021), compared with 1.43%: 1.63% of men with disabilities and 1.23% of women with disabilities (2022 population census).	Most (72.8%) do not have the national disability identification card that is required for the disability allowance. This information is based on the National Survey of Persons with Disabilities and the Labour Force Survey, which used the Washington Group questions.
Cambodia	4.9% (The General Population Census of the Kingdom of Cambodia 2019) and 24.4% (Cambodia Demographic Health Survey 2021–22). 356,269 persons with disabilities (174,437 are female) had voluntarily registered in the system of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.	287,599 were approved and issued a disability card.
Lao PDR	2.77%: 3.33% in rural regions without roads, 2.86% in rural regions with roads, and 2.48% in urban areas; ethnic disparities are prevalent, with the Mon-Khmer group (located in an impoverished rural region) showing a higher prevalence (3.51%) compared with the Lao-Tai (2.5%), Hmong-Lewmien (2.79%) and Chinese-Tibetan groups (2.85%).	The Disability Monograph of 2020.
Mongolia	3.28%: 115,000 persons have disabilities within a population of 3.5 million.	The number is gradually increasing.
The Philippines	8.7% (8.47 million) of individuals aged five years and above (2020 Census on Population and Housing by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)).	The Washington Group questions were used. A disability registry exists; however, only 1.65 million people were registered.
Sri Lanka	8.7%	The Washington Group questions were used.
Turkiye	6.9%	The Washington Group questions were used.

Source: National Reports.

National Disability Laws and Policies

Regarding national disability laws and policies (see Table 4), all the studied countries have disability-specific laws and policies, with some also implementing action plans (Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Turkiye). In other words, various disability-related special measures exist within their legal frameworks. However, all countries highlighted that these measures are not effectively implemented in practice and fail to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in their respective environments. Some countries, such as Turkiye and Bangladesh, have introduced numerous financial support measures for employers and employees with disabilities, while others lack comprehensive disability-inclusive employment policies and services. To improve the everyday realities of people belonging to this group, the introduction of more proactive disability-inclusive employment policies is essential. Mongolia and the Philippines have established disability focal points at the local level, whereas other countries have only done so at the national level. Beyond the lack of robust data systems, the ineffective institutional implementation mechanisms of disability-inclusive employment

policies in many of the studied countries likely contribute to their limited enforcement. Additionally, several countries lack essential disability services that would enable persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. The Mongolian report highlights that 24.4% of laws merely duplicate other regulations, 35.5% are not adhered to, and 13.3% are outright violated.

The quota system is examined in greater detail, as it is present in all the studied countries except Lao PDR. Quotas range between 1% and 4%; however, the quota system is inconsistently enforced, as officials often fail to monitor compliance or penalize employers for noncompliance. In Türkiye, the number of civil servants with disabilities increased from 5,777 in 2002 to 68,396 in July 2024 due to affirmative action policies, though this figure still falls short of the intended target. While the quota system presents opportunities to increase the employment rate for certain groups of persons with disabilities by mandating a minimum percentage of hires, its effectiveness remains limited due to several challenges [24, p.1600]. The existing literature [25–29] highlights the shortcomings of quota systems, especially their limited impact on persons with disabilities. First, these systems necessitate the disclosure of sensitive personal information, which may not be legally permissible in many of the studied countries. Without functional data systems, the implementation of quotas becomes difficult. Additionally, in societies where disability is stigmatized, potential employees may be reluctant to identify themselves as persons with disabilities, fearing differentiation from their colleagues and the potential devaluation of their skills. Moreover, employers tend to prefer candidates with milder disabilities, further marginalizing individuals with more severe disabilities [24]. In Türkiye, for example, 79% of quota hires were men with disabilities, while only 21% were women, highlighting a significant gender disparity. Moreover, according to Turkish statistics, quota targets remain unmet, with only 89% of designated positions filled by the end of 2023. Quota percentages are considerably lower than the proportion of persons with disabilities within each country’s population, likely contributing to employers’ preference for individuals with certain types of disabilities. Furthermore, the private sector is often exempt from quota obligations, as seen in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, or is subject to lower quota requirements, as in Cambodia and Türkiye. Given that the private sector offers significantly more jobs opportunities than the public sector, this exclusion represents a major gap in disability employment policies. In general, the studied countries have either failed to fully meet their quota obligations or have inadequately monitored their implementation. To enhance the effectiveness of these systems, substantial social and cultural changes are needed.

When disability laws and policies are not enforced, persons with disabilities may consider filing complaints. However, among the studied countries, only Türkiye reports the existence of an independent complaint mechanism: The Human Rights and Equality Institution, which addresses human rights violations and includes an ombudsman to assist complainants. Such independent mechanisms are crucial to ensuring the implementation of domestic disability laws and policies.

TABLE 4

DISABILITY POLICIES

Country	National special laws	National action plan (latest)	Quota system	Focal points	Financial benefits
Bangladesh	Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013; Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2015; Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act, 2013	Strategic action plan for neuro-developmental disorders, 2016–30; National Action Plan, 2018–25	1% in the public sector only; 5% of TVET admissions	Ministry of Social Welfare; no other focal point elsewhere	Monthly allowance (USD7.23); half-price tickets on public transportation; 5% tax rebate for employing at least 10% persons with disabilities; A 75% tax rebate on salaries is granted when 25 persons with disabilities are hired

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Country	National special laws	National action plan (latest)	Quota system	Focal points	Financial benefits
Cambodia	Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2009	National Disability Strategic Plan, 2024–28 (Drafted as of November 2025)	2% for the public sector (more than 50 employees); 1% for the private sector (more than 100 employees); penalty for failing to comply with a fund	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation	287,599 cases had been approved and recipients received a disability card, entitling them to social assistance of KHR28,000 or USD7 per month, provided they are also considered part of a “poor family”
Lao PDR	Decree on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2019; National Inclusive Education Strategy 2010–15	National Plan of Action on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	NA	Ministry of Social Welfare	NA
Mongolia	2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2024–28 Action Program of the Government of Mongolia; National Human Development Policy, 2024–28	4% (over 25 employees)	Subcommittees and branch committees for persons with disabilities in all provinces	Tax deductions for employment and modifications for employers; EUR250 benefits per person per year, on average; 42,468 persons with disabilities receive disability pensions; no tax on bank deposits; higher education scholarships
The Philippines	Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, 1991; Accessibility Law (Batas Pambansa Bilang 344); Philippine Web Accessibility Policy Employment Quota Law (RA 10524)	Philippine Human Rights Action Plan, 2018–23 (Chapter 5 is dedicated to disability mainstreaming)	1% quota for the government and companies having over 100 employees, with penalties for noncompliance	Persons with Disability Affairs Offices in every province, city, and municipality	25% tax benefit on salaries of persons with disabilities; tax deductions for workplace modifications; tuition-fee waivers for universities; cash-for-work-program (persons with disabilities receive payment for community work)
Sri Lanka	Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996; National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, 2003; Visually Handicapped Trust Fund Act of 2003	National Plan of Action for Disability, 2014	3% of government jobs	Ministry of Social Welfare; National Council for Persons with Disabilities; National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities supports the council	NA

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OVERALL POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Country	National special laws	National action plan (latest)	Quota system	Focal points	Financial benefits
Turkiye	Disability Act No. 5378, 2005	2030 Barrier-Free Vision Document; First National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–25	4% for the public sector; 3% for the private sector; fine for noncompliance in both sectors; 3% for civil servants in the public sector	General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly; monitoring and evaluation board on the rights of persons with disabilities	An administrative fine is imposed for noncompliance with the quota, with funds directed to the Administrative Fine Fund for promoting employment, making adjustments, and investing in assistive devices; 80% of fees covered on the Public Employees Selection Exam for Persons with Disabilities; entrepreneurship grant support; income and corporate taxes are reduced for employers; part of the sheltered workshop is paid for by the government; income tax deductions for persons with disabilities; free citywide public transportation; financial support for using private buses; disability allowance (with the obligation of attending vocational training); allowance for relatives of persons with disabilities; disability living allowance (for the purchase of assistive devices); home care allowance

Notes: RA, The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons in the Philippines (Republic Act); TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training)
Source: National Reports.

OVERALL SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

This chapter examines actual employment practices based on national reports. The findings are presented first in terms of employment-related statistics and subsequently as enablers and barriers to employment.

Employment-Related Statistics

The studied countries collect slightly different statistics and information regarding the employment of persons with disabilities (see Table 1). These include employment, active labor, and economically active rates. The general trend indicates that the employment rate of persons with disabilities is significantly lower than that of persons without disabilities. Furthermore, gender disparities strongly favor men with disabilities over women with disabilities in countries that have organized disaggregated data by gender, such as Bangladesh, Lao PDR, and Turkiye. In rural areas, employment rates among persons with disabilities tend to be higher (e.g., in Bangladesh). Different groups of persons with disabilities also experience varied employment outcomes (e.g., in Lao PDR). Moreover, Turkiye explicitly supports the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in sheltered workshops, a practice that its critical analysis report deems discriminatory. Across the studied countries, self-employment and family business play a central role in employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, as highlighted in the Bangladesh report. The evidence suggests that persons with disabilities in these countries do not enjoy the same employment rights as those without disabilities.

TABLE 1

EMPLOYMENT RATE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Country	Employment rate of persons with disabilities	Additional information
Bangladesh	33.78%: 47.59% for men with disabilities and 12.80% for women with disabilities; 35.55% in rural areas and 25.95% in urban areas; another study reported an employment rate of only 29%.	The majority are self-employed (54.42%), followed by “household or family business” (18.14%) and “private organizations” (16.37%).
Cambodia	73.2% for persons with mild disabilities, 58.8% for persons with severe disabilities (compared with 72.7% for the general population); 67% for women with mild disabilities, 92.2% for men with mild disabilities, 51.3% for women with severe disabilities, and 72.2% for men with severe disabilities (compared with 86.1% for men and 66.2% for women).	7,535 persons with disabilities work in the public and private sectors.
Lao PDR	46.5% (compared with 68.4% for the general population), 38.1% for women with disabilities and 54.9% for men with disabilities, (67% for women and 69.7% for men without disabilities).	Persons with visual and hearing disabilities have better employment outcomes compared with those with physical and intellectual disabilities.
Mongolia	25.2% were economically active (compared with 62.1% of the general population); 22% were paid employees (compared with 50% of the general population).	The average monthly salary for persons with disabilities is only 50% of the average wage of the general population.

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Country	Employment rate of persons with disabilities	Additional information
The Philippines	About half of the employment rate of persons without a disability.	
Sri Lanka	28.7% were economically active (compared with 51.9% of the general population).	
Turkiye	The labor force participation rate is 35.4% for men with disabilities and 12.5% for women with disabilities (compared with 47.5% of the general population); Of the 144,178 workers, 22,449 work in the public sector and 121,729 in the private sector.	129 persons with intellectual disabilities were employed in 14 sheltered workplaces.

Source: National Reports.

Enablers of Employment

The national reports mention far fewer enablers or good practices compared with the barriers to employment faced by persons with disabilities. This section first presents the enablers, followed by the barriers.

Mongolia has several ongoing employment programs. Sri Lanka and Turkiye report that their national implementation institutions function effectively. Turkiye highlights its sheltered employment initiatives for persons with intellectual disabilities and commends the extensive employment support and job coaching services available in 120 units across all provinces. Furthermore, Cambodia acknowledges the efforts of government bodies in identifying persons with disabilities and their role in registering, inspecting, and incentivizing employers.

When laws and policies are not effectively implemented, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) step in to fill the gaps, as observed in Bangladesh, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. These NGOs provide financial and technical support. In Cambodia, the worker's union TAFTAC has been instrumental in training landmine survivors and creating employment opportunities for them. In Sri Lanka, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon serves as a model organization, offering capacity-building programs for persons with disabilities. The Philippines highlights vocational training for persons with visual disabilities, enabling them to become massage therapists. However, despite these efforts, employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remain largely confined to occupations traditionally associated with them such as tailoring. The Sri Lankan report also acknowledges the role of international organizations such as the ILO in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities.

In addition, a university in Bangladesh has incorporated universal design into its architecture curriculum, while the national budget allocation for persons with disabilities has been increasing, currently accounting for 0.48% of the total budget. These initiatives represent positive steps toward greater inclusion in employment.

Barriers Related to Preconditions of Employment

There are several barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, as highlighted in national reports. All the studied countries presented extensive lists of obstacles hindering the employment of this group. This section first examines barriers related to the preconditions of their employment, followed by a discussion on barriers to employment itself. Since this study conceptualizes disability as a social phenomenon that arises from interactions between individuals and their environments, clarifying the environmental factors affecting employment prospects is essential.

The living environment for persons with disabilities is highly discouraging across all studied countries, with reports highlighting discrimination, stigma, and attitudinal barriers. The Cambodian report underscores the role of the media in perpetuating these issues. Additionally, the study noted that even families and relatives

often ridicule persons with disabilities, who may be hidden away at home. Cases of domestic violence against persons with disabilities, especially girls and women, have been documented in Bangladesh and Cambodia. The Sri Lankan report analyses the reasons behind such attitudinal barriers and identifies two central factors. One is the traditional and religious concept such as “karma,” which defines disability as the result of one’s actions in this life or a previous life, thereby fostering profound stigma. A similar stigma is observed in Cambodia. Another contributing factor is the lasting impact of colonialism, specifically England’s segregation policies implemented through Christian missionaries during the colonial period, which may still influence society today. Moreover, the Mongolian report highlights the dominance of a medicalized perspective on disability, which reinforces disabling attitudes. Many parents seek to protect their children with disabilities instead of isolating them from society. The Turkish report highlights legal challenges in criminalizing discrimination, as existing laws often reinforce the status quo rather than promote inclusion. Negative attitudinal barriers are deeply entrenched across the studied countries, significantly overshadowing the employability of persons with disabilities. Some awareness-raising initiatives exist; however, according to the Bangladeshi report, these efforts are largely limited to urban areas. Gender disparity continues to be a widespread issue in many countries. Additionally, socially marginalized groups, such as Dalits (or “untouchables”) and individuals with leprosy in Bangladesh face even greater attitudinal barriers. Discrimination and stigma are not confined to employers; they are often internalized by persons with disabilities themselves. The Cambodian report noted that many individuals with disabilities doubt their capabilities, further hindering their employment prospects. Even when laws prohibit discrimination, this remains a reality for many in all the studied countries.

As a person with a disability, I have faced discrimination in various roles: as a child with a disability, as a woman in her 20s with a disability, as a mother with a disability after having a child and as a civil servant with a disability, (Mongolian report).

Attitudinal barriers can manifest across various sectors, including health and education. The Sri Lankan report highlights the lack of early detection and intervention mechanisms, leading to delays in rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. The lack of specialized services further hinders access to timely and appropriate medical treatment. Similarly, in Türkiye and other countries, the limited availability or lack of assistive equipment and technology further intensifies challenges. When medical and health interventions are scarce and diagnoses are either delayed or not provided, securing a disability allowance, if available, becomes increasingly difficult. This financial assistance is crucial for covering expenses related to medication, assistive devices, and alternative transportation options, such as taxis, due to the inaccessibility of public transportation. The Cambodian report emphasizes that households with family members who have disabilities require higher incomes to cover their needs, increasing their susceptibility to poverty. In Bangladesh, obtaining a disability ID card, which grants eligibility for a disability allowance, often entails paying bribes to officials, imposing an additional financial burden on individuals already facing economic hardships. In Mongolia, the lack of a comprehensive needs assessment system limits the effectiveness of existing social protection allowances, benefits, and services. Furthermore, in Bangladesh, many persons with disabilities are excluded from existing disability laws, thereby preventing them from accessing necessary services and financial support. The issue of inadequate government financial support is prevalent in Türkiye, Mongolia, and other countries. Moreover, loans and microcredit remain inaccessible to many persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Although the Cambodian report notes the existence of a dedicated fund, its resources are insufficient. Furthermore, even those who receive financial assistance from the fund often remain economically vulnerable due to their disadvantaged starting position compared with other families.

Regarding the education sector, which serves as a critical pathway to securing decent employment, the situation remains dire across all countries. The Sri Lankan report indicates that a significant proportion (34%) of persons with disabilities have no formal education. Similarly, the Cambodian report highlighted that over half of children with disabilities lack access to education. In Mongolia, one in five persons with disabilities has never received any education, compared with 4% of the general population. Barriers such as inaccessible school facilities, peer bullying, and negative attitudes from teachers and social workers contribute to this disparity. Furthermore, in Mongolia, 47% of individuals with congenital disabilities receive no education, compared with 12% of those with acquired disabilities. Similarly, Türkiye also reports significant educational disparities,

with an overall literacy rate of 76.7% among persons with disabilities—89.1% for men and 67.6% for women—compared with 95.5% for the general population. This gap, particularly concerning disability and gender, poses a major obstacle. In Mongolia, special education services are available only in the capital city. In Bangladesh, vocational training programs for persons with disabilities are often segregated and fail to align with market demands. The Cambodian report noted that each year, 50 economically disadvantaged persons with disabilities receive a year of vocational training funded by the line ministry. However, many individuals, especially those in rural areas, remain unaware of such opportunities and lack the necessary transportation to access them. The Cambodian and Sri Lankan report further stated that mainstream vocational training courses often fail to effectively accommodate persons with disabilities. As the Cambodian report stated:

They (persons with disabilities) in remote and poor households could not travel to the vocational training centre, and with little allowance per day, some of them preferred to stay home instead.
(Cambodian report)

In the health and education sectors, the lack of accessibility and reasonable accommodation is a key factor contributing to the situation. Most persons with disabilities live in rural areas and face significant accessibility challenges when roads are unpaved, assistive devices are unavailable, and buildings are inaccessible or lack proper sanitation facilities. The Lao PDR report criticizes the lack of an accessibility law as a fundamental issue. The Cambodian report highlights the ambiguity surrounding undue burdens placed on duty-bearers, despite the legal stipulation of access to reasonable accommodation. The Türkiye report noted that the capacity to monitor and audit accessibility is limited to the built environment, excluding ICTs. Similarly, the Bangladeshi report noted that government websites providing information regarding laws and policies are largely inaccessible. Thus, neither the physical nor digital environment is readily accessible to many persons with disabilities, which limits their access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. As a result, the Bangladeshi and Cambodian reports indicate that the main employment sector for persons with disabilities is subsistence farming or unpaid work in rural areas near their homes.

In all the countries, many gaps are addressed by NGOs and donor agencies. However, NGOs are often not consulted by the government. The Lao PDR report highlights that NGOs operate on a project-by-project basis with limited resources, while the Cambodian report questions the extent to which donor-funded projects can bring about lasting improvements. The Philippines report highlights a lack of coordination among NGOs. Collectively, the reports imply that while the contributions of NGOs and donor agencies are important, their efforts remain fragmented and insufficient to bridge the significant gaps and meet the extensive needs.

Barriers Related to Employment Itself

In addition to the preconditions for obtaining employment, employment itself presents numerous barriers, as highlighted in national reports. The aforementioned attitudes and prejudices hinder the recruitment of persons with disabilities in all countries. A common barrier across the studied countries is a lack of awareness regarding disabilities in the workplace, which manifests as inadequate accessibility and a lack of reasonable accommodation measures. However, the Bangladeshi report highlights the lack of legal enforcement of provisions protecting workers with disabilities from harassment. Reports from Bangladesh and the Philippines note that persons with disabilities are often confined to low-paid manual labor without social security if they are employed in salaried positions at all. Similarly, reports from Türkiye and Cambodia indicate that many persons with disabilities are employed in a limited range of jobs regardless of their educational background.

First, there is discrimination. People often believe that individuals with disabilities work slowly and are less capable. However, some perform even better than those without disabilities. Given a choice, employers often prefer those without disabilities, and we are frequently the last option.
(Cambodian report)

Governmental disability-inclusive employment policies have not been effectively monitored using appropriate indicators, and the implementation of policies and practices has been inadequate in all selected

countries, according to reports from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye. Furthermore, reports from these countries, excluding Lao PDR and Sri Lanka, emphasize that employment quotas have neither created sufficient opportunities for persons with disabilities nor been adequately monitored. Additionally, reports from Cambodia and Türkiye indicate that penalties for noncompliance are nonbinding due to gaps in the legal framework. The Philippines report highlights that persons with intellectual and multiple disabilities are especially marginalized within employment systems. The Türkiye report further criticized authorities for discontinuing social assistance after employment, which disincentivized many persons with disabilities from seeking work, an institutional and structural barrier. Another such barrier was identified in the Bangladesh report: when an individual becomes disabled at work, compensation under the 2006 Labour Act is insufficient to cover actual costs.

The findings of the reports collectively underscore that statutory interventions largely fail to safeguard the right to employment for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, institutional focal points for disability assistance, along with various government ministries, have not devoted sufficient attention to this issue. Additionally, in some cases, such as in Sri Lanka, they have reinforced a charity-based approach rather than a rights-based framework.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

The national experts provided policy recommendations to their respective governments based on their findings as well as to a range of stakeholders beyond the employment sector. As highlighted in the national reports, the exclusion of persons with disabilities from employment stems from multiple factors, most of which are linked to the social environment. This chapter summarizes the key policy implications and recommendations for institutions and processes.

Policy Implications and Recommendations Related to the Institutions

As discussed earlier, many countries lack the institutional frameworks necessary to make employment inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities. First, domestic laws must align with the UNCRPD, including adopting its definition of disability, ensuring reasonable accommodation, and actively combating disability-based discrimination. Many countries still struggle with inconsistencies between the CRPD and their domestic legislation.

A coordination mechanism or focal point must be established or strengthened, given the involvement of multiple duty-bearers and stakeholders. This mechanism can align with the requirement outlined in Article 33 of the UNCRPD. Additionally, responsible ministries and duty-bearers should be explicitly designated in national action plans. Currently, the lack of clarity regarding these responsibilities has contributed to a broader lack of transparency and accountability, especially among states, which remain the primary duty-bearers.

Furthermore, budget and human resource allocations for implementing legal and policy measures on inclusive employment have been limited. Additionally, rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems for assessing existing legal requirements, such as the quota system, are largely lacking. To address these gaps, a more robust action plan is required, including the appointment of duty-bearers for specific actions, establishment of monitoring and evaluation indicators, and setting of timeframes for tracking processes and measuring outcomes against predefined goals. These institutional changes are typically envisioned as short-term or midterm objectives, especially when there is sufficient political will to support such initiatives.

Policy Implications and Recommendations Related to the Process

Raising awareness about disability rights, existing legal requirements and available support for duty-bearers as well as rights-holders is a crucial aspect of the process. Both groups often lack sufficient knowledge and the capacity to either implement or demand disability rights effectively. Duty-bearers should begin by fostering an attitude shift, which is one of the most fundamental prerequisites for change, as discussed above. Their transparency and accountability would improve if they had a deeper understanding of disabilities as human rights issues.

States must also train and incentivize employers to hire persons with disabilities by ensuring they have adequate information about relevant laws and financial support mechanisms, such as workplace adjustments and tax reductions or exemptions.

For rights-holders, namely, persons with disabilities, strengthening their ability to claim their rights is essential. Moreover, awareness-raising efforts are particularly needed in rural areas, as previous training has often been concentrated solely in urban regions. The need for accessible and inclusive education,

especially vocational training, is urgent. Additionally, training in e-commerce and entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly relevant.

Accessibility, including accessible public transportation and a barrier-free physical environment, is crucial. However, the lack of penalties for noncompliance impedes the full implementation of accessibility laws, in case they exist. Moreover, accessibility is often narrowly interpreted as physical accessibility, even though information and digital accessibility are equally important for persons with disabilities. Different forms of communication must be considered to accommodate the diverse needs of individuals with different disabilities.

Assistive devices and technology, social protection, and medical and rehabilitation services remain unavailable to many persons with disabilities. When access to information is limited and public transportation is not easily accessible, obtaining these essential services, including disability identification cards, becomes even more challenging. However, these services are fundamental prerequisites that must be carefully planned, with particular attention given to the diversity and individual needs of each person with a disability.

Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations efficiently collaborate in shaping policies and processes to ensure their practical relevance and effectiveness. Greater attention is needed to address gender disparities, disability diversity, and other intersectional factors, as national reports indicate that inequalities compound in multiple ways for certain groups of persons with disabilities more than others.

International cooperation in this field is important, allowing countries to learn from one another's good practices and challenges. Implementing a pilot project or program and subsequently scaling it up presents a realistic and effective approach.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Prof. Hisayo Katsui

This concluding chapter summarizes the findings of the national reports and reflects on the study based on the personal observations of the chief expert.

At present, all the studied countries lack robust, regularly collected data, and standardized indicators to measure disability-based exclusion in the employment sector. One of the primary reasons for conducting this study was to help address this knowledge gap. However, the study faced challenges in synthesizing findings due to the diversity of datasets and frequent data omission. The interviews conducted as part of the study partially compensated for some of the missing statistics and data. These interviews provided important insights into the lived and embodied experiences of persons with disabilities, offering a more suitable understanding of the situation at the grassroots level.

It is important to clarify that this study was neither comprehensive nor comparative, as the existing datasets vary widely and are difficult to compare. Instead, the findings from the national reports were examined collectively in this synthesis report to provide an overview of the current state of disability-based employment exclusion in each of the seven case countries.

According to the national reports, all seven countries share a common trend: multilayered and culturally embedded barriers hinder the employment of many persons with disabilities on an equal basis with those without disabilities. As discussed above, the employment rate of persons with disabilities is significantly lower than that of persons without disabilities across all the studied countries. This disparity is particularly pronounced for women with disabilities in countries where gender- and disability-disaggregated data are available. The right to employment remains challenging to realize in practice due to barriers such as accessibility, inadequate health services, limited reasonable accommodation, insufficient education opportunities, and persistent negative attitudes.

At the time of this study, disability-inclusive employment policies and practices were still in development at the governmental level in each of the seven countries. While many countries have established disability policies and action plans, efforts to monitor and evaluate their implementation remain insufficient. Consequently, these policies often fail to translate into tangible improvements in employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, according to the national reports, the fiscal capacity of governments to provide support remains low. Many persons with disabilities in the studied countries are at a higher risk of poverty, and those with intersecting marginalized identities, such as gender, ethnic origin, caste, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, geographical location, or political background, face multiple forms of discrimination. The significant gaps left by governmental shortcomings are often addressed by NGOs and international donors. However, these entities are unable to fully bridge the gaps. Moreover, some governmental and nongovernmental interventions tend to follow a charity-based approach, which further reinforces the power asymmetry that many persons with disabilities experience.

These findings align with existing global research, including the ILO study [9], studies conducted by various European countries [30–31], research from the 32 OECD countries [32], and research conducted in the Asia-Pacific [33]. This underscores that the challenge of ensuring the right to employment for persons with disabilities is an ongoing issue in Asia as well as other regions, including the Global North. Despite having stronger social protection systems, disability policies, and disability service practices, countries in the Global North still experience significant delays in implementing effective interventions, if such interventions occur at all.

Under these circumstances, national experts proposed several relevant policy recommendations tailored to their respective countries. Notably, they emphasized the importance of addressing employment sector stakeholders as well as a broad spectrum of other actors, given the complex and interconnected nature of disability and the social environment. A key point raised in the reports was the importance of comprehensive data collection practices and longitudinal research. Without baseline data to assess the effectiveness and impact of policies, it becomes challenging to develop evidence-based strategies, action plans, or policy frameworks. A centralized database integrating registry data, regularly collected statistics, and internationally comparable datasets would enable more precise monitoring and analysis of disability-disaggregated data.

Against this backdrop, the APO's decision to conduct this study on persons with disabilities and existing employment policies and practices in Asia was particularly significant. Disability had been a missing component in previous discussions on productivity within the APO's publication series, and this study helps bridge that gap. However, there remains substantial room for further research. In accordance with the spirit of Article 32 of the UN CRPD on international cooperation, countries must continue exchanging good practices and lessons learned [34]. The national reports reviewed in this study contained relatively few examples of good practices or innovative solutions, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area. In particular, rapidly advancing technological solutions and artificial intelligence present important opportunities for further research, both in the disability sector in general and in the employment of persons with disabilities specifically.

Another important area for future research is the self-employment of persons with disabilities, as this appears to be the most prevalent form of employment for this group in many Asian countries. Understanding the opportunities and challenges associated with self-employment and entrepreneurship across Asia would provide valuable insights for policymakers and shareholders. While this study was conducted as a short-term commissioned project, a longitudinal study on the employment of persons with disabilities in Asia is necessary to track developments over time. Only through such long-term research can meaningful comparisons be made between different countries. To achieve this, further collaboration with OPDs is essential, especially given the global disability movement's guiding principle: "Nothing about us without us." With persons with disabilities comprising approximately 16% of the world's population, they represent a significant and valuable resource for all countries in Asia and beyond.

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These references encompass the Introduction and Methodology, the overall policy and situational analyses of the employment of persons with disabilities, the policy implications and recommendations, and the concluding remarks, whereas each country report lists its own references separately at the end.

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