SEAMEO CENTRES POLICY RESEARCH NETWORK (CPRN) SUMMIT 2025

Building Bridges to a Sustainable Future: Inclusive Collaboration and Innovation in Education, Science, and Culture

(PROGRESS PAPER) EMPLOYABILITY STATUS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDS) IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Introduction

- The employability of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Southeast Asia, has seen notable developments between 2020 and 2024.
- This thematic background research provides a comprehensive analysis of the employability status of PWDs focusing on

i. Indonesia

ii. Malaysia

iii. Singapore

iv. Thailand

- PWDs encounter barriers such as social stigma, lack of accessibility, and insufficient vocational training, leading to low labor force participation and high unemployment rates, especially in informal sectors

Research Questions

RO1 : To identify current policies and strategies on employment of PWDs in selected SEA countries;

RO2 : To analyze the policy and strategies implementation gaps for employment of PWDs in selected SEA countries; and

RO3 : To highlight the best practices of employment of PWDs in selected SEA countries.

Literature Review

There is an estimated 690 million PWDs in Asia and the Pacific which means that one in six people in Asia and the Pacific is a person who lives with a disability.	Crosta & Sanders 2021 United Nations 2018
Disability affects a wide range of socio-economic outcomes, including labor market participation, but also other factors that shape participation, including education, information and transport.	Grammenos 2011
The disabled/non-disabled participation rate differential varies cross-nationally	Pagán 2009
PWDs tend to be concentrated in lower-skilled, lower-paid occupations	Meager & Higgins 2011
Low participation rates are costly for the individuals concerned in terms of economic and psychological well-being, for governments in terms of lost output and tax revenues, and increased welfare payments, and for society in terms of the impact of social exclusion and discrimination on civic participation and public life	Kitching 2014
They are the most vulnerable group and are at risk of being excluded from the benefits of economic, social and environmental development in their country	United Nations 2018

Methodology

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

DATA COLLECTION
- Document analysis
- In-depth interviewss (online and face-to-face)
- Roundtable discussion (RTD)

DATA ANALYSIS
- Transcription
- Content
- Thematic
- Comparative

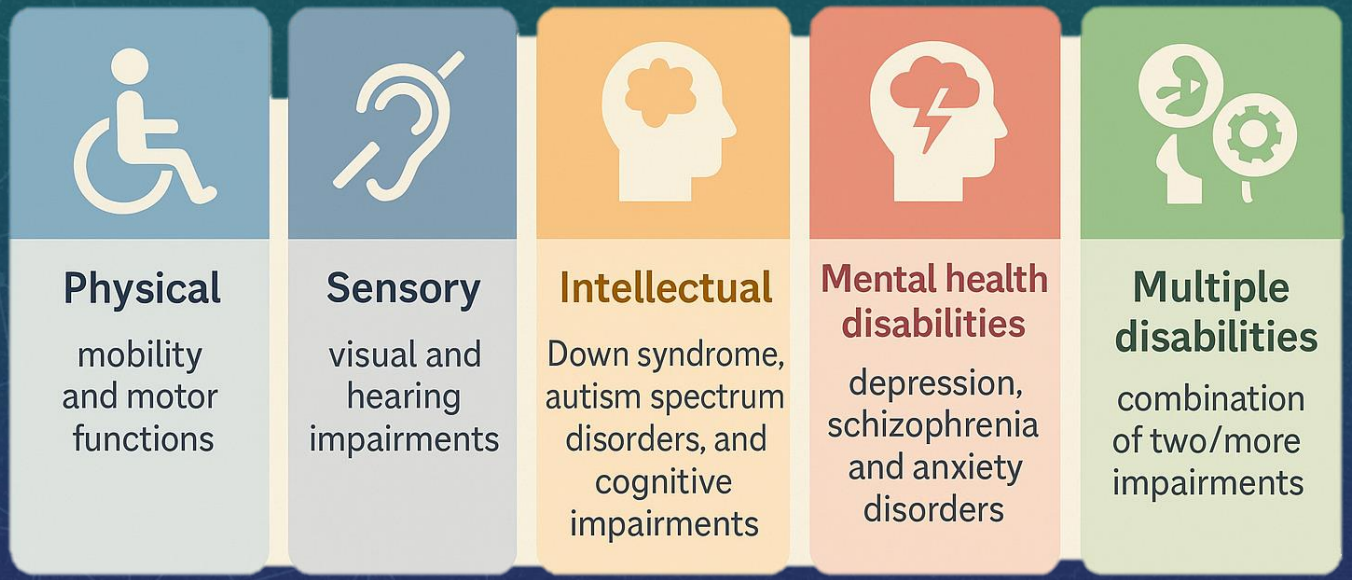
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1 → **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2** → **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3** → **REPORT & PUBLICATION**

Aug 2026

Overview States of People with Disabilities in the Southeast Asia

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines PWDs as individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with societal barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society

- The primary categories of disabilities include;



Prevalence of Disabilities

INFLUENCED BY

- Demographic Trends
- Healthcare Access
- Occupational Hazards
- Public Awareness

WHY REGISTRATION MATTERS

Registration plays a key role in granting PWDs access to **government assistance, financial support, and rehabilitation services**

THE DATA GAP

While data collection efforts have improved, official statistics often **undertestimate** the true number of PWDs due to **underreporting, stigma,** and **inconsistencies in** classification systems.

THE HIDDEN BARRIERS

- Lack of Awareness
- Bureaucratic Processes
- Social Discrimination

PWDs in Selected Countries

INDONESIA	MALAYSIA	SINGAPORE	THAILAND
22 million • Ministry of Social Affairs • Disability prevalence is higher in rural area - limited access healthcare and rehabilitation services. • Policies to support PWDs, including employment quotas and accessibility mandates	**637,038** 1.9% of Malaysia's total population • Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), as of 2023 • Physical Disabilities (39.5%) • Hearing Disabilities (14.1%) • Visual Impairments (9.3%) • Multiple Disabilities (7.3%) • Speech Disabilities (0.7%) • Steps to improve the registration process and expand accessibility to assistive services, financial aid, and vocational training.	**3% Singapore's Resident** • Lives with some form of disability (SG Enable) • The prevalence of disabilities increases with residents age, ➢ 50 years & older (13.3%) ➢ 18-49 years (3.4%) ➢ Students in mainstream schools (2.1%) • Initiatives such as the Enabling Masterplan, which focuses on employment, education, and independent living.	**2 million** • Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEP). • Many individuals reluctant to register due to stigma and lack of awareness about available benefits. • Disability prevalence is notably higher in rural areas – less accessible healthcare services and assistive infrastructure • Employment quotas and financial support programs

Policies & Strategies

Country	Strategies	Programs
Indonesia	1. Wage Subsidy & Tax Incentives for Inclusive Employment (MOF, 2023) 2. Accessibility and Workplace Adaptation Initiatives (Apindo, 2022) 3. Public-Private Partnership in Disability Inclusion (Kemitraan Publik-Swasta untuk Inklusi Disabilitas) - (IBC-DI), 2022	1. National Vocational Training Centers for PWDs (Balai Latihan Kerja Disabilitas – BLK Disabilitas) - (Kemenaker), 2022 2. Entrepreneurship Assistance Program for PWDs (Program Kewirausahaan Penyandang Disabilitas - PKPD) -(Kemensos), 2023 3. Disability Employment Quota System (Official Gazette of Indonesia, 2016)
Malaysia	1. Wage Incentive Program (Insentif Pekerjaan Orang Kurang Upaya, OKU) 2. Talent Enhancement Programme (TEP) 3. National Disability Action Plan (Pelan Tindakan OKU 2016–2022)	1. Job Coach Services Program (JKM, 2021) 2. Inclusive Employment Program (Program Pekerjaan Inklusif, PPI) 3. 1% Employment Policy for PWDs in the Public Sector (JPA, 2020)

Country	Strategies	Programs
Singapore	1. SG Enable and Government Collaboration with Employers (SG Enable, 2023) 2. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Inclusive Hiring Policies (SBF, 2023) 3. Digital and Remote Work Opportunities for PWDs (IMDA, 2023) 4. Strengthening Workplace Accessibility (BCA, 2023)	1. Enabling Academy (SG Enable, 2023) 2. Job Redesign Grant (Workforce Singapore, 2023) 3. Enabling Employment Credit (EEC) (Singapore Budget 2023)
Thailand	1. Wage Subsidies and Tax Incentives for Employers (Ministry of Labour, Thailand, 2023) 2. Community-Based Employment & Entrepreneurship Support (DEP, 2023) 3. Partnerships with the Private Sector for Inclusive Hiring (CSR Programs) – Thailand Business Coalition for Disability Inclusion (TBC-DI), 2022 4. Digital & Inclusive Education for PWDs (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 2023)	1. Vocational Training and Employment Promotion Program for PWDs (DEP, 2023) 2. The 60+ Plus Bakery & Chocolate Café Program 3. PWD Employment Quota System (Section 33, 34, and 35 of the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act, B.E. 2550 (2007)

Implementation Plan

INDONESIA

- Public sector: 2% PWD employment
- Private sector: 1% PWD quota
- Monitored by Ministry of Manpower (KEMNAKER) and Ministry of Social Affairs (KEMENSOS) with local partners

MALAYSIA

- Led by Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), supported by SOCSO, Department of Labor (JTK) & Department of Social Welfare (JKM)
- Collaborates with ministries, local authorities, NGOs & private sector
- Focus on job placements, training & accessible workplaces
- Key programs: Job Coach Malaysia, PWD Skills Development

SINGAPORE

- Led by Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) with SG Enable, Workforce Singapore (WSG) & SkillsFuture
- Open-Door Programme (ODP): Grants for workplace upgrades, training & salary support to hire PWD

THAILAND

- Companies (100+ staff): Hire ≥1% PWD or contribute to PWD Employment Promotion Fund
- Led by Ministry of Labor & Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEP)
- Alternatives: Fund training, assistive tech, or self-employment programs

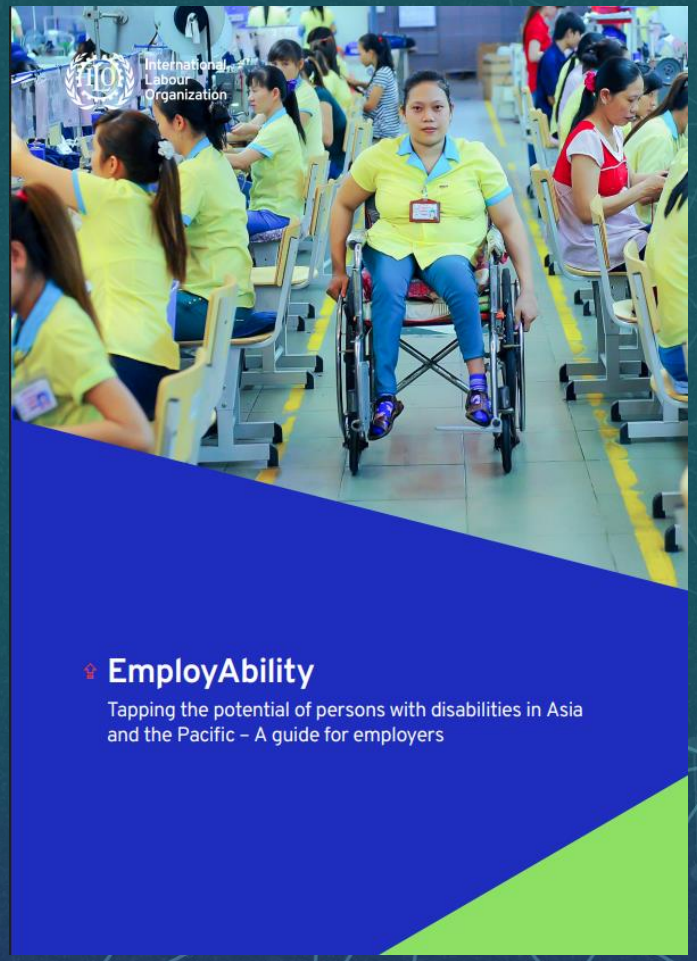
Findings

- The four Southeast Asian countries under investigation have implemented various policies and initiatives to enhance the employability of PWDs.
- Challenges such as employer perceptions, policy enforcement, and data limitations continue to hinder progress.
- Adopting inclusive employment models and strengthening public-private partnerships are pivotal steps toward creating a more inclusive workforce in the region.
- This study underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach to improve the employability of PWDs in Southeast Asia.
- By addressing implementation gaps, enhancing employer engagement, and leveraging best practices, the region can move towards a more inclusive and equitable labor market that empowers PWDs to participate fully in economic and social.

Conclusion

The study highlights the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration among governments, the private sector, and civil society to close the gap between policy and practice. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms, raising societal awareness, improving workplace accommodations, and expanding skills training are essential for meaningful and sustainable inclusion.

In summary, while progress has been made, achieving full workforce participation for PWDs in Southeast Asia requires a more coordinated, inclusive, and accountable approach that addresses both structural barriers and social attitudes.



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