

An Analysis of the Challenges and Strategies to Improve and Strengthen the Employment Status of Persons with Disabilities in Asia

Ryuhei Sano
Hosei University, Japan

ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, the employment of persons with disabilities in the Asia region has been the subject of the spotlight of several studies from various government and non-government organizations. A proper and thorough look at the employment status of persons with disabilities is a crucial aspect in the overall improvement of their rights in society, especially in terms of being free from discrimination by having equal access to decent work along with other members of society.

KEYWORDS

Asia; disability;
employment;
inclusive; right

Several transformations have occurred in the employment status of persons with disabilities. With growing potential being seen in the current world work atmosphere, persons with disabilities, with the help of technological advances, the popularity of the so-called Gig Economy, and expanding entrepreneurial spirit of the populace, the door seems to be opening wider for persons with disabilities.

Given this current picture of what is happening in Asia, this paper will look at the growth of employment of persons with disabilities and its causes; the current realities and challenges, as well as possible directions that this trend is taking; and the effective strategies to further develop and promote employment of persons

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the employment of persons with disabilities in the Asia region has been the subject of the spotlight of several studies from various government and non-government organizations. A proper and thorough look at the employment status of persons with disabilities is a crucial aspect in the overall improvement of their rights in society, especially in terms of being free from discrimination by having equal access to decent work along with other members of society. The countries and regions in Asia, throughout the last several years, have seen significant changes not only in disability rights issues, but also in terms of disability employment status and policy focus. According to statistics provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2020, there are approximately 427 million persons with disabilities in Asia (and the Pacific) classified as of working age.

In a nutshell, several transformations have occurred in the employment status of persons with disabilities. With growing potential being seen in the current world work atmosphere, persons with disabilities, with the help of technological advances, the popularity of the so-called Gig Economy, and expanding entrepreneurial spirit of the populace, the door seems to be opening wider for persons with disabilities. There is, however, much room for improvement as there are still barriers present for persons with disabilities in getting productive, stable, and decent employment. The current worldwide upheaval presented by COVID-19 pandemic also adversely affected such opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Given this current picture of what is happening in Asia, this paper will look at the growth of employment of persons with disabilities and its causes; the current realities and challenges, as well as possible directions that this trend is taking; and the effective strategies to further develop and promote employment of persons with disabilities.

METHOD

Document research was used mainly when the author had questions as to which topics should be addressed from the Asian perspective. The analysis of the documents in this research was rather to clarify the key issues in reliable sources publicized by several international organizations in recent years. To obtain the data practically, the author consulted with experts with knowledge and experiences on disability and development working at several international organizations. According to their recommendations, target documents were listed for the comprehensive review. Although the time period of such consultation was not defined, the documents were analyzed eventually in February - July 2021.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evolution in the Perception on the Employment Rights of Persons with Disabilities

For the last 50 years or so, the rights of persons with disabilities have grown from virtual invisibility in the post-war era up to the 1960s to more than 18 international initiatives and 15 citations from international instruments. Among the most notable of such initiatives are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted in 2006; the Asian and Pacific Decades for Persons with Disabilities since 1993; the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, 2013-2022; and the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, also calls for the creation of full and productive

employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities and equal pay for work of equal value.

The CRPD has clear terms in its recognition of persons with disabilities' right to work on an equal basis with others in a work environment that is both inclusive and accessible. Specifically, the CRPD Articles 5 (Equality), Article 8 (Awareness-raising), and Article 24 (Education) provides prescriptions for setting up a strong environment to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, 2013-2022, is also very clear in its goal to reduce poverty and enhance the work and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the region.

Likewise, the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025 key actions points include the development of policies aimed at removing obstacles of employment and business opportunities, as well as the promotion of a disability-inclusive environment for entrepreneurship, enterprises, including social enterprises, cooperatives and regular businesses and e-commerce. Apart from key action points that will assist persons with disabilities in having equal opportunity marketplaces and accessible financial assistance and protection, it also aims to promote one-stop entrepreneur centers acting as hub of information for those who want to set up micro, small, and medium enterprises for entrepreneurs with disabilities and family members. Furthermore, these centers will also provide networking and funding information.

What helped push forward a heightened awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities are the changes in society's models of disability, particularly from disability being seen as a medical and charity or welfare model to a more accessible social model and, in recent years, to a human rights model of disability. Previously, disability was seen as a burden or a pitiable situation, and a 'condition' that needs to be treated medically. Thus, the mindset of mendicancy and charity became associated with persons with disabilities, who are seen as being incapable of taking full and productive part in society, including any type of work environment. Around this time, there were a flurry of social welfare services, separate health care and rehabilitation services, and segregated work environment for persons with disabilities.

When the social model of disability began emerging, society started to look at disability in a less helpless and useless light, with the conversation being drawn to the both the physical and social barriers, including communication and information, that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society and accessing areas, including the labor market. This new-found awareness and interest paved the way for the creation of policies that promoted an inclusive society, as exemplified by the Community-Based Inclusive Development concept that also helped change people's negative assumptions and attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

In the last decade or so, the perception of persons with disabilities as important and equal members of society has taken root and paved the way for the human rights model of disability to take effect. This disability model declares that persons with disabilities are entitled to their rights and their dignity as human beings, and therefore should not be subjected to any form of discrimination. Furthermore, this model affirms that disabilities are not a burden and a lack but, instead, are part of the diversity of human beings that need to be acknowledged and respected.

Alongside with all these positive changes, the region also saw a shift in the socio-economic front. The focus of policies in different governments in the region slowly start turning to persons with disabilities as potential productive partners in the workplace, which required new approaches to work and employment.

In the 1970s, the Asia region saw persons with disabilities being employed in sheltered workshops, a form of segregated centers set up as a social service by charitable and religious groups. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), these types of sheltered employment were not the most ideal of work environments due to the lack of contracts, absence of good working conditions, lower than minimum pay grade, to name a few.

From the 1980s onward, the Asia region saw further improvement in employment opportunities for persons with disabilities with the sheltered employment scheme transitioning into more program-based, more open forms where employees can choose work options, with more opportunities for skills training. Under such conditions thus emerged supported employment, a more mainstream type of work environment for persons with disabilities. Under this concept, employees with disabilities can find work through individual job placements with the help of a job coach or work with a team of colleagues with disabilities in a mainstream company doing specific tasks under supervision. They also have the option of doing mobile work, such as cleaning services, under proper contract agreement from companies. They were also given opportunities to open small business ventures, such as subcontracting work, and offering their services to big companies.

With the increased awareness about the capabilities and potential of persons with disabilities, and the growing sensitivity to seeing persons with disabilities as having as much equal rights in many levels as persons without disabilities, the private sector slowly came to realize the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities, given the right accessible work environment and culture. Given more chances to participate in the workplace, employers have found out that, given the right accessible work environment, persons with disabilities are very productive and diligent, and have low turnover rates, to name a few. Alongside these developments, business owners also began initiatives and

programs partnering up with disabled people's organizations in collaboration with state employment agencies, as well as working with disability training centers, in order to identify and train potential employees with disabilities. These positive experiences led employers to seek out more employees with disabilities by organizing disability-related networks and taking an active part in promoting awareness among their peers about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. The ILO Global Business and Disability Network is a good reference for these lists of networks in the region, among which include the Australian Network on Disability, Sri Lanka's Network on Disability, and a variety of networks in South and Southeast Asia.

It needs to be acknowledged that these shifts and transitions did not happen overnight and, in fact, are still occurring in varying degrees. For instance, some companies will not hire persons with disabilities outright. Instead, they will first direct potential hires to undergo some form of vocational skills training or go through employment services before they can join the company. Others would create disability-related projects of livelihood opportunities through their corporate social responsibility goals, while improving their system with the goal of becoming a full-fledged disability-inclusive company or business.

In the light of these current developments in the employment of persons with disabilities, a new form of social economy, which has led to a new phenomenon emerging in the form of social enterprise, which has grown in popularity in recent years. The Southeast Asian region has seen social enterprise in the disability community growing by leaps and bounds. Hence, the booming culture of cooperatives, foundations, non-profits, and a host of social enterprises.

Current Trends in Disability and Employment

The advent of technological advancements in recent years has had a significant impact on the employment status of everyone of working age, including persons with disabilities. Assistive technology has vastly improved the way persons with disabilities interact with society and increased their productivity on many levels. Defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "an umbrella term covering the systems and services related to the delivery of assistive products and services", assistive technology consists of a wide range of products, from hearing and communication aids to wheelchairs and prostheses, to memory aids, among others.

The adoption of Universal Design, defined by the United Nations as the design of products, environments, programs and services to be usable by all people to its fullest extent and with no need for any specialized design, which can now be seen in many countries in the region is also presenting more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

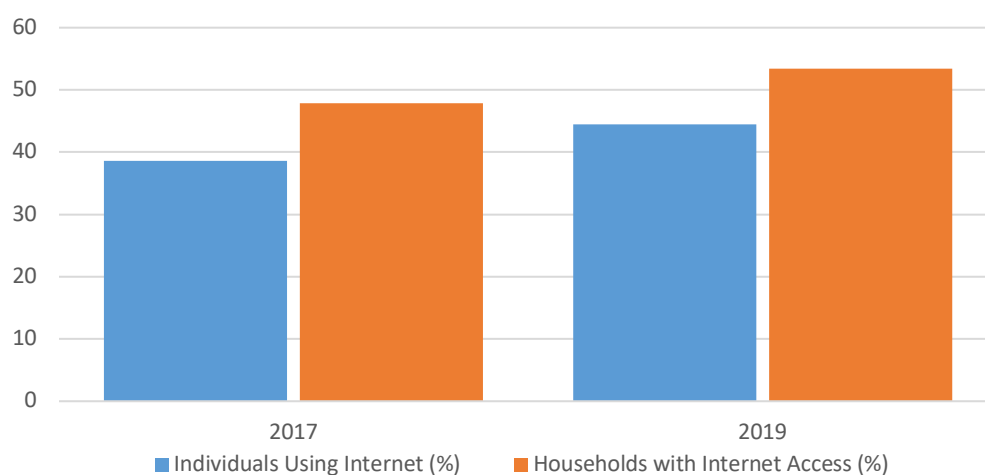
Digital accessibility, via the accessibility features and functionalities of the internet, smart phones and other digital gadgets, has also produced significant impact on persons with

disabilities. This means, in a general sense, more opportunities for people, including those with disabilities, to take advantage of employment opportunities presented by this kind of technology. With a lot of industries tapping into digital technology, the world has seen the growth and expansion of travel and leisure industries, for instance, and along with it, the creation of new jobs, such as online travel bookings, online shopping, food deliveries, computer games, among others. The dawn of virtual work, e-commerce, e-shopping, and e-learning have also opened doors to new work opportunities. The fast-paced development of Artificial Intelligence and its usage in the manufacturing and service sectors is also seen to complement and assist skilled persons with disabilities in doing their jobs, whether online or in physical workplaces.

According to a 2021 study conducted by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Asia (and the Pacific) is not only the most diverse in the world, but is also home to the top digital economies and societal developments globally. It is also the global leader in high-speed internet access and usage. Furthermore, the last four years have seen a stable growth in most areas in the region in terms of ICT infrastructure, access, and usage. The same could be said of mobile cellular coverage, which is estimated to be close to 100%, with “mobile cellular subscriptions far in excess of 100 per 100 inhabitants in 22 out of 38 countries from which data were available” according to the study.

While all this seems to be good news, the region is also extremely diverse in that there is a huge gap “in terms of population size, geographical features, and income distribution”. For instance, ITU figures pegs internet usage rates to more than 90% in the region’s advanced economies while the least developed countries has internet usage of less than 15%. In general, however, internet usage have seen positive growth in the region.

Table 1: Individual Internet Usage & Household Access to Internet



Source: ITU, rearranged by the author

These technological innovations and popular usage naturally led to the so-called Gig Economy, defined as a labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. According to IE University, one of the top business academic institutions in the world, technology is the main driving force of gig economy and with an estimated 60% workforce of freelance professionals choosing this type of employment by 2027. As long as conditions for an ideal gig economy are met (e.g. reliable internet and cloud-based software, accessible technology and assistive devices), the region will see a younger generation, including persons with disabilities, choosing remote jobs over a traditional work environment. Whether it's desktop publishing, transcription, design, sales and marketing, and other digital work, the possibilities are endless for gig economy workers.

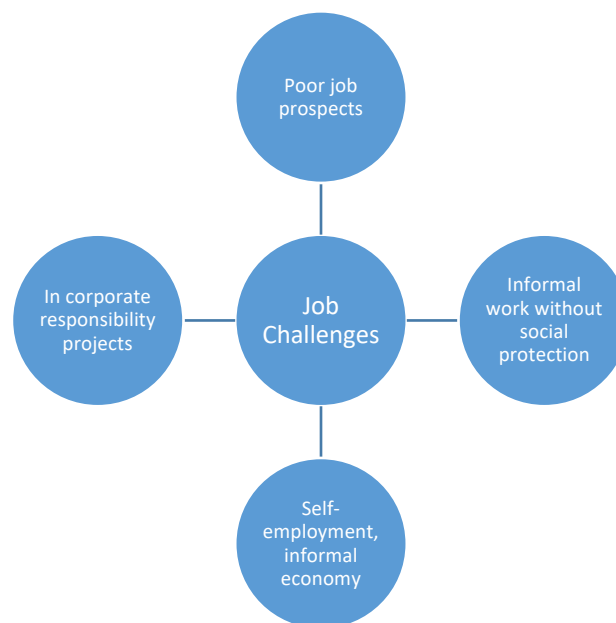
Besides the lower overhead cost for the employers, other advantages of this type of employment especially for persons with disabilities are the flexible working hours and work locations, plus more focus on the workers' abilities instead of their disabilities, which could potentially lower discrimination in its many forms.

Challenges in Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

In spite of developments in the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities, much work needs to be done in addressing numerous challenges that continue to exist. For instance, according to ESCAP figures, the likelihood of persons with disabilities to be given a chance to take part in the labor force, however, are up to six times less likely to happen due to several factors which will be discussed here. Further, women with disabilities, as well as those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, are also likely to be overlooked or rejected in favor of men with disabilities, with the former facing "disproportionate and unique barriers to their equal participation in employment" as per a United Nations Population Fund report in 2020, particularly under the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the main challenges for persons with disabilities in many countries in the region is their continued 'invisibility' in the labor market, often referring to their "not being registered as either employed or unemployed", according to a report from the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development. Thus, the region has to contend with the lack of accurate and updated data, as well as contradicting data. The ILO also states that persons with disabilities have higher unemployment rates than persons without disabilities, and would often be subjected to lower paid employment rates as well.

Table 2: Employment Challenges of Persons with Disabilities



Source: ESCAP, rearranged by the author

The proliferation of informal economy, where workers and economic units are neither legally and socially protected nor acknowledged and regulated, are also prevalent in the disability working community. They are not fully covered by standard formal work arrangements and do not receive benefits such as insurance or hazard pay, among others.

Asia (and the Pacific), according to ILO data, has about 1.3 billion informal workers out of the 2 billion globally. That is, 68 percent (or two in three) of workers are employed informally, with some countries in the region posting a ratio of nine in 10. Statistics also show that these informal workers, at least in the initial onset of the COVID-19 crisis, faced a 22 percent decrease in their earnings.

In terms of gig economy, which is in fact a form of informal economy, the lack of employment benefits and other protection as stipulated by law, such as sick leave pay or proper minimum wage, could also put persons with disabilities at risk of exploitation.

As for internet and digital technology, persons with disabilities who don't have consistent access to reliable internet and mobile connection, as well as assistive devices, among others, might have a difficult time doing remote work or entering the gig economy. According to the ITU, the difference in the gender gap in internet usage is quite significant, with 41.3 percent of women being able to go online as opposed to 48.3 percent of men in 2019. Likewise, researchers have noted the gap between rural and urban areas in Internet access with only 37 percent of rural households having internet access while the urban households enjoyed a 70.4 percent figure in 2019. All of this in spite of numerous related legislations in Asia.

Table 3: Digital Technology Challenges in South Asia

India	Of the 7,800 government websites tested in 2012, 75% had accessibility barriers and 25% websites failed to open
Pakistan	Of the Top 100 local websites tested in 2015, 75% of websites failed to meet WCAG 2.0 standards

Source: Internet Society, rearranged by the author

While technological advancements made lots of things easier for employees, there is also the disadvantage of a highly automated company, which could potentially decrease the need for employees, much less opportunities, for persons with disabilities.

According to ESCAP, the lack of accessible information continues with persons with disabilities not having enough access to websites and applications due to numerous factors, including the lack of digital literacy and the unaffordability of these tools. Moreover, the dearth in accurate, real-time captioning and sign language interpreters in public and broadcasting events and conferences, understandable language for persons with intellectual disabilities, and even disaster warning visual information continue to be a burden to the disability community, especially in low-income countries.

The affordability of assistive technology is another factor that affects employees with disabilities. A 2018 WHO study on assistive technology showed that only one in 10 people have access to such products. Again, the question of affordability comes into play in this situation, especially for persons with disabilities living in least developed and developing countries who couldn't afford expensive assistive products.

Another challenge faced by persons with disabilities is the gender gap that still exist, with women encountering more discrimination in the many forms, from unequal pay and lack of workplace accommodation, to negative employer attitude and various types of harassments, and many physical, information and communication barriers. More than men with disabilities and women without disabilities (who are already facing a huge gap in the labor sector), there are more women with disabilities who are in the informal job market or have unstable employment without security.

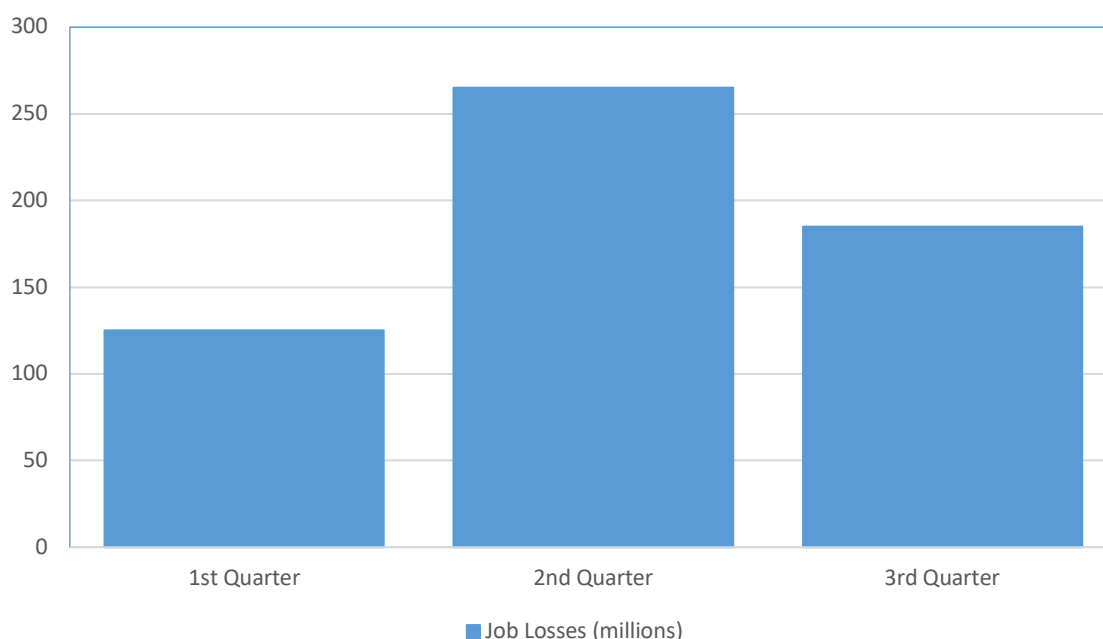
Further compounding these challenges is the fact that persons with disabilities have a diverse set of profiles, including their socio-economic situations, and the various forms and degrees of disabilities that they have, ranging from physical to intellectual and psychosocial. This does not take into consideration the varying stages in which they have acquired their disabilities, whether from birth or childhood, or in their later adult years. Moreover, their levels of work experience differ, as well as their educational opportunities, skills training know-how, and other factors. All this affect the proper (or lack thereof) documentation of government, non-government, and private institutions,

resulting in huge information gaps in statistics in the sectors of education, labor, and social protection. This lack of information, in turn, could lead to the lack or low levels of awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, and result in proper laws and policies that will improve the lives of persons with disabilities overall.

The 2020 COVID Pandemic

One very important development in the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020 and continues to rage on worldwide with new virus variants coming out. As they have pre-existing health conditions that could potentially lead to a higher risk of COVID-related illness and even death, persons with disabilities are a highly vulnerable group in this health crisis. And due to the economic burden as a result of the numerous lockdowns and quarantine periods of countries due to COVID-related restrictions, persons with disabilities already reeling from low-income opportunities have a more difficult time earning enough, or worse, have lost their jobs in the process. According to ESCAP and ILO figures, Asia (and the Pacific) saw a “significant loss of jobs” at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Table 4: Job Losses in 2020 in Asia-Pacific



Source: ESCAP & ILO, rearranged by the author

The ILO estimates that an estimated 81 million people lost their jobs in Asia (and the Pacific) at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. With greatly reduced working hours as well as complete job losses, income from the labor sector dropped to a low of 10 percent in the region in most of 2020, or a 3 percent loss of the region’s gross domestic product

(GDP). All this could result in an estimated 94 to 98 million of “working poor” (defined by ILO as people living on less than 1.90 USD per day) in 2020.

Several studies during this time were cited by ESCAP which showed the negative impact of the pandemic in Asia. In India, for instance, a study conducted by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Disabled People found that 73 percent of respondents faced drastic financial losses, serious food shortage and difficulty accessing healthcare. Meanwhile, blind massage therapists working in 81.7 percent of spas and massage shops in China lost their jobs when these workplaces suffered from lack of clients or worse, closed down.

While the global pandemic paved the way for more people doing remote work via Internet and mobile use, persons with disabilities particularly those who don't have proper access to said technology had very limited opportunities to working online or remotely.

According to a fact sheet presented by ESCAP on “Vulnerable Groups and Digital Divide in the Asia-Pacific”, persons with disabilities were hard-hit by the pandemic and severely limited and even put their lives at risk due to the following:

- a) Support persons could not practice social distancing because their role is very important for persons with disabilities.
- b) Essential support services were not available.
- c) Lower employment opportunities.
- d) Lack of access to health care, especially access to prescription medicines, as well as respirators and oxygen tanks due to shortages brought by the huge number of COVID patients being confined to hospitals.

On a more positive light, ESCAP reports that several governments in Asia put in place some contingency measures that assisted persons with disabilities in employment-related matters and social protection. Among creative measures applied were company subsidies that continue to employ persons with disabilities, supporting persons with disabilities-owned businesses, encouragement of flexible working arrangements, provision of cash assistance and aids such as hygiene kits and food packs, creation of online recruitment service platforms and virtual training programs, to name some.

Strategies to Help Promote Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Overall, a proper multi-pronged approach to improving the employment of persons with disabilities in Asia is necessary to fill in the gaps coming from various areas. The countries and regions in Asia need to ensure that the following are in place and strengthened: 1) legal frameworks; 2) employment gain and retention; 3) entrepreneurship promotion and development; 4) employer support; 5) accessibility and awareness.

A very important area of improvement would be the strengthening of legal frameworks, ensuring that such laws are applied and followed. The importance of solid constitutional provisions the express commitment to disability rights and prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities can never be underscored enough. Anti-discrimination and equity laws need to be in place that will prevent workplace and employment discriminations from recruitment and promotions to dismissal. While the quota scheme, whereby companies are required to hire a certain percentage of persons with disabilities, are in place in around 25 countries in the region, there are loopholes to it. One such loophole is that, instead of hiring persons with disabilities as required by law, companies opt to just pay a levy for the vacant slot, instead of recruiting personnel with disabilities. The levy fund is normally used to the promotion of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Another loophole is in the so-called disability ‘benefits trap’, where persons with disabilities may lose their disability benefits once they are fully and regularly employed. One suggested solution to this dilemma, according to the ESCAP study, is for governments to continue providing disability benefits to fully employed persons with disabilities according to a “certain threshold of income earned”. If the employee loses or resigns from their employment, then he/she will be fully eligible again for disability benefits, as required by law.

In terms of gaining and retaining employment, persons with disabilities will benefit from both financial and in-kind support such as salary augmentation, transport allowance, access to accessible equipment, to name some. Various kinds of training, including skills, technical and vocational trainings, as well as gaining job seeking abilities, will improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Job coaching services need to look at the ‘place and train’ approach to ensure that persons with disabilities are not wasting their time training for a job and then later on not getting a spot at all.

The encouragement and promotion of persons with disabilities’ entrepreneurial spirit continue to be an important aspect in improving their lives and furthering their rights in society today. Apart from enhancements of their skills in business development, persons with disabilities also need to be savvy in financial management, and need support in sourcing equipment, accessing markets, and expanding their business networks.

The employers of persons with disabilities, likewise, should not be left out in the equation. These employers need to have financial support, perhaps in the form of incentives, if they are to be active proponents for the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities. These incentives can take the form of ‘tax exemptions, wage subsidies, and coverage of insurance premium costs’, among others.

Always of paramount importance and one that needs to take root in the consciousness of society is having an enabling general environment for persons with disabilities. Thus, accessibility and awareness of such needs by society need to be created, including in

public transportations, built environment especially in workplaces, as well as in information and communication technologies. The World Bank, in its 2016 ICT development study, emphasized to the need for multiple channels for persons with disabilities to access information and be able to communicate effectively. It also stressed the need for the affordability and availability of assistive technology, as well as access to education and employment, financial inclusion, political participation, and disaster management, among others. Improved awareness about persons with disabilities will help decrease, or even eradicate, wrong assumptions and stereotypes regarding their abilities and skills in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

The last 50 decades or so have seen so many positive changes in the plight and recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities. With the many global and regional initiatives and programs launched to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, there is now a growing awareness in society about the importance of having a barrier-free and accessible environment to allow persons with disabilities to live equally, productively, safely, and share their capabilities and abilities with the rest of society. In the Asia region, persons with disabilities are starting to experience an inclusive and accessible society, thanks to such strong international and regional measures like the CRPD, the Asian and Pacific Decades for Persons with Disabilities, the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, and the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, as well as provisions in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These measures, ratified by governments in Asia, have seen national legislations and frameworks changed and developed to accommodate the ‘voice’ of persons with disabilities, and which are now being implemented albeit with varying degrees of speed and success, to the grassroots level.

These initiatives have greatly helped in putting the spotlight on the livelihood of persons with disabilities, including their opportunities in the mainstream employment sector. As was discussed in this paper, there have been great developments in the way society views employees with disabilities. From the highly segregated sheltered employment schemes where persons with disabilities have very few work options and skills trainings to the more mainstream type of supported employment where employees can find work through job placements, courtesy of job coaching and supervision, the last few decades have seen the doors of opportunities open much wider, especially with the advent of digital technology and the so-called ‘gig economy’ which offered more freedom in choice and flexibility in work for persons with disabilities.

These advancements, however, also brought with it many challenges. Due to the huge diversity in socio-economic levels, for instance, in the Asia region, there is also a huge gap

between developed and least developed countries in terms of persons with disabilities' opportunities to find stable and accessible jobs. It is still a reality that informal economy is where majority of persons with disabilities can be found. The high cost of assistive devices and digital technology continue to be a problem for persons with disabilities who want to engage in gig economy, or freelance work. Certain legislations, while already in place, still need to be implemented properly and consistently. The quota system of companies, which requires businesses to hire a certain percentage of persons with disabilities, is still not being applied on a large scale with some companies even finding a way to work around it where they end up not being penalized for not hiring the required number of employees with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 did not help in advancing the cause of employers with disabilities as millions in the region, including those with disabilities, suffered job losses and severe health conditions. Governments in the region, depending on their economic capabilities, set up emergency contingency measures to help alleviate the crisis affecting persons with disabilities with monetary subsidies, in-kind donations and food allowances, work-at-home schemes, and other measures.

Given these issues in employment opportunities in the disability community, the continued and consistent plans of action of governments in the region are necessary to assist in the livelihood development of persons with disabilities. Among the much-needed improvements include the implementation of existing legislations concerning employment protection of persons with disabilities; the affordability of and easy access to digital technology and assistive devices; more improvement in having an inclusive and accessible work environment; and more mainstreaming of employees with disabilities in the form of trainings, job assistance and placements, and positive perceptions of their capabilities and high productivity in the workplace.

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