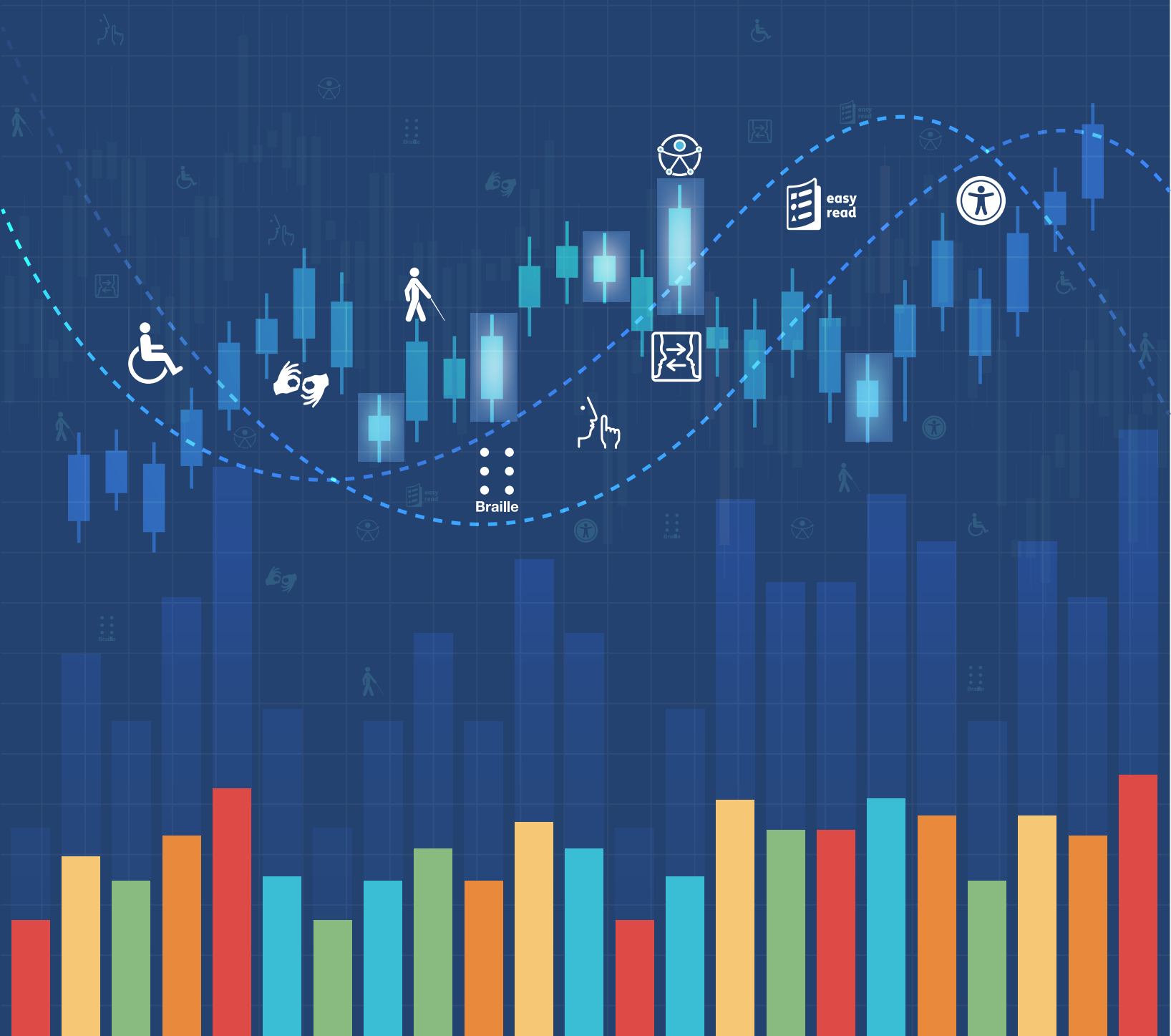


Disability at a Glance 2023

Catalysts of Change: Disability Inclusion in Business in Asia and the Pacific





*The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.**

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DISABILITY AT A GLANCE 2023

Catalysts of Change: Disability Inclusion in Business in Asia and the Pacific

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Preface

Ensuring that no one is left behind is the ultimate ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Disability-inclusive business offers great potential to promote inclusive socioeconomic development – recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to participate in business and strengthening economic outcomes for businesses and whole economies.

The Asia-Pacific region has a long history of innovative and collective actions to promote disability-inclusive development. The Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and the Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in October 2022, is the latest commitment of Governments in the region. The Jakarta Declaration recognizes the potential of disability-inclusive business and calls on the engagement of the private sector as a key change agent.

The market for consumers with disabilities is vast – with more than 750 million persons with disabilities living in Asia and the Pacific, representing 16 per cent of the population. In addition, current trends, such as population ageing, experiences from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and rapidly accelerating technological advances, make now an excellent time to focus on business becoming more disability-inclusive.

In addition to areas of business where efforts for disability inclusion have traditionally focused, such as employment, businesses need to ensure disability inclusion across the value chain, in every aspect of a business's operation. Undoubtedly, persons with disabilities should be included as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs and valued stakeholders. Potential benefits of disability inclusion in business include increased access to an untapped talent pool; improved productivity and retention, workplace accessibility, innovation and profitability; strengthened supplier diversity; enhanced delivery of goods and services; closer contact with a vast and often untapped consumer market; and boosted business reputation.

Achieving disability inclusion in all aspects of society and fulfilling the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind cannot be achieved without all stakeholders and sectors in society doing their part. ESCAP calls on businesses and the private sector to join forces with governments, United Nations entities and civil society to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all parts of business throughout the Asia-Pacific region. It is hoped that this report will inspire further actions from all sectors and catalyse change to support the economic inclusion of persons with disabilities and accelerate disability-inclusive sustainable development.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AI	artificial intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATM	automated teller machine
CEO	chief executive officer
COVID-19	coronavirus disease
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	civil society organization
CSR	corporate social responsibility
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DEI	diversity, equity and inclusion
ERBD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EFPTOS	electron funds transfer at point of sale
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESG	environmental, social and governance
GDI Hub	Global Disability Innovation Hub
GDP	gross domestic product
GISC	Global Impact Sourcing Coalition
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
ICT	information and communications technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPO	initial public offering
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MSMEs	micro, small and medium enterprises
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PATA	Pacific Asia Travel Association
NGO	non-governmental organization
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
TVET	technical and vocational education training
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

Executive summary

Disability-inclusive business opens a new horizon to accelerate the effective implementation of disability-inclusive development. Disability-inclusive development ensures the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and the promotion and practice of mainstreaming their rights into all areas of development. Business has a pivotal role to play in accelerating disability-inclusive development through practising the inclusion and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of the business value chain by engaging persons with disabilities as leaders, employees, consumers, suppliers/distributors, subject experts and valued stakeholders.

Disability at a Glance 2023: Catalysts of Change: Disability Inclusion in Business in Asia and the Pacific provides an in-depth examination of disability-inclusive business. The target audience of the publication is member States and associate members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and businesses in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as other stakeholders working on disability inclusion. The publication presents fundamental concepts, key components of fostering disability-inclusive business, and good practices and data, and provides recommendations for businesses and governments.

The rationale for disability-inclusive business

Persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific – more than 750 million people – continue to be marginalized in almost all sectors of society due to persistent discrimination and ableism. The labour force participation rates are lower for persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities in all 23 Asia-Pacific countries from which data are available, with a median rate of 25.4 per cent for persons with disabilities and 60.4 per cent for persons without disabilities. The discrepancy in labour force participation can be attributed to the exclusion by society of persons with disabilities from employment, education, transportation and other sectors.

Private sector business activity, investment and innovation are drivers of economic growth, productivity and job creation. It is estimated that, globally, the private sector accounts for 60 per cent of GDP, 80 per cent of international capital flows and 90 per cent of jobs in developing countries.

By excluding persons with disabilities, businesses are missing out on untapped talent among potential and current employees, consumer markets and opportunities for innovation and profits. A study of 10 low- and middle-income developing countries in Asia and Africa conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), found that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour force can lead to an economic loss ranging between 3 and 7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

As consumers, persons with disabilities are often overlooked, even though the global market for consumers with disabilities is vast – estimated at 16 per cent of the

global population. In Asia and the Pacific, rapid population ageing is resulting in increased disability prevalence as functions decline. Among persons aged 60 years and above, 46 per cent experience some form of disability. The “silver economy” alone is estimated to be worth \$4.56 trillion in Asia.

Opportunities

Global trends focused on sustainable development and an increasing focus on the environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance of businesses have led to many changes in the workforce and business processes. A greater understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in business provides opportunities for bringing disability inclusion into mainstream business practices.

Businesses are developing solutions for how and where they can incorporate disability inclusion into their existing operations to address the current and future needs of the changing demography. The shifts in “business as usual” during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the rise in new technologies have provided opportunities for the public and private sectors to consider the design and delivery of products and services for greater accessibility. Moreover, younger generations are gaining spending power and demanding inclusivity from companies. Disability inclusion not only makes sense from a business perspective – not being inclusive is a reputational risk for companies.

Disability-inclusive business in action

Disability-inclusive businesses engage with persons with disabilities in all their diversity, their representative organizations and community stakeholders as part of the businesses’ commitment to ethical and responsible business practices. Moreover, developing disability-inclusive practices presents opportunities for businesses to improve their overall business strategy, enhance workplace and consumer accessibility, strengthen performance, encourage innovation, expand to new consumer markets and hire from untapped talent pools. Study findings have shown a positive correlation between the financial performance of companies and their capacity for disability inclusion, with results indicating higher sales, profit margins and shareholder returns for companies championing and practising disability inclusion.

Five key components of disability-inclusive business

This publication outlines five key components for fostering disability-inclusive business: leadership; operations, including product and service development, logistics, marketing and sales, and after-sales services; human resources; procurement; and support for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Leadership and top management can advance an inclusive culture across all levels of a business through vision-setting and establishing operational systems, policies and budgets for disability inclusion. Leaders' commitments trickle down to the rest of the business value chain, from the development of accessible goods and services to creating inclusive supply chains through equal participation of persons with disabilities in logistics management. Leaders with disabilities who disclose their disability set a tone of acceptance and encourage employees to disclose their disability status.

Universal design is key to accessibility and disability inclusion. By designing products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, businesses can maximize their value chains. This extends beyond the goods itself to include the services that enable customers to use them, including installation, training, repair and other customer services. Emphasis should be placed on developing accessible solutions across all sectors. Promising developments of universal design are taking place across a range of sectors, including, among them, tourism, financial services, digital devices and apparel.

For consumers with disabilities, it is essential that not only is marketing accessible in various formats, but also that diverse disability groups are represented as part of the sales and marketing strategy. Persons with disabilities rarely see themselves in marketing and advertising outside of stereotyped ideas and "inspiration" narratives. Accordingly, product and service marketing must ensure that advertising is authentic and normalizes having a disability as a part of many people's lives.

A robust set of policies and practices reinforces the business commitment to disability inclusion and enables the participation of persons with disabilities as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, subject experts and valued stakeholders. These policies and practices need to begin with the proactive attraction of candidates with disabilities, followed by accessible recruitment, and then continue through the employees' careers by providing reasonable accommodations, creating career and leadership development opportunities, and collecting disaggregated data on employees with disabilities to inform talent management. Forming employee resource groups is one way that companies can promote disability inclusion and organizational learning on inclusion. The bottom line is to ensure that the requirements of employees with disabilities are met speedily and consistently across the organization.

Entrepreneurship among persons with disabilities is a crucial aspect of fostering a disability-inclusive business environment. Entrepreneurs with disabilities face magnified difficulties in accessing capital through traditional funding channels due to ableism, stereotypes and misconceptions, with women with disabilities often facing compound discrimination. Persons with disabilities often also lack access to "social capital" – networks of collaborators, mentors and potential customers that are critical to not just launching a business, but also to scaling its growth. Despite these challenges, in the Asia-Pacific

region, there are many examples of how entrepreneurs with disabilities are fulfilling market needs and identifying new market opportunities due to the differences in their lived experiences.

In addition to businesses, the whole ecosystem – comprising government; civil society organizations (CSOs), including organizations of persons with disabilities; industry and professional associations, including national business and disability networks; development finance institutions; and investors – is crucial for creating conditions for greater disability inclusion in business. Governments, in particular, are critical in providing leadership in harmonizing domestic policies with global and regional commitments; encouraging businesses to mainstream disability into their core business strategy, ESG and DEI operations; creating policy interventions to ensure non-discrimination and equality at work; advancing universal design and public procurement that promotes accessibility and preferential contracting; and supporting the development of entrepreneurship by persons with disabilities.

The continuous engagement of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and organizations of persons with disabilities is central to the success of disability-inclusive businesses and ecosystem interventions designed to support them. Organizations of persons with disabilities play a key role in building awareness, advocacy and accountability across the region, and ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are part of business conversations. They continue to help shift disability inclusion from an element of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to a value chain imperative.

Recommendations

Addressing the gaps in disability-inclusive business in the Asia-Pacific region requires the collective efforts of businesses, governments, development finance institutions and CSOs, including organizations of persons with disabilities. Detailed recommendations are given in chapter 5, while some broad recommendations are proposed below :

- Businesses starting or advancing their disability inclusion journey should, with an initiative by executive-level managers, develop and implement a disability inclusion strategy as a core business strategy with indicators and timelines. Sufficient human and financial resources should be allocated for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation. External and internal commitments to inclusivity should be made. Dialogues involving persons with diverse disabilities should be facilitated for mutual learning on disability equality and inclusion. Learning and sharing good practices on disability-inclusive business should be encouraged.
- Governments should apply a whole-of-society approach to disability inclusion and support the implementation of disability-inclusive business by encouraging multiple ministries and local governments to develop and implement laws and regulations that ensure non-discrimination and the rights of persons with disabilities in all relevant sectors, in line with global and regional frameworks on disability and business.
- To foster awareness on disability rights, governments and CSOs, including organizations representing persons with disabilities, should jointly develop and implement cross-sector disability equality training for themselves on a regular basis.
- Governments should utilize public procurement to promote the employment and entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities and to promote the availability of accessible goods and services.
- With their lived experience of disability, persons with disabilities, in all their diversity, and their representative organizations should be consulted and involved, with due accessibility support, in the development and implementation of disability inclusion strategies set by businesses and government policymaking. There should be a mutual working arrangement between organizations of persons with disabilities and businesses so that they can learn from each other and foster disability-inclusive businesses.

- International organizations, industry organizations and development finance institutions should contribute towards the advancement of disability-inclusive business by working with governments, businesses and organizations representing persons with disabilities and developing knowledge products, codes of conduct on prohibiting disability-based discrimination, guidance on disability-inclusive business, and assessment tools.

Disability-inclusive businesses can maximize opportunities across their value chains by accessing untapped talent pools comprised of persons with disabilities, improving workplace productivity and driving innovation and profitability. Real progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across the Asia-Pacific region can only be achieved through concerted efforts from the entire ecosystem to put persons with disabilities at the centre of inclusive development.



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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the critical role played by businesses in accelerating disability-inclusive development. Historically, promoting disability rights and inclusion has often been perceived as a human rights issue to be dealt with primarily by Governments, with private sector involvement generally falling under corporate social responsibility (CSR).¹

Global shifts towards “sustainable development” and an increasing focus on the environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance of businesses have promoted many changes in the workforce and business processes. A greater understanding of the importance of talent management has brought diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes into mainstream business practices. A broader age range and generational set of experiences has also contributed towards the inclusion that is critical to increasing business performance.²

Disability-inclusive businesses are maximizing opportunities across their value chains by ensuring that the primary functions of business (sourcing, operations, logistics, product design, marketing, and sales and services) benefit from the application of a disability-inclusive lens across the business value chain and the inclusion of persons with disabilities as leaders, employees, customers and suppliers/distributors.

In the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the main legally binding international treaty on disability rights, several articles mention business and the private sector in relation to eliminating discrimination (article 4), accessibility (article 9), and work and employment (article 27).

Regionally, the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and the Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032, adopted by members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2022, emphasizes the engagement of the private sector in disability-inclusive development. The Declaration calls on governments to enhance cooperation with private sector entities to fully realize the goals and principles of the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific; the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy; the CRPD; and

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The private sector contributes to a significant proportion of the employment and manufacturing in the Asia-Pacific region and the lives of persons with disabilities can only be transformed with their full involvement and contribution.

Against this background, this publication aims to provide an in-depth overview of current business and encourages all actors to engage in promoting and adopting disability-inclusive business practices. Chapter 1 introduces the context and issues relating to business and disability inclusion. Chapter 2 defines disability-inclusive business and explores the business case³ and benefits of disability inclusion for organizations. In chapter 3, some megatrends that are driving greater business engagement in disability inclusion are shared. Chapter 4 presents an overview of concrete measures and good practices across the value chain that businesses, governments, civil society, and other stakeholders can take to support disability inclusion in business operations. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for further action by various stakeholders to build a disability-inclusive business community in the region.

The examples and data cited throughout this publication were gathered through a combination of secondary literature review, online research and recommendations from experts and advocates in disability-inclusive business. A balance between various sectors, enterprise sizes and geographical locations was sought to emphasize that all kinds of businesses can and should reflect on how they can become inclusive of persons with diverse disabilities. Data from the Asia-Pacific region were sought and included where possible; however, due to a lack of data from this region, data from Europe and the United States of America are often utilized. Additionally, due to the lack of comparable data and differences in methodologies, the interpretation and comparison of information from different sources should be considered with caution.

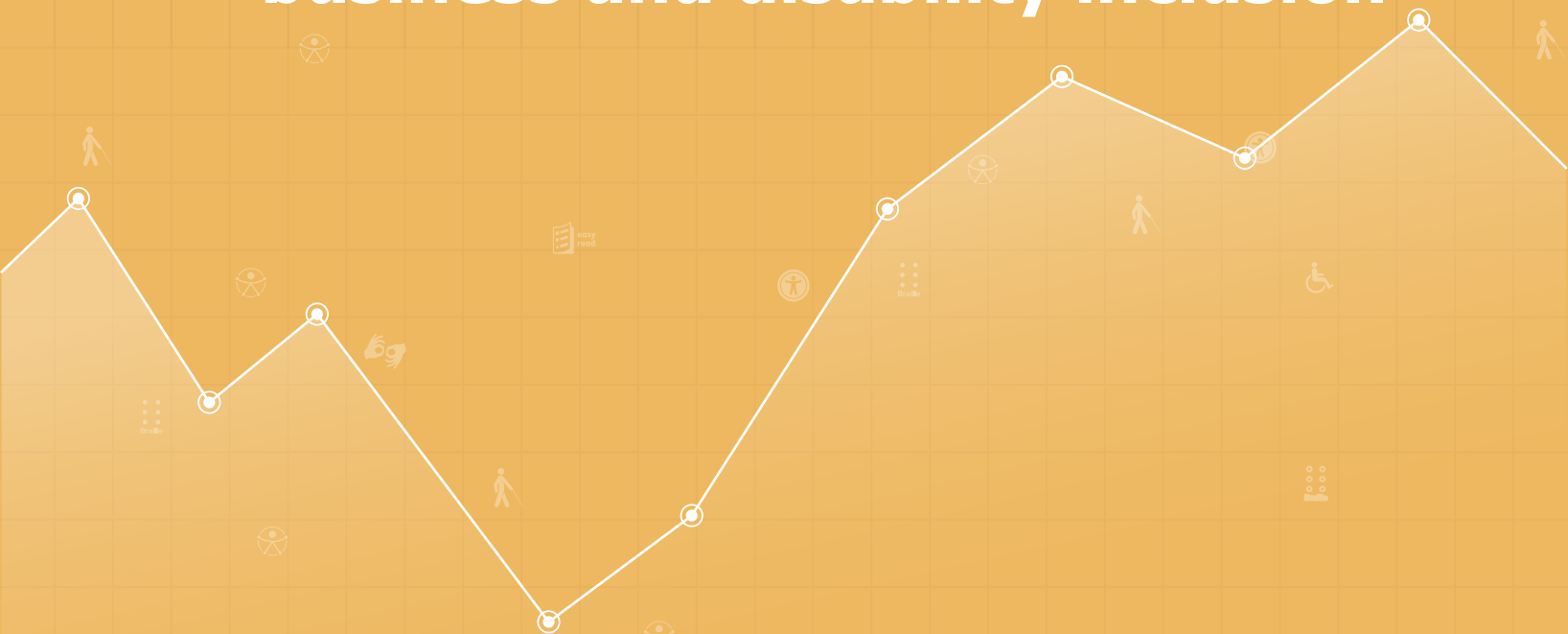
¹ Corporate social responsibility refers to responsibilities among corporations that goes beyond economic activities and includes social and environmental implications. For more details, see Australian Human Rights Commission, “Corporate Social Responsibilities and Human Rights” (n.d). Available at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/corporate-social-responsibility-human-rights>

² There are currently four generations in the workplace (baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z), each with their own set of experiences and priorities. For more information, please see Natasha Lane, “How to manage 4 generations in the workplace”, Insights For Professionals, 4 March 2019. Available at <https://www.insightsforprofessionals.com/hr/leadership/how-to-manage-generations>

³ A business case provides “a justification for a proposed project or undertaking on the basis of its expected commercial benefit.” Source: Oxford English Dictionary.

Chapter 1

Context and issues concerning business and disability inclusion



Key messages

An estimated 16 per cent of the global population experience a significant disability. This translates to more than 750 million people in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴

The potential of persons with disabilities remains largely untapped due to their continued marginalization in almost all sectors of society in Asia and the Pacific and slow progress in shifting the paradigm from a deficit-based medical model of disability to a social or human rights model.

The 2030 Agenda and other international and regional instruments articulate the need for collective efforts by governments, civil society and the private sector to leave no one behind.

Business has the transformative power to address social challenges through its large economic scale. It plays a role as the primary employer in most economies and a producer of goods and services that can change lifestyles and values in society.

The recent focus on ESG metrics has motivated businesses to address disability inclusion. Considering disability inclusion across environmental (impact on persons with disabilities), social (DEI and community) and governance (representation and voice) interventions will be the focus of driving disability inclusion in business in the coming years.

1.1 Continued marginalization of persons with disabilities

An estimated 16 per cent of the global population live with a significant disability.⁵ This translates to more than 750 million people in Asia and the Pacific.⁶ Starting in 1993, ESCAP member States launched four consecutive Asian and Pacific Decades of Persons with Disabilities to advance disability rights and inclusion in the region. Findings of the final review of the implementation of the third Decade (2013–2022) suggest that despite progress in areas, such as disability law and policy development and access to the physical environment, information, communication, transportation and services, persons with disabilities continue to face challenges in almost all sectors of society.⁷

Lack of awareness and understanding of the key concepts of disability and disability rights is a key factor behind the continued marginalization of persons with disabilities. As illustrated in the CRPD, “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impair-

ments” and disability is the result of “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.”⁸ The primary focus is on how the social context affects individuals rather than their impairments. The paradigm shift from an impairment-based medical model of disability to a social or human rights model acknowledges that persons with disabilities are rights-holders and should not be viewed as passive recipients of charity, welfare or benevolence.⁹ Persons with disabilities are entitled to fully participate in and contribute to society as leaders, employees, consumers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs, subject experts and valued stakeholders. The continued dominance of the medical model of understanding disability results in the marginalization of persons with disabilities across all domains of society. Urgent actions are needed to apply the social or human rights model of disability, including removing barriers to accessing the business world.

Ableism, “a value system that considers certain characteristics of body and mind as essential for living a life of value,”¹⁰ is regularly reflected in laws, policies

⁴ The figure was calculated as 16 per cent of the estimated regional population at mid-year 2022 by ESCAP. United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “ESCAP population data sheet 2022”, data sheet (Bangkok, 2022).

⁵ World Health Organization, *Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities* (Geneva, 2022).

⁶ The figure was calculated as 16 per cent of the estimated regional population at mid-year 2022 by ESCAP. United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “ESCAP population data sheet 2022”, data sheet (Bangkok, 2022).

⁷ *A Three-Decade Journey towards Inclusion: Assessing the State of Disability-Inclusive Development in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, 2022).

⁸ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2515, No. 44910 (2019).

⁹ United Nations, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “General comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination” (CRPD/C/GC/6 (2018)).

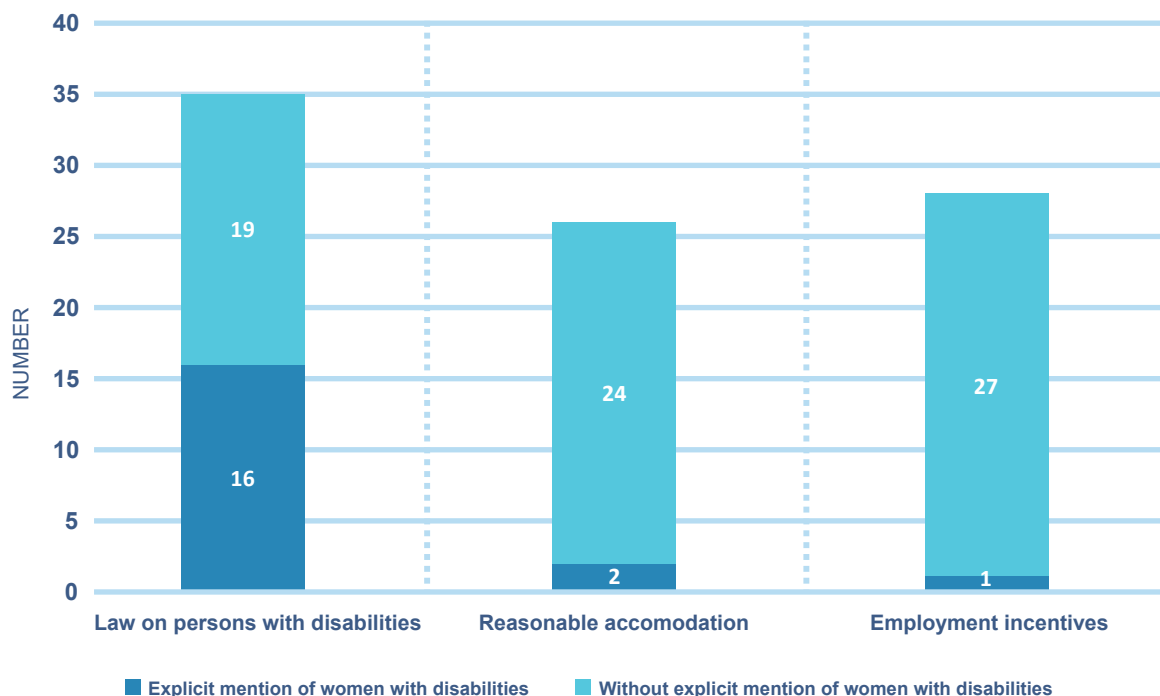
¹⁰ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Rights of persons with disabilities: report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities” (A/HRC/43/41 (2019)).

and programmes on persons with disabilities across the Asia-Pacific region.¹¹ Efforts to promote disability inclusion and disability-inclusive development have sought to fit persons with disabilities into a mainstream definition of an effective and productive society. That is because ableist ways of thinking view disability as a misfortune that results in suffering, disadvantages and a lack of efficiency and productivity, ultimately leading to the devaluation of the lives of persons with a disability. Ableism is at the core of a medically driven incapacity or charity approach to disability, which is commonly adopted and results in differential and discriminatory treatment of persons with disabilities, such as segregated employment in sheltered workshops.^{12,13} As a result, the exclusion of and discrimination against persons with disabilities are perpetuated, leaving them behind in development processes. Persons with certain types of disabilities are more likely to be left behind, including those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

Asia and the Pacific is facing overlapping challenges relating to disability, age and gender and developing public and private sector responses is essential. In 2022, one in seven people in the Asia-Pacific region were aged 60 years or older and this proportion is expected to nearly double to one in four people by 2050. Women account for 54 per cent of persons aged 60 years or older in Asia and the Pacific, due to their longer life expectancy.¹⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has also added to the overall number of persons with disabilities. It is acknowledged that COVID-19 and its aftermath “long covid” have resulted in more cases of disabilities around the globe. Both the public and private sector will have to adjust to meet these challenges.

Women are more likely than men to acquire a disability during the course of their lives, due to gender-related risk factors, such as a lack of access to sexual and reproduc-

Figure 1
Number of countries and territories with laws related to persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, by explicit mention of women with disabilities



Source: World Bank, “Women with disability”, database. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/disability>

¹¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Harmonization of National Laws with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, ST/ESCAP/3047(2022).

¹² Sheltered workshops are a segregated working environment, often designed for persons with a certain type of disability to work in. The CRPD Committee has stated that any alternative employment should exist only to support the transition to open employment settings. United Nations Development Programme, Independent Evaluation Office, “Evaluation of disability-inclusive development at “UNDP” (2016). Available at <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/10230>

¹³ United Nations, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “General comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment” (CRPD/C/GC/8 (2022)).

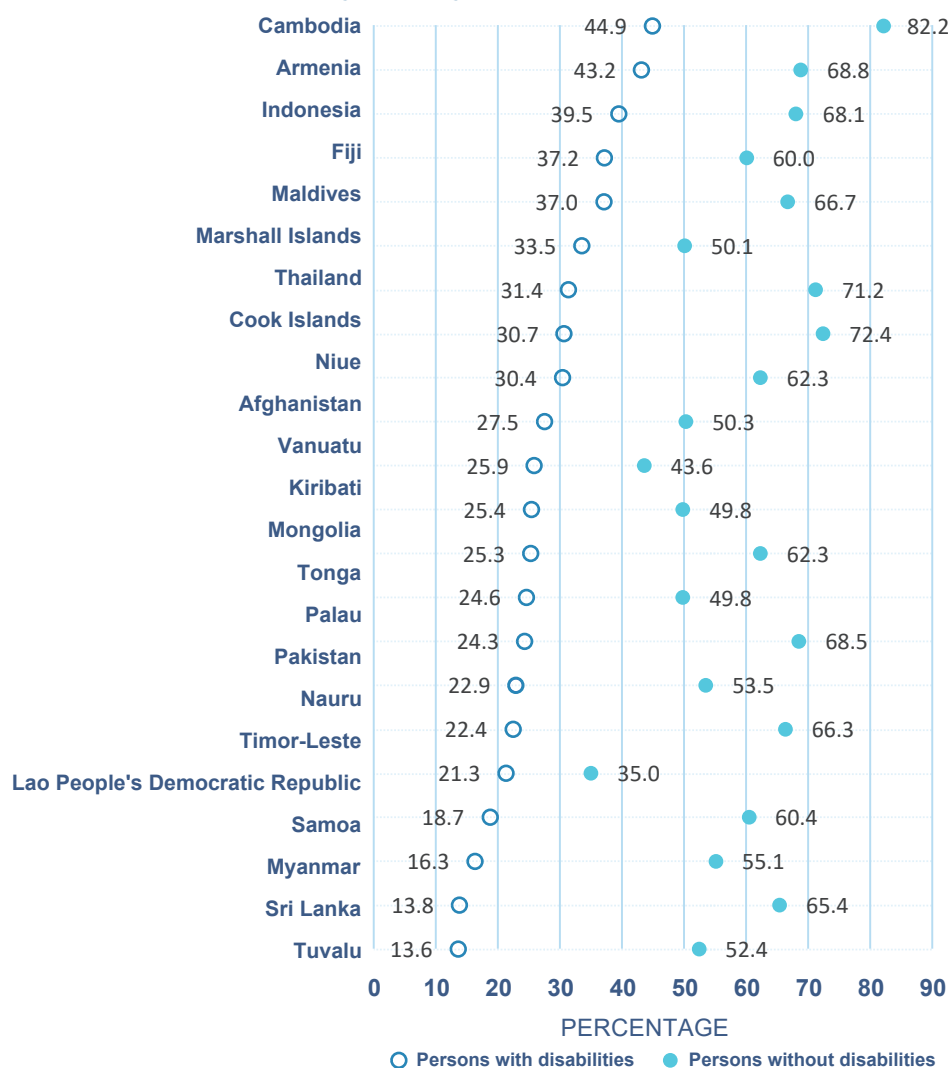
¹⁴ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing 2022: Trends, Policies and Good Practices Regarding Older Persons and Population Ageing*, ST/ESCAP/3041 (2022).

tive health services, exposure to violence and gender-biased intra-household distribution of resources.¹⁵ **Women and girls with disabilities, among other groups with intersecting identities, often experience additional difficulties in developing their full potential.**¹⁶ Despite the adoption of the CRPD in 2006, in which Article 6 calls for the promotion of the full and equal rights of women with disabilities, the majority of countries fail to establish laws and policies that safeguard their rights.¹⁷ The World Bank Group Women Business and the Law database shows that only 16 countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific have enacted legislation that explicitly protects and promotes the rights of women with disabilities. While 26 countries and territories have

implemented reasonable accommodation mandates for persons with disabilities, only two of them – the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka – refer to women with disabilities. Similarly, among the 28 countries and territories that have introduced legal or policy incentives, such as quotas, tax breaks or wage replacements, to encourage employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector, only the Republic of Korea specifically mentions women.¹⁸

The societal exclusion of persons with disabilities often starts with the provision of education. The percentage of countries in the Asia-Pacific region with a disability gap in school attendance increases dramati-

Figure 2
Labour force participation rate, by disability status



Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", data base. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 4 August 2023).

¹⁵ UN Women, Making the SDGs Count for Women and Girls with Disabilities, (2017). Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Making-SDGs-count-for-women-with-disabilities.pdf>

¹⁶ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Empowering women and girls with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific", background paper for the sixth session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 (Bangkok, 2020).

¹⁷ Julia Constanze Braunmiller and Marie Dry, "Safeguarding the rights of women with disabilities to family, life, work, and protection from gender-based violence", Global Indicators Briefs, No. 14, World Bank Group (2022). Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099407312052226699/pdf/IDU0eb65b1db03a82042710aaa905ee2dc24b2d7.pdf>

¹⁸ World Bank, "Women with disability", database. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/disability>

cally with higher levels of education, from 22.2 per cent for pre-primary school to 87.5 per cent for upper-secondary school.¹⁹ Education and the better employment opportunities it brings can have a significant impact on the incomes of persons with disabilities. Country studies in Nepal show that the inclusion of persons with sensory or physical impairments in schools generates wage returns of 20 per cent and in China, each additional year of schooling for persons with disabilities leads to a wage increase of 5 per cent in rural areas and 8 per cent in urban areas.²⁰ The World Bank estimates that each additional year of schooling completed by an adult with a disability reduces the probability by 2 to 5 per cent that his or her household will fall into the poorest quintiles.²¹

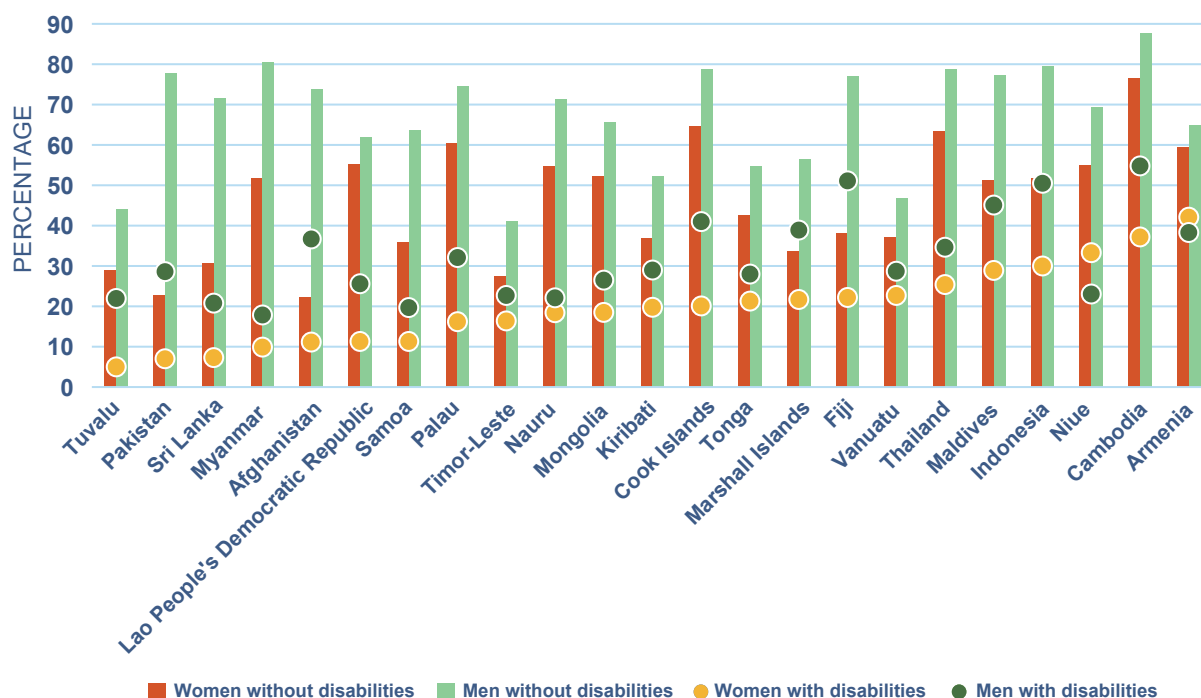
Persons with disabilities are disproportionately left out of the labour force. The labour force participation rate is the share of working-age people who are currently working or available and desire to work. Among the 23 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with relevant data, the median labour force participation rate for the most recent year available was 25.4 per cent for persons with disabilities compared to 60.4 per cent for persons without disabilities. In all 23 countries and territories with data available from the International Labour Organization (ILO), persons with disabilities had a lower labour force participation rate

by at least 10 percentage points. Women with disabilities had the lowest median labour force participation rate (20.5 per cent) compared to men with disabilities (30.7 per cent), women without disabilities (52.2 per cent) and men without disabilities (74.8 per cent).²²

Persons with disabilities who are engaged in the labour force have a higher unemployment rate compared to persons without disabilities. The employment-to-population ratio measures the share of a country’s working-age population that is employed. Among the 23 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with relevant data for the most recent year available, the median employment-to-population ratio was 58.5 per cent for persons without disabilities compared to 24.1 per cent for persons with disabilities. The median ratios for women (19.6 per cent) and men (28.7 per cent) with disabilities were lower than for women (51.3 per cent) and men (71.2 per cent) without disabilities.²³

The exclusion of persons with disabilities also has negative implications for the broader economy. A study of 10 low and middle-income developing countries in Asia and Africa from ILO found that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour force can lead to an economic loss ranging between 3 and 7 per cent of GDP.²⁴

Figure 3
Employment-to-population ratio, by disability status and gender



Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", data base. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 4 August 2023).

¹⁹ Data were available for 11 Asia-Pacific countries. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Seen, Counted, Included: Using Data to Shed Light on the Well-being of Children with Disabilities* (New York, 2022).

²⁰ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "The case for disability inclusive education", EducationLinks, 14 November 2018. Available at <https://www.edu-links.org/learning/case-disability-inclusive-education>

²¹ Lena Morgon Bank and Sarah Polack, *The Economic Costs of Exclusion and Gains of Inclusion of People with Disabilities: Evidence from Low and Middle Income Countries*, CBM, International Centre for Evidence in Disability, and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (2014).

²² ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue" web page. Available at : <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data> (accessed 4 August 2023).

²³ ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue" web page. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed 4 August 2023).

²⁴ Sebastian Buckup, "The price of exclusion: the economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work", Employment Working Paper, No.43 (Geneva, ILO , 2009).

From the perspective of the United States' economy, a study conducted jointly by Accenture, Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities revealed that closing the employment gap between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities could help boost GDP by up to \$25 billion (about \$77 per person in the United States).²⁵ More country-level data and academic studies are needed, however, to fully understand the economic benefits.

1.2 International and regional instruments on disability rights and the private sector

Developing disability-inclusive business is first and foremost a human rights issue. Companies of varying sizes, sectors and locations are urged to incorporate human rights into their strategies and operations and empower the communities in which they operate.²⁶ The rights of persons with disabilities are set out in human rights and development frameworks at the international level, such as the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda, and at the regional level in the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy and the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032.

The CRPD is the main legally binding international treaty that comprehensively elaborates on disability rights. This convention has catalysed the paradigm shift from perceiving persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection to recognizing them as "subjects" with rights, as it states that as active members of society, persons with all types of disabilities enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. They possess the capacity to claim their rights and make decisions for their lives based on free and informed consent. The Convention serves as a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension, providing clarity on how to apply all categories of rights to persons with disabilities.²⁷ While the CRPD requires action from governments, several provisions make direct reference

to the private sector. For example, States parties are required to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination based on disability by any person, organization or private enterprise (article 4 on general obligations); to ensure that private entities offering facilities and services to the public consider all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities (article 9 on accessibility); and to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through policies and measures, including affirmative action programmes (article 27 on work and employment). Importantly, the Convention specifies that the denial of reasonable accommodation must be prohibited, as it constitutes a form of discrimination.²⁸

Additionally, the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (the Marrakesh Treaty), provides a mandate and guidance for investing in accessibility, ensuring that individuals with visual or print disabilities have better access to printed materials, aligning with the broader global and regional frameworks aimed at fostering disability inclusion.²⁹

Global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the United Nations Global Compact, provide macro guidance for the private sector as it moves on the path to greater disability inclusion. The Sustainable Development Goals aim to realize the human rights of all, including persons with disabilities, as more than 90 per cent of the targets directly correspond to elements of international human rights and labour standards.³⁰ Disability and persons with disabilities are explicitly mentioned in the Goals, including those related to education, economic growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, and data collection and monitoring of the Goals.³¹ Persons with disabilities are also included as a group in vulnerable situations, extending the scope of references to disability-inclusive development. As a key partner in achieving the Goals,³² the private sector, ranging from microenterprises to cooperatives to multi-nationals, is called upon to contribute to sustainable and inclusive development.

²⁵ Disability:IN, "Entrepreneur: What is the economic impact of hiring autistic, neurodivergent and disabled talent? Here's what you should know". 10 April. Available at <https://disabilityin.org/neurodiversity-autism/entrepreneur-economic-impact-of-hiring-autistic-neurodivergent-disabled-talent/#:~:text=GDP%20growth,per%20person%20in%20the%20US>.

²⁶ United Nations Global Compact, *Human Rights: The Foundation of Sustainable Business* (New York, 2018).

²⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)", web page. Available at <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd> (accessed on 21 March 2023).

²⁸ Reasonable accommodation refers to "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms." A/RES/61/106, article 2 definition.

²⁹ World Intellectual Property Organization (2013). Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (June 27, 2013). Available at <https://wipo.int/en/text/301016>

³⁰ Danish Institute for Human Rights, *Integrated Review and Reporting on SDGs and Human Rights: A Key to Effective, Efficient and Accountable Implementation* (Copenhagen, 2019).

³¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "#Envision2030: 17 goals to transform the world for persons with disabilities", web page. Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html> (accessed on 21 March 2023).

³² See A/RES/70/1.

Box 1

Sustainable Development Goal targets that include persons with disabilities and disability

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

Source: See A/RES/71/313.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights comprise a set of guidelines for governments and companies to fulfil their duties regarding human rights issues in company operations. The principles highlight the responsibility of business enterprises, regardless of their size, sector, operational context, ownership, and structure, to respect human rights expressed in the International Bill of Human Rights and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Companies are expected to adopt policies and processes to prevent, mitigate and, where appropriate, remedy adverse human rights impacts resulting from their operations. In addition, companies should seek to avoid and alleviate negative impacts on human rights caused by their suppliers and business partners.³³ The Guiding Principles include persons with disabilities among the groups or populations that require particular attention in ensuring the respect of their human rights.

The United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, issued the *Guide for Business on the Rights of Persons*

with Disabilities.³⁴ The Guide outlines positive impacts of the realization of disability rights on companies and how they can implement disability inclusion. Global Compact Local Networks – business-led, multi-stakeholder platforms that work directly with businesses to help them implement the Global Compact and the 2030 Agenda – have formed a partnership with the business and disability network in Bangladesh, which has led to the establishment of a business and disability network in Nepal.³⁵

In Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP, the United Nations regional development arm, promotes disability rights and disability inclusion. ESCAP member States adopted the Incheon Strategy, the Beijing Declaration and Action Plan and the Jakarta Declaration. The Incheon Strategy comprises the world's first set of regionally agreed-upon disability-specific development goals, covering 10 thematic areas, such as employment, political participation, accessibility, social protection and education. The Beijing Declaration and Action Plan provides strategic policy guidance for

³³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework (New York and Geneva, 2011); United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights, "The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: An introduction, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights". Available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Business/Intro_Guiding_PrinciplesBusinessHR.pdf

³⁴ United Nations Global Compact and ILO, "Guide for business on the rights of persons with disabilities" (2017). Available at <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5381>

³⁵ Jürgen Menze, ILO, personal communication, 13 September 2023.

Box 2

Jakarta Declaration on actions related to the private sector to accelerate disability-inclusive development

“Galvanize the power of the private sector, including its resources, technological innovations and talents, to advance disability-inclusive development by adopting disability-inclusive public procurement policies to promote the application of universal design and accessibility measures to publicly procured infrastructure, information and communications technologies and services, by deploying policy incentives for private companies to take action towards mainstreaming disability inclusion in their workforces, organizations, products, services, market activities and supply chains and by facilitating the development of industry guidelines and protocols, especially in the media, including social media, and the entertainment sector, to promote diversity and inclusion and remove content that could lead to discrimination, stigmatization, stereotyping and misconceptions of persons with disabilities.”

Source: See ESCAP/APDDP/2022/L.4.

governments in connection with the Incheon Strategy goals. The two instruments emphasize the centrality of a multi-stakeholder approach, including partnerships with the private sector to promote disability-inclusive business practices.³⁶

The most recent disability-related adoption by ESCAP member States, the Jakarta Declaration, promotes private sector engagement in disability-inclusive development. The Jakarta Declaration proclaims a new Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2023–2032) and proposes six areas for strategic action, namely harmonization of national legislation with the CRPD, meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, improved accessibility, promoting a gender-responsive life-cycle approach to disability inclusion, closing disability data gaps and galvanizing the power of the private sector.³⁷

1.3 Financing sustainable development and disability inclusion

Sustainable development and disability inclusion cannot be achieved without adequate financing and investment. **The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development recognizes the transformative potential of the private sector in addressing sustainable development challenges.**³⁸ Public sector finance often lacks the capacity

needed to deliver the scale of the changes required. Private sector business activity, investment and innovation are drivers of economic growth, productivity and job creation. It is estimated that, globally, the private sector accounts for 60 per cent of GDP, 80 per cent of international capital flows and 90 per cent of jobs in developing countries.³⁹ Companies can also design business models that meet specific needs in a scalable way and influence consumer attitudes by delivering value.⁴⁰

Over the past 10 years, the significance of ESG factors as risk and value indicators for the private sector has grown. ESG investing looks at a company’s environmental, social, and governance practices and risk exposures as part of investment appraisal and monitoring processes.⁴¹ Most investors recognize the relevance of ESG issues to the financial performance of firms. In addition, a growing subset of investors seek out assets that are either aligned with positive environmental and social outcomes (sustainable investing) and/or actively contribute to measured improvements in environmental and social outcomes (impact investing). The growing attention to climate change and DEI has reinforced these trends.

Out of \$250 trillion in global assets under management in 2020, a total of \$103 trillion was invested sustainably, in line with the UN Principles of Responsible Investing. Many investors consider ESG risks in their assessment of investment opportunities, and a growing market niche – estimated at \$2.3 trillion in 2020 – invests with

³⁶ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific* and *Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy*, policy brief, ST/ESCAP/2848 (Bangkok, 2018).

³⁷ See ESCAP/APDDP/2022/L.4*.

³⁸ See A/RES/69/313.

³⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Development Co-operation Report 2015: Making Partnerships Effective Coalitions for Action* (Paris, 2015).

⁴⁰ Zahid Torres-Rahman and others, *Business and the United Nations: Working Together towards the Sustainable Development Goals- A Framework for Action*, Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDGF), Harvard Kennedy School CSR Initiative Limited (New York, 2015).

⁴¹ European Commission, “Overview of sustainable finance”. Available at https://finance.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-finance/overview-sustainable-finance_en (accessed on 24 August 2023).

the intent for positive environmental and social impact. In 2022, there were \$2.5 trillion in ESG-oriented funds globally at the end of 2022⁴² and issuance of green, social and sustainability bonds amounted to approximately \$948 billion.⁴³

Integrating disability inclusion into core ESG metrics is nascent in business. Considering persons with disabilities across environmental (impact on persons with disabilities), social (DEI and community) and governance (representation and voice) indicators will be the work of the next decade of private sector disability inclusion. The easiest place for the private sector to start is within social indicators and DEI is a crucial dimension to consider.⁴⁴ In a global survey conducted by the United Nations Global Compact and Accenture, 92 per cent of participating companies had ongoing DEI initiatives, and 94 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) indicated that initiatives aimed at building a diverse workforce had not been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁵ Disability inclusion is a core pillar of DEI and according to Fiona Reynolds, former Chief Executive Officer of Principles of Responsible Investment, it is “the next frontier” in ESG investing.⁴⁶

The “Disability in Sustainability Reporting Guide,” updated by the Disability Hub Europe in collaboration with GRI and Fundación ONCE, serves as a significant tool in this arena. This guide aligns with the GRI Universal Standards 2021 Update, which promotes transparency on non-discrimination and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce, in line with broader ESG goals and the inclusivity objectives of the 2030 Agenda.⁴⁷

In addition to ESG investing, impact investing provides opportunities to accelerate disability inclusion. Impact investing aims to help a business or organization produce an environmental or social benefit. In a 2022 report, the Global Impact Investing Network estimated the size of the

global impact investing market at \$1.164 trillion, which reflects the increasing importance of the measurement of sustainability and impact investing across different asset allocators.⁴⁸ A 2020 International Finance Corporation (IFC) report found that \$2.3 trillion of assets were managed with a stated intent for positive impact.⁴⁹ Individual funds, such as the Disability Impact Fund in Asia⁵⁰ and Enable Ventures⁵¹ in the United States are focused on investing in disability inclusion through assistive technology⁵² and closing the disability wealth gap.

The greater definition of impact metrics and how to measure the success of disability inclusion is starting to be included in the global systems of impact measurement used to attribute impact and value to investors (one example of this is the IRIS+ system created by the Global Impact Investing Network). These measures are important, as they allow investors to assess and report on disability inclusion in a tangible way and provide visibility to a community often overlooked.



⁴² Brian Baker, “ESG investing statistics 2023”, Bankrate, 31 January 2023. Available at <https://www.bankrate.com/investing/esg-investing-statistics/>

⁴³ World Bank, “Green, Social, and Sustainability (GSS) bonds. Market Updates January 2023”. Available at <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/98c3baab0ea4fc3da4de0e528a5c0bed-0340012023/original/GSS-Quarterly-Newsletter-Issue-No-2.pdf>.

⁴⁴ International Labour Organization, *Transforming Enterprises through Diversity and Inclusion* (Geneva, 2022).

⁴⁵ United Nations Global Compact and Accenture, *United Nations Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study 2021: Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Spotlight* (New York, 2021).

⁴⁶ Yelena Novikova, “Disability is the forgotten frontier of inclusion & diversity for ESG investors”, Global Solutions, 6 November 2020. Available at <https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/young-global-changers-blog/disability-the-forgotten-frontier/>

⁴⁷ Disability Hub Europe, “Disability in sustainability reporting guide”, 13 June 2023. Available at <https://disabilityhub.eu/en/outcomes/disability-hub-europe-releases-updated-guide-including-disability-issues-sustainability>.

⁴⁸ Dean Hand, Ben Ringel and Alexander Danel, “Sizing the impact investing market: 2022”, The Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) (2022). Available at <https://thegiin.org/assets/2022-Market%20Sizing%20Report-Final.pdf>

⁴⁹ Ariane Volk, *Investing for Impact: The Global Impact Investing Market 2020* (Washington D.C., IFC, 2021).

⁵⁰ For more information, see <https://disabilityimpact.com>

⁵¹ More information, see <https://www.enableventures.vc>

⁵² Assistive technology refers to assistive products and their related systems and services. It enables and promotes the inclusion, participation and engagement of persons with disabilities and other groups, including older persons. The CRPD has called on member States to facilitate access to assistive technologies for persons with disabilities (articles 4, 20, 26, 29 and 32). See World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Global Report on Assistive Technology* (Geneva, WHO and UNICEF, 2022).

Chapter 2

Understanding the case for disability-inclusive business



Key messages

A disability-inclusive business assesses and capitalizes on opportunities to promote and mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into all phases of a business value chain and ensures the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all their diversity as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs, substantive experts and valued stakeholders.

For a disability-inclusive business to develop fully, it needs to be better supported by the ecosystem interplay of governments, development finance institutions, business investors and CSOs and, critically, involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the process.

Disability-inclusive businesses contribute towards the advancement of disability rights by addressing the diverse needs of disability groups, providing solutions to disability-related problems and engaging persons with disabilities in various aspects of their business operations.

Some of the key potential benefits of developing a disability-inclusive business are access to an untapped talent pool; improved productivity, workplace accessibility, innovation and profitability; strengthened supplier diversity; enhanced delivery of goods and services; closer contact with a vast market; access to new market opportunities; and boosted business reputation.

2.1 Definition of disability-inclusive business

A disability-inclusive business assesses and capitalizes on opportunities to promote and mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into all phases of a business value chain and ensures the meaningful participation of

persons with disabilities and their representative organizations⁵³ in all their diversity as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs, substantive experts and valued stakeholders.

Figure 4
Visualization of disability-inclusive business definition



⁵³ Organizations of persons with disabilities, also known as disabled persons' organizations, are those comprising a majority of persons with disabilities – at least half their membership – and governed, led and directed by persons with disabilities. United Nations, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "Report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its eleventh session (31 March – 11 April 2014)" (CRPD/C/11/2).

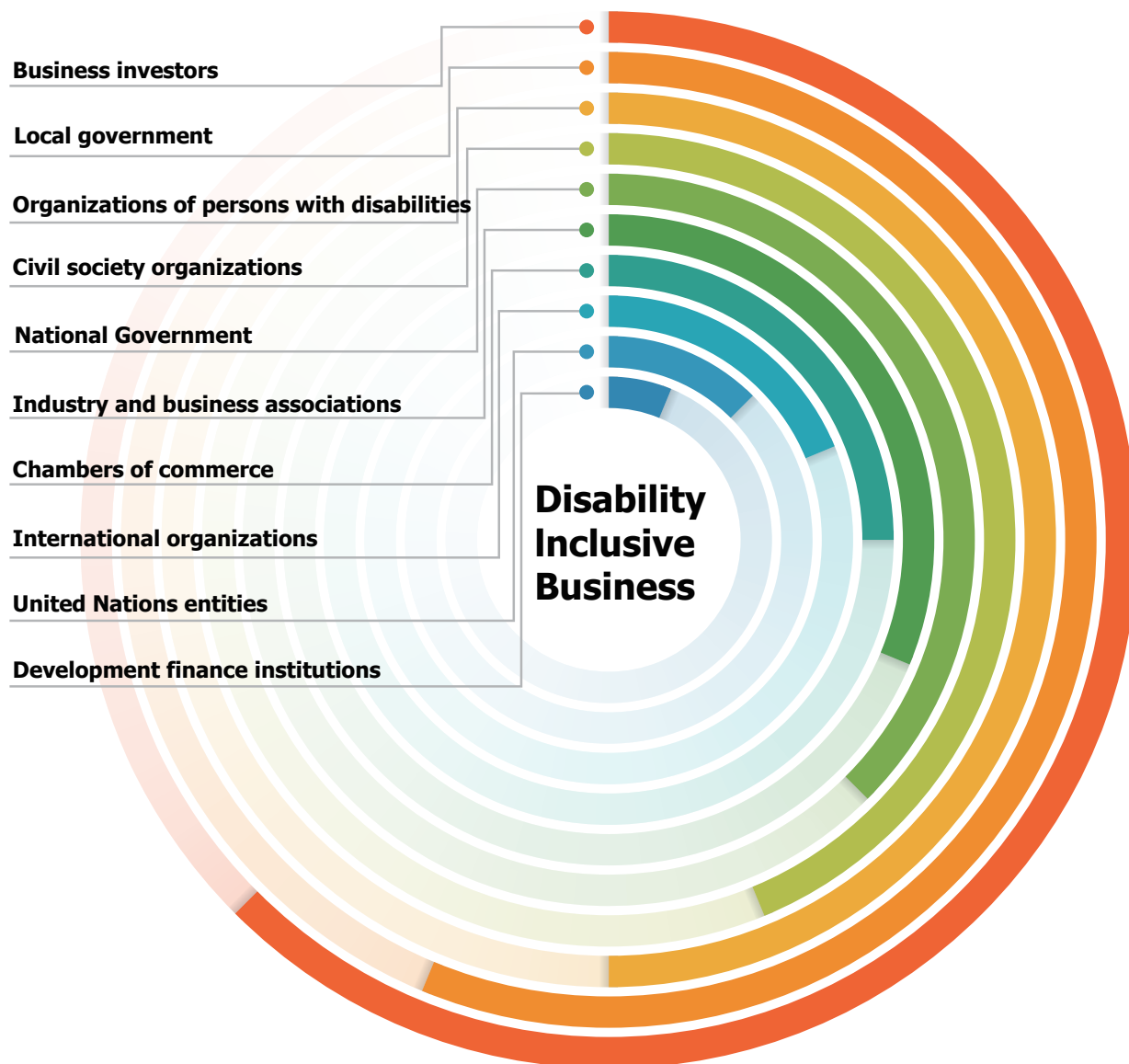
All types of businesses can embrace disability inclusion, irrespective of size or sector, ranging from for-profit corporations to non-profits, social enterprises and public sector enterprises.

Based on the value chain analysis conducted by Michael Porter, the primary activities of a business are the activities that go “directly into the creation of a product or the execution of a service”, while the secondary activities help the primary activities to become more efficient.⁵⁴ Some of the practices of a disability-inclusive business regarding its primary and secondary functions of business are outlined in box 3.

The “value chain” approach to disability inclusion is gathering momentum in the private sector from initial

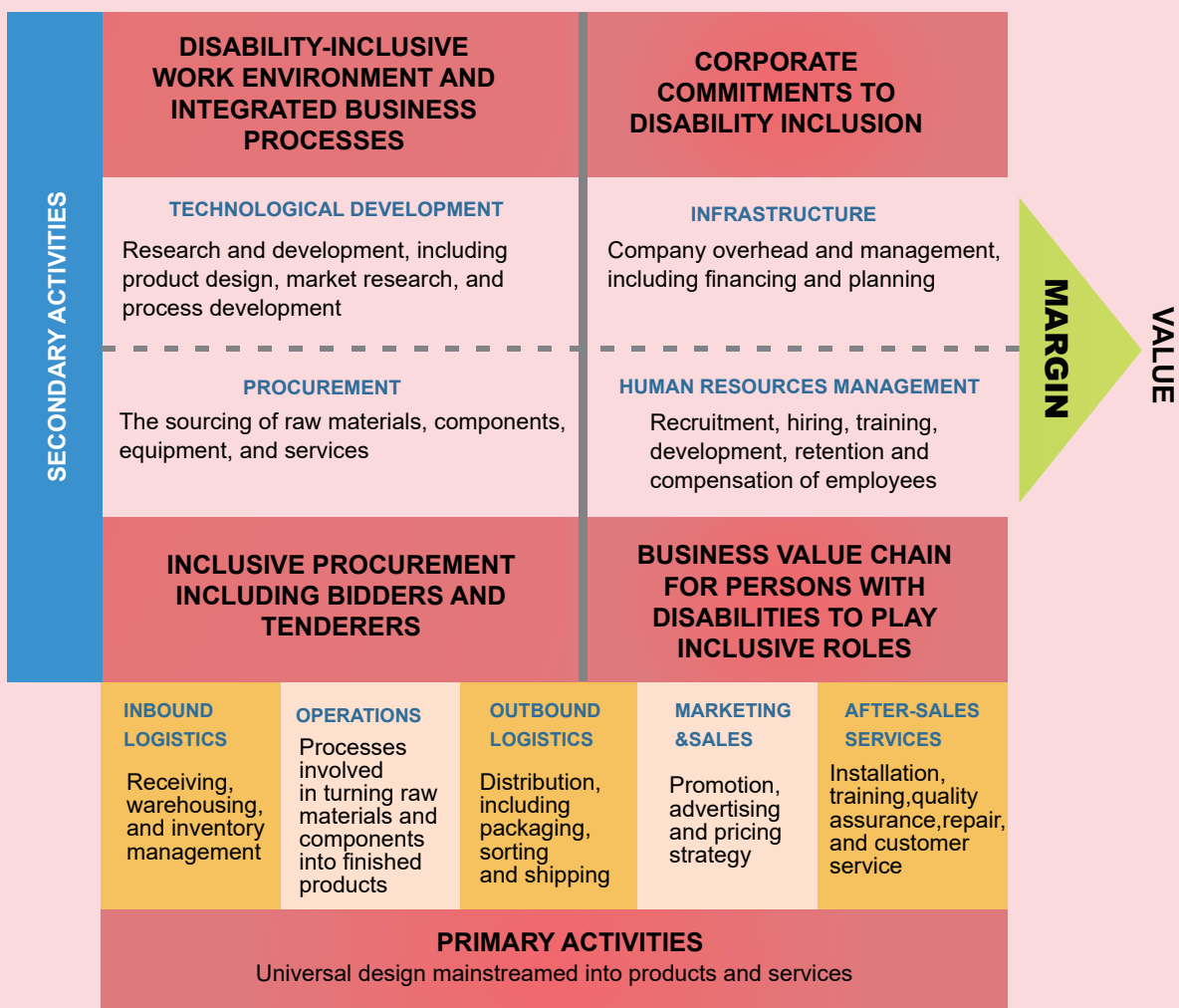
efforts through CSR activities and accessible product development to the current focus on DEI and disability inclusion in the workplace. Increasing evidence shows that greater disability inclusion can help improve a company’s competitiveness, solidify its supply base, improve its human capital and help build an overall enabling business environment. By considering the full scope of the business case, private sector companies can unlock opportunities for increased profit, expansion and innovation. For a disability-inclusive business to develop fully, it needs to be better supported by the ecosystem interplay of governments, development finance institutions, business investors and CSOs, and critically, it is also critical to involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the process.

Figure 5
Ecosystem supporting disability-inclusive business



⁵⁴ Michael E. Porter, The Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance. (New York, Free Press, 1985).

Box 3
Practices of disability-inclusive businesses and the value chain



Adopted by ESCAP from Tim Stobierski, "What is a value chain analysis? 3 Steps". Harvard Business School Online, 03 December 2020. Available at <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-value-chain-analysis#:~:text=The%20term%20value%20chain%20refers,sales%2C%20and%20everything%20in%20between.> (accessed 07 August 2023).

A disability-inclusive business engages in the following practices. Examples of this are explored in greater depth in chapter 4.

- Develops corporate policy statements underscoring commitments to disability inclusion⁵⁵ and underlying the importance of collecting and reporting on disaggregated data and metrics as a core business strategy;
- Ensures that the entire business value chain enables persons with disabilities to play multiple roles, for example, as CEOs/senior managers; suppliers, contractors, consultants; distributors; technical professionals and consumers;⁵⁶
- Builds a disability-inclusive work environment and integrated business processes (including accessible facilities, information infrastructure and disability-inclusive digital systems and networks, and through the provision of reasonable accommodations);
- Integrates universal design into mainstream products and services;
- Delivers on inclusive procurement and engages as (a) bidders for government procurement (public procurement); and (b) tenderers that invite bidding as part of the procurement of goods and services for the companies' own use (private procurement);
- Supports the development of entrepreneurs with disabilities.

⁵⁵ The term "disability inclusion" refers to the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights into the work of the organization, the development of disability-specific programmes and the consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This requires the development and implementation of a consistent and systematic approach to disability inclusion in all areas of operations and programming, internally and externally. For more information, see the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, which is available at www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/.

⁵⁶ The inclusion of persons with disabilities in these roles must go beyond tokenism to ensure that persons with disabilities are treated as equal, valued members of the business.

2.2 Benefits of developing disability-inclusive businesses

A business that practises disability inclusion can reap multifaceted benefits, including, among them, improved performance, innovation, exploration of an untapped market of consumers with disabilities and an enhanced reputation, all of which can lead to greater profitability.⁵⁷ This is often referred to as the “business case”.

Businesses that engage in good practices as employers of persons with disabilities often report enhanced productivity and employee engagement across the organization. This is because they have learned how to provide every employee, including those with disabilities, with the accessibility, tools and flexibility required to contribute toward the success of the business.

The active engagement of persons with disabilities in the workforce enables companies to gain insights into designing products and services that respond to the needs of persons with disabilities and may be useful for other consumers.⁵⁸ Having employees with lived experience of diverse disabilities across different departments can also help ensure the accessibility and inclusiveness of goods and services and thus benefit customers.⁵⁹ The Return on Disability Group describes this as “amplified functionality” and notes that it has been a valuable part of the design of products and services for many companies that have focused on disability inclusion.⁶⁰ The broader diversity and inclusion efforts are in including persons with disabilities and other groups representing the whole of society, the more businesses will realize these benefits.

A study conducted by SG Enable and Heidrick & Struggles revealed that employees who worked closely with persons with disabilities scored their organizations 9 per cent higher in terms of innovation than those who did not. Organizations with more disability-inclusive employment practices also scored 9 per cent higher

on learning and growth than organizations with less disability-inclusive practices.⁶¹ Employees who view their organizations as being more innovative and open to learning and growth may be more willing to suggest innovative ideas themselves, furthering the ability of the organization to respond to consumer needs.

As consumers, persons with disabilities are often overlooked even though the global market for them is estimated to comprise 16 per cent of the global population. In Asia and the Pacific, this translates to 750 million people. This number is expected to increase in the coming years as the rapidly ageing population will result in increased disability prevalence as functions decline with age.

Research conducted by the Return on Disability Group on the consumer market indicated that the market related to persons with disabilities increased by 3.4 billion when taking into account people who have emotional connections to persons with disabilities. Figure 6 illustrates the potential broader market related to persons with disabilities.

At the same time, a positive trend in this regard is emerging. An analysis of the Return on Disability Group of 763 publicly traded companies in the United States on their corporate profitability revealed that the level of activity in the primary “customer” function of the value chain outpaces activity in the supporting talent” category, suggesting that companies are focusing on persons with disabilities as consumers as much as employees.⁶² Previously when considering disability inclusion, many companies focused solely on the employment of persons with disabilities.

Investors and companies are becoming increasingly aware of their public perception and understand that the value creation process of disability-inclusive business yields reputational advantages. The largest transfer of intergenerational wealth is under way,⁶³ younger generations value inclusivity, including persons with disabilities.⁶⁴ Companies that provide goods and

⁵⁷ See, for example, the United Nations Global Compact and ILO, “Guide for business on the rights of persons with disabilities” (New York, 2015); American Association of People with Disabilities and Disability:IN, “Getting to equal: the disability inclusion advantage”, Accenture (2018). Available at <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/pdf/pdf-89/accenture-disability-inclusion-research-report.pdf>; Valuable 500, “Valuable truth report 2022: tracking progress in global business disability inclusion” (2022). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Valuable-Truth-2022.pdf> (accessed on 13 October 2023).

⁵⁸ SG Enable and Heidrick & Struggles, *Unlock the Competitive Advantage of a Disability-inclusive Workforce: How Leaders Can Elevate Their Businesses with Inclusive Hiring and Empowering an Under-represented Talent Pool* (Singapore, 2022).

⁵⁹ American Association of People with Disabilities and Disability:IN, “Getting to equal: the disability inclusion advantage”, Accenture (2018). Available at <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/pdf/pdf-89/accenture-disability-inclusion-research-report.pdf>

⁶⁰ Rich Donovan, *2020 Annual Report: The Global Economics of Disability - Design Delight from Disability*, Return on Disability Group (Toronto, 2020).

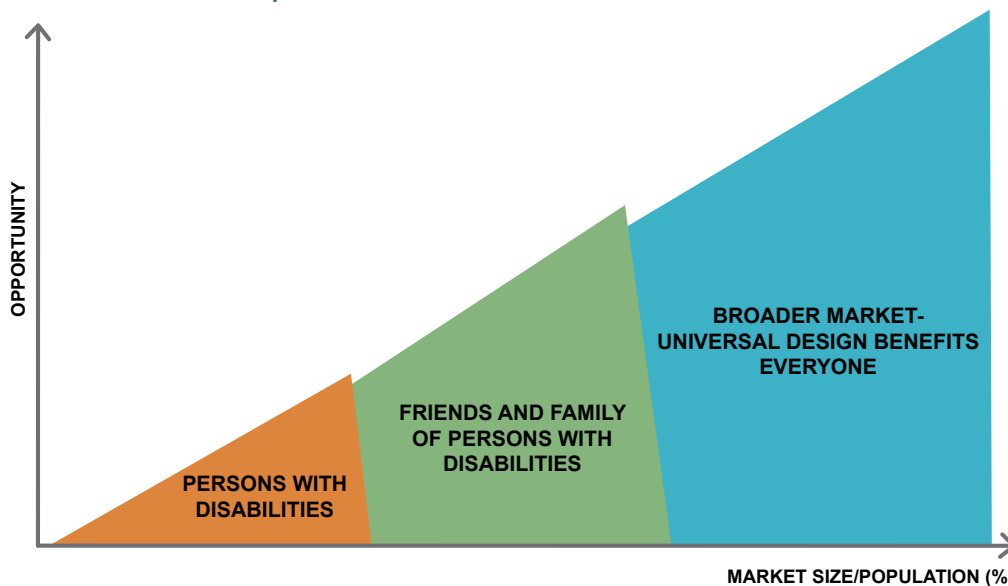
⁶¹ SG Enable and Heidrick & Struggles, *Unlock the Competitive Advantage of a Disability-inclusive Workforce: How Leaders Can Elevate Their Businesses with Inclusive Hiring and Empowering an Under-represented Talent Pool*(Singapore, 2022).

⁶² Return on Disability. “Return on disability research”. Available at <https://www.rod-group.com/insights/rod-research> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

⁶³ Mike Sha, “The great wealth transfer will radically change financial services”, *Forbes*, 9 March 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesfinancecouncil/2023/03/09/the-great-wealth-transfer-will-radically-change-financial-services/?sh=7bb8f5753393>

⁶⁴ Mario Carrasco, “Gen Z: Brands need to prioritize DEI and gender liberation”, *Forbes*. 1 March 2022. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2022/03/01/gen-z-brands-need-to-prioritize-dei-and-gender-liberation/?sh=2dbca7d374ab>

Figure 6
The broader market related to persons with disabilities and their families and friends



Source: ESCAP rendering of a Return on Disability Group figure. Rich Donovan, 2020 Annual Report: *The Global Economics of Disability – Design Delight from Disability*, Return on Disability Group (Toronto, 2020).

services for the disability community are offering solutions to disability-related problems and involving persons with disabilities in the value chain to distinguish themselves from their competitors. A survey conducted by the National Business & Disability Council at the Viscardi Center in the United States found that 66 per cent of participating consumers would purchase goods and services from companies that feature persons with disabilities in their advertising, and 78 per cent would purchase products from companies that take steps to facilitate easy access for persons

with disabilities at their physical locations.⁶⁵

Studies on the sustainability concerns of consumers indicate that disability discrimination remains one of the most concerning social issues in the Asia-Pacific region. In one survey, discrimination in relation to disability was ranked as the top concern by 7 per cent of the respondents in the Asia-Pacific region and 34 per cent ranked it within their top five concerns.⁶⁶

Box 4

Disability-inclusive business can increase profit

The Okinawa prefecture is engaging persons with disabilities in “barrier-free tourism” by organizing a series of workshops and developing dedicated staff and website pages. The results show a positive trend in terms of potential increased profit for disability-inclusive businesses. Research conducted by the prefecture in 2015 revealed that the average amount spent by tourists with disabilities and older tourists in Okinawa was significantly higher than the average amount spent by tourists in general. Furthermore, there was evidence of heightened interest in visiting the prefecture by potential tourists with disabilities. Over the period 2006–2015, the number of inquiries over the phone to the prefecture’s “help desk” for tourists with disabilities and older tourists” increased tenfold.⁶⁷

Source: Okinawa Prefecture. “Report on Initiatives on Tourism aimed at Empowering All” [in Japanese]. Available at <https://www.pref.okinawa.lg.jp/site/bunka-sports/kankoshinko/documents/h29report.pdf>

⁶⁵ Michelle Yin, and others, *A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities*, American Institute for Research (Washington, D.C., 2018).

⁶⁶ Valuable 500, “Making employment accessible for people with disabilities”, The Valuable 500 global trends report, issue 6 (2021). Available at https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/V500_Global-Trends-Report_Issue-6_Designed-V7_FINAL.pdf (accessed on 24 July 2023).

⁶⁷ According to the report, the average value by general tourists was 74,502 Japanese yen (¥) while that of persons with disabilities was ¥105,360, and for older tourists was ¥144,711. The number of inquiry phone calls in 2006 was 1,601 while in 2015, it totalled 16,275.

Chapter 3

Megatrends which will influence and strengthen private sector engagement in disability inclusion across the value chain.

Key messages

Population ageing in the Asia-Pacific region is likely to lead to increased disability prevalence. This presents business opportunities for businesses to address the current and future needs of a large portion of society; the “silver economy” alone is estimated to be worth \$4.56 trillion in Asia.⁶⁸

Advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), and new types of assistive technology offer opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce as entrepreneurs and employees in new ways. These technologies need to be developed by disability-inclusive businesses to ensure existing design bias is not integrated into the new systems.

By 2050, the urban population of Asia is expected to increase by 50 per cent to 3.4 billion.⁶⁹ The benefits of inclusive design in infrastructure solutions are becoming more apparent to the public and the private sectors in such areas as transport, housing and public buildings.

Asia and the Pacific will face increasing challenges from the rise in seawater and the increase in adverse climate events. The Global Action on Disability Network has issued a call to action for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the climate debate and the development of climate solutions. Businesses should engage with persons with disabilities to ensure that their climate mitigation and adaptation solutions are disability-inclusive, as persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for persons with disabilities in addition to increasing the overall number of persons living with a disability (both short and long-term). The pandemic fundamentally changed the workplace and made some workplaces more inclusive through the use of technology and adopting new ways of working.

Advancing disability-inclusive business closely aligns with the priorities for disability-inclusive development that Governments and CSOs in the Asia-Pacific region identified for the period 2023–2030.

The increasing focus on disability inclusion in business activities is shaped by various megatrends.

Demographic shifts and the technological and skills revolution are leading to changes in the workplace and the creation of new market opportunities. The Asia-Pacific region is facing the challenges of increasing urbanization and climate change, which have significant implications for the development of private-sector solutions. In addition, many lessons can be learned from the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which is increasing awareness of the importance of universal design in the creation and delivery of products and services.

3.1 Demographic trends affecting the increased market related to persons with disabilities

The demographic changes also present business opportunities for the private sector to address the current and future needs of a large portion of society.

In 2022, one in seven people in the Asia-Pacific region

were aged 60 years or older; this proportion is expected to nearly double to one in four people by 2050.⁷⁰ As the population ages, the prevalence of disability also increases, making it necessary for societies to prioritize disability inclusion. Among persons aged 60 years and above, 46 per cent experience some form of disability.⁷¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently launched a specific agenda encompassing digital technology and ageing to develop the next level of disability-inclusive technology. Its initiative, Digital and Assistive Technologies for Ageing (DATA), is intended to amplify the increasing need for improved technology for assisted living as people age and the opportunities afforded by digital technology to transform how this is provided.⁷² In this new agenda, assistive technology is seen as a tool to help people in their everyday lives, especially as their faculties decline due to the ageing process. This concept of assisted living will drive demand, which, in turn, will produce opportunities for greater affordability and usability of digital devices. The development of solutions that cater

⁶⁸ Ageing Asia, “Asia Pacific’s silver economy by 2025”, web page. 11 June 2023. Available at <https://ageingasia.com/trend/asia-pacifics-silver-economy-by-2025/>

⁶⁹ For more information, see <https://unhabitat.org/asia-and-the-pacific-region>

⁷⁰ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing 2022: Trends, Policies and Good Practices Regarding Older Persons and Population Ageing*. ST/ESCAP/3041 (2022).

⁷¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and a Challenge* (New York, 2012), p. 61.

⁷² Chapal Khasnabis, Catherine Holloway and Malcolm MacLachlan, “The digital and assistive technologies for ageing initiative: learning from the GATE initiative”, *The Lancet*, vol. 1, issue 3 (2020) e-94–e-95.

to older populations is critical to the success of future digital investments in this space. The private sector is starting to respond to these generational shifts by increasing its understanding of consumer needs and the creation of accessible goods and services that are fit for purpose. This “silver economy” is estimated to be valued at \$4.56 trillion in Asia by 2025.⁷³

An ageing population, together with migration, another key demographic trend, results in a more diverse workforce. In addition, a new generation of young people, who were born between 1995 and 2010, are entering the workforce. These are the digitally native, highly connected and hypercognitive group known as Generation Z. McKinsey describes the group as “True Gen” in contrast to the Millennials as “Me Gen”. Seven out of ten Gen Zers say it is important to defend causes related to identity; this indicates that they are more interested than previous generations in human rights.⁷⁴ The presence of four different generations in the workforce underscores the importance of placing DEI at the centre of organizational culture and building inclusive working environments for all.⁷⁵ Nearly half of the employees surveyed in the 2023 Net Positive Employee Barometer reported they would consider resigning if a company’s values did not match their own and a third indicated they had already resigned from a company for this reason.⁷⁶

3.2 The opportunities and implications of artificial intelligence

AI technologies offer significant opportunities for persons with disabilities. Some examples of this are applications using AI that can enhance the mobility of persons with a visual disability with navigation tools and eye-tracking, as well as voice recognition software technology that enables persons with disabilities to access information and education. Integration of AI into medical systems is increasing the efficacy of diagnosis and early treatment. Other innovations, such as speech-to-text software, are being used to compensate for the lack of sign language interpreters and to enable greater interaction for persons with speech impairments.

As transformative as AI could be for all of humanity, significant risks associated with it are being identified. Some of these risks have specific implications for persons with disabilities and should be taken into consideration by the public and private sectors.

Research has shown some instances of AI and other technologies acting as gatekeepers for social protection benefits.⁷⁷ Given that the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is generally high and eligibility for unemployment assistance could be restricted by biased data sets and discriminatory algorithms, careful consideration must be paid to integrating AI into public and private technology systems. The rapid pace of technology developments and the opaque nature of the logic behind the algorithms pose issues for people who are already marginalized, including persons with disabilities.

In an employment context, AI poses several challenges for persons with disabilities across the hiring process and executives are starting to understand the implications for their businesses.

The use of curriculum vitae (CV) screening tools may not allow for explanations for career gaps or reflect non-traditional career journeys. The use of chatbots in interviews may not be accessible for screen-reader usage. Video screening tools used to test subjects may not have been tested with persons with disabilities ahead of time. As these systems are often not able to “read” the facial expressions of persons with certain disabilities, the algorithmic searches for characteristics, such as speech patterns or facial expression, can have a discriminatory effect on the candidate.⁷⁸

A recent report by Accenture, Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities noted that while 84 per cent of executive-level managers believe they must leverage AI to achieve their firm’s growth objectives, most have not put AI to work to advance growth through inclusion.⁷⁹ In addition, 67 per cent of C executive-level management respondents believe they have built a supportive workplace that enables their employees with disabilities to thrive with the right technology, environment and support, but only 41 per cent of employees with

⁷³ Ageing Asia, “Asia Pacific’s silver economy by 2025”, web page. 11 June 2023. Available at <https://ageingasia.com/trend/asia-pacifics-silver-economy-by-2025/>

⁷⁴ Tracy Francis and Fernanda Hoefel, “True Gen: Generation Z and its implications for companies”, McKinsey & Company, 12 November 2018. Available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies>

⁷⁵ ILO Global Business and Disability Network and Fundación ONCE, “Making the future of work inclusive of people with disabilities” (2019). Available at chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_729457.pdf

⁷⁶ Valuable 500, Disability inclusion and ESG: the Valuable Global 500 trends report (2023). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/The-Valuable-500-Global-Trends-Report-Issue-10.pdf>

⁷⁷ Michael Lokshin and Nithin Umapathi, “AI for social protection: mind the people”, Brookings, 23 February 2022. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/02/23/ai-for-social-protection-mind-the-people>

⁷⁸ Associated Press, “U.S. warns of discrimination in using artificial intelligence to screen job candidates”, NPR, 12 May 2022. Available at <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/12/1098601458/artificial-intelligence-job-discrimination-disabilities#:~:text=Hourly%20News-,U.S.%20warns%20of%20discrimination%20in%20using%20AI%20to%20screen%20job,discriminating%20against%20people%20with%20disabilities>

⁷⁹ Laurie Henneborn and Ray Eitel-Porter, “AI for Disability Inclusion: Enabling Change with Advanced Technology” (2021). Available at https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-155/Accenture-AI-For-Disability-Inclusion.pdf

disabilities agree with that assessment. The following recommendations from the report are useful for leadership across the public and private sectors:

- (a) expand executive awareness of the power of AI to foster disability inclusion;
- (b) focus on the myriad benefits of AI while screening for and eliminating the possibility of unintended consequences; and
- (c) use the R(AI)S guiding principles (responsible, accessible, inclusive, secure) to inform decision-making about using AI to improve inclusion.

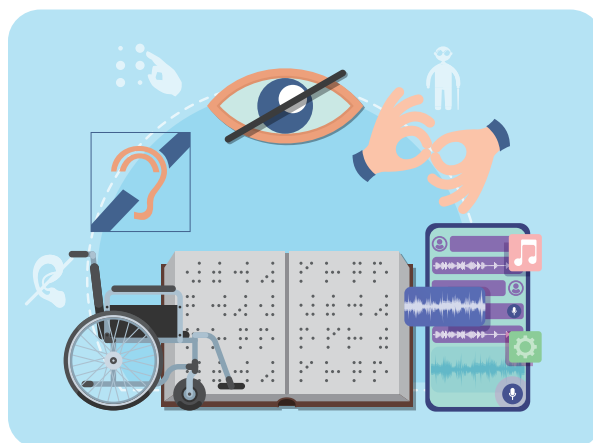
Furthermore, persons with disabilities need to be included in the design and development of AI and related technologies to avoid these negative outcomes.

3.3 Assistive technology and the potential of new markets

Currently, more than 2.5 billion people need access to assistive technology; this number is expected to increase to 3.5 billion by 2050.⁸⁰ Research conducted by ATscale has shown that investment in assistive technology can lead to a return on investment of 9:1, as access brings value to health, the community and the economy. For a child in a low- or middle-income country, access to assistive technology can make a difference of \$100,000 in lifetime income. Currently, only 5 to 15 per cent of the population have access to the assistive technology they need.⁸¹ This population group presents a sizable market for accessible and assistive technology products and services.

The entrepreneurial landscape for assistive tech development is nascent, however, due to efforts by governments and organizations, such as ATscale and the Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub, it is beginning to be viable and achieve a scale that can attract new investment and resources. In 2019, Innovate Now, the first assistive technology accelerator in Africa, was launched. The accelerator is a partnership between GDI Hub, ICT Norway and Norad and focuses on digital assistive technology and entrepreneurship.⁸² The Assistive Tech Impact Fund (AT Impact Fund), a collaboration between GDI Hub, Brink and Catalyst Fund, is targeting the path to scale for assistive

technology start-ups and scale-ups in African markets.⁸³ The Innovation Fund for Assistive Technology of GSMA, which is funded by UKAID, focuses on start-ups, small and medium enterprises and social enterprises in Africa and Asia that support the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities).⁸⁴ Other similar initiatives are the Disability Impact Fund,⁸⁵ which invests in assistive technology in India, Africa and the South-East Asia and Assist Tech Foundation,⁸⁶ which incubates early-stage ideas and scales assistive technology start-ups in India. In 2021 the +N Inclusive Innovation Network⁸⁷ was launched. “With five accelerators on four continents and nearly a hundred start-ups on board, +N is kickstarting a global ecosystem to empower innovators and entrepreneurs to turn bold visions into exciting new realities.” These types of interventions and the development of a disability innovation ecosystem allow investors to explore new markets and opportunities, which may not have been considered before. Greater private sector finance is critical to take this market to the next stage. It offers great potential to make a difference in the lives of millions.



In addition, innovations targeted for persons with disabilities present additional market opportunities for the broader population. For example, audiobooks were created in 1932 by the American Foundation for the Blind. Approximately 55 million people, including many persons without disabilities, now listen to audiobooks each year and that number continues to grow.⁸⁸ Similarly, one of the first typewriters was invented to aid a blind person in writing letters and formed the prototype for the keyboards used in computers around the world.⁸⁹ More than 130,000 patents

⁸⁰ World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Global Report on Assistive Technology* (Geneve, WHO and UNICEF, 2022).

⁸¹ ATscale, "The case for investing in assistive technology, ATscale Global Partnership for Assistive Technology" (2020). Available at <https://atscalepartnership.org/investment-case>

⁸² Innovative Now, "Africa's first Assistive Technology Accelerator", web page (2020). Available at <https://atinnovatenow.com>

⁸³ More information is available at <https://www.disabilityinnovation.com/projects/scale/at2030-spark-innovation-programme>

⁸⁴ For more information, see <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/gsma-innovation-fund-for-assistive-tech>

⁸⁵ For more information, see <https://disabilityimpact.com>

⁸⁶ For more information, see <https://www.atflabs.org>

⁸⁷ For more information, see <https://inclusiveinnovationnetwork.org/about>

⁸⁸ Alison Thoet, "A short history of the audiobook, 20 years after the first portable digital audio device", PBS News Hours, 22 November 2017. Available at <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/a-short-history-of-the-audiobook-20-years-after-the-first-portable-digital-audio-device>

⁸⁹ Jenna Caldwell, "We find ways to come up with solutions.' Haben Girma on how disability drives innovation", TIME, 20 August 2020. Available at <https://time.com/5881870/haben-girma-how-disability-drives-innovation>

for assistive technology were filed from 1997 to 2017 globally. Filings for assistive technology patents related to emerging technologies (AI, Internet of things, materials, biosensors) are increasing nearly three times faster than conventional patent filings.⁹⁰ Many of these assistive technologies will also benefit the broader population beyond the initial population of persons with disabilities they were designed for.

3.4 Increased need for accessible urban environments, associated infrastructure and services

More than half the population in Asia and the Pacific is estimated to live in cities.⁹¹ The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) estimates that by 2050 the urban population in Asia is expected to expand by 50 per cent to 3.4 billion.⁹² The concept and practice of accessible design has often been considered by the public and private sectors to be too costly. **Evidence provided by the United Nations shows that integrating accessibility into urban planning and design costs almost nothing or only 1 per cent additional cost, while the cost of adaption post-construction is often prohibitive.** The United Nations suggests that there is an opportunity cost of 15 to 20 per cent of the global tourism market share because of spaces that are inaccessible to tourists with disabilities, older persons and parents with young children.⁹³ As the understanding of the benefits of accessible design increase, the popularity and use of it also increases. This in turn, presents opportunities for the private and public sectors to provide better infrastructure solutions and meet the requirements of ESG investors.

3.5 Greater investment in climate adaptation is also critical as Asia and the Pacific will face increasing climate-related challenges

Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-affected region in the world. In 2022, more than 140 disasters struck the region, affecting more than 64 million people.⁹⁴ Shocks related to climate change disproportionately affect persons with disabilities, whose resilience and adaptive capacities

may be limited. Persons with disabilities can face greater difficulties in this regard because they often do not have access to information on disaster risks and warning systems, including deaf persons not being able to hear emergency alarm systems. In addition, persons with disabilities may be unable to quickly leave their homes and the lack of accessible safe places may prohibit evacuation.⁹⁵ The Global Action on Disability Network has produced a call to action for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the climate debate. The recommendations from this document include: (a) ensuring disability inclusion action at the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) events, and for information and campaigns to be disability-inclusive and accessible at global, regional and national levels; (b) promoting disability-inclusive participation, so that organizations of persons with disabilities are engaged as stakeholders in climate change negotiations; (c) undertaking a significant effort to integrate data on the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities into decision-making processes; and, (d) ensuring that all climate funding is disability-inclusive.⁹⁶

The ILO, in operationalizing its Just Transition Guidelines, similarly advocates the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the prevention of adverse impacts of climate change and climate policies for persons with disabilities. In the guidelines, ILO highlights the need to ensure opportunities for decent work in the changing nature of the green economy, which includes developing cohesive service and support systems that facilitate entry into emerging green jobs and green enterprises. This transition process presents opportunities for innovation by including persons with disabilities to co-create meaningful climate action and make societies more accessible, equitable and sustainable. With the threat of extreme weather events to cause injury and lead to the loss of accessibility in transportation systems and buildings, designing for inclusion with the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities can improve accessibility and resilience for all in the long-term.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), *Technology Trends 2021: Assistive Technology* (Geneva, 2021).

⁹¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and others, "SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities: make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", 28 March 2018. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDG%2011%20Goal%20Profile%20Final%20Edit%20260218.pdf>

⁹² UN-Habitat, "Asia and the Pacific Region", web page (2023). Available at <https://unhabitat.org/asia-and-the-pacific-region>

⁹³ United Nations, Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "Accessibility and disability inclusion in urban development" (2015). Available at <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/2015/accessibility-urbandevelopment.pdf>

⁹⁴ *Seizing the Moment: Targeting Transformative Disaster Risk Resilience*, Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2023 (United Nations publication, Sales No. 23.II.F.8, 2023).

⁹⁵ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Review of disability-inclusive and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific", background paper for Regional Consultation on Facilitating Innovative Action on Disability-inclusive Gender-responsive DRR (2022). Available at

https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Background%20paper_ESCAP%20Regional%20Consulation%20on%20DiDRR%200220428%20final.pdf

⁹⁶ The GLAD Network, "3 steps toward disability-inclusive climate action", infographic (n.d.) Available at

https://gladnetwork.net/sites/default/files/GLAD%20Infographic_Accessible.pdf

⁹⁷ International Labour Organization, "Nothing about us without us: realizing disability rights through a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies", Just Transition Policy Brief (2022). Available at

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_860628.pdf

Given the specific climate challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and the disproportionate impact of disasters on persons with disabilities, businesses should engage with persons with disabilities to ensure their climate mitigation and adaptation solutions are disability-inclusive. The dominance of climate or green finance in the current investment landscape presents opportunities for this financing to create a more inclusive and just climate smart future for all.

3.6 COVID-19 recovery

The private sector has a key role to play in the transformative recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁸

While the pandemic and the global economic downturn have had immeasurable negative consequences, they have also given impetus to culture change in the workplace. The aftermath of COVID-19 and the associated impact of “long Covid” has increased the number of persons with disabilities in society overall. The pandemic was indiscriminate and affected all types of people across economic and social classes. Many persons who acquired a disability during the pandemic are experiencing the challenges and discrimination that persons with disabilities have historically faced. Both private and public sector employers have had to grapple with the challenges that the impacts of the pandemic have imposed on their workforces. This has resulted in a greater understanding of the need to provide reasonable accommodation and has catalysed a shift in leadership’s perception of what disability looks like in the workplace and their role in supporting the staff. More companies are adopting flexible working arrangements and investing in the mental health and well-being of their employees. The pandemic has also heightened awareness of the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in daily life and social inequalities more broadly, which may contribute towards increased efforts to promote DEI.⁹⁹

While COVID-19 has presented challenges for persons with disabilities and increased the numbers of persons with disabilities (both short and long-term), it has also offered an opportunity for expanded social empathy for disability empowerment.¹⁰⁰ The pandemic has conferred new experiential knowledge on society and extended a rare opportunity to improve comprehension of the social model of disability. Developing inclusive and sustainable

business practices is key to post-pandemic recovery and long-term corporate competitiveness.

The use of lockdowns as a pandemic response has led to greater reliance on technology, which has had some positive implications for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. During the pandemic, many mediums of societal participation went virtual. Where persons with disabilities had access to the Internet, they were able to engage in society in a new way, as physical and communication barriers were equalized when education, work, shopping, and leisure activities went online. These new market conditions have built opportunities for the private sector and new ways for them to build more inclusive products and services.¹⁰¹ However, as a recent ESCAP study shows, despite the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating mass digital adoption, the pandemic also has deepened the digital divide between and within countries across the region.¹⁰²

The post-pandemic lens has provided many opportunities for the public and private sectors to design products and offer services that will be beneficial for persons with disabilities. The lack of understanding of the importance of accessible design was highlighted in many of the products and services that were used to mitigate physical risks. Standard health-care personal protective equipment (PPE) design was often exclusionary for persons with disabilities. One example of this was the impact of mask mandates for persons who lip read. Information concerning vaccines and at home COVID-19 tests were often not accessible for blind persons.

A greater understanding of the importance of the design of physical spaces should also benefit persons with disabilities. The need for touch free access to lifts and doors (as a contagion mitigation measure) has made many building spaces more accessible. As lockdown restrictions were relaxed and many governments’ advice was to walk or cycle as a means of transportation, the importance of better accessible design of outside spaces has also been highlighted. The mental health challenges faced by many people during and after the pandemic have presented the need for a greater focus by governments on this often-overlooked aspect of health care. This also led to the development of a whole new market for the private sector to consider in the delivery of these

⁹⁸ United Nations Global Compact, “UN Global Compact Strategy 2021–2023”, strategy (2021). Available at <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/strategy#:~:text=We%20will%20strive%20to%20move,to%20hold%20participating%20companies%20accountable>.

⁹⁹ International Labour Organization, *Transforming Enterprises through Diversity and Inclusion* (Geneva, 2022); Valuable 500, “Valuable truth report 2022: tracking progress in global business disability inclusion” (2022). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Valuable-Truth-2022.pdf> (accessed on 13 October 2023).

¹⁰⁰ Ikenna D. Ebuonyi and others, “COVID-19 as social disability: the opportunity of social empathy for empowerment”, *BMJ Global Health*, vol. 5, No. 8 (2020).

¹⁰¹ Tom Shakespeare, Florence Ndagire and Queen E. Seketi, “Triple jeopardy: disabled people and the COVID-19 pandemic”, *The Lancet*, vol. 397, No. 10282 (2021) pp 1331–1333.

¹⁰² Seunghwa Jun, Jongsur Park and Jeong Yoon Kim, “Digital transformation landscape in Asia and the Pacific: aggravated digital divide and widening growth gap”, ESCAP Working Paper Series 5/WP-5/23. (2022). Available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/digital-transformation-landscape-asia-and-pacific-aggravated-digital-divide-and-widening>

services for customers and/or their employees.

3.7 Priorities for disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific

Last but not least, advancing disability inclusion in the private sector closely aligns with the priorities for disability-inclusive development from 2023 to 2030 identified by Asia-Pacific Governments and CSOs (figure 7). In their responses to the ESCAP survey on the final review of the implementation of the third Disability Decade (2013–2022), 79.3 per cent of governments reported work and employment as a top priority, followed by digital accessibility (62.1 per cent)

and disability statistics (62.1 per cent). For CSOs, 62.5 per cent of them considered digital accessibility as an essential area, followed by work and employment (58.3 per cent) and disability rights advocacy (50 per cent).¹⁰³

The power of the private sector, including its resources, technologies and creative ideas, can be leveraged to improve employment prospects for persons with disabilities, accelerate disability-inclusive digitalization and tackle other priority areas. A business that effectively addresses disability issues also improves its sustainability and its chances of attaining success.

Figure 7
Priorities for disability-inclusive development from 2023 to 2030 reported by Asia-Pacific Governments and civil society organizations



Source: ESCAP, A Three-Decade Journey towards Inclusion: Assessing the State of Disability-Inclusive Development in Asia and the Pacific, Sales no. E.22.II.F.18 (2022).

¹⁰³ A total of 29 governments and 24 CSOs reported their priorities for disability-inclusive development in the period 2023–2030. A *Three-Decade Journey towards Inclusion: Assessing the State of Disability-Inclusive Development in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.F.18 (2022)).

Chapter 4

Putting disability-inclusive business into practice



Key messages

Disability-inclusive business is being practised around the world, including in Asia and the Pacific, through five key areas: leadership, operations (encompassing product and service development, logistics, marketing, sales, and after-sales services), human resources, procurement, and support for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

At the same time, an ecosystem is supporting disability-inclusive business through direct and indirect government policy initiatives and increasing engagement of development finance institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities and other CSOs, industry associations and investors.

Leadership

- Executive-level managers and leadership boards are promoting an inclusive culture at all levels of a company by setting a vision of disability inclusion as part of the core business strategy and establishing policies, budgets and operational systems for disability inclusion.
- Executive leaders also are setting the foundation for disability disclosure and inclusion in their organizations by communicating their commitment to disability inclusion and appreciation of the value it creates in the workplace.
- Business leaders are adopting ESG and DEI guidelines that offer an opportunity to promote disability inclusion within corporate governance and other aspects of business.
- Policymakers are also adopting ESG and DEI policies and guidelines and are encouraging businesses to implement them.
- Policymakers with disabilities provide a critical lived experience perspective to policy design, implementation and monitoring.
- Global networks support and promote theories and practices of disability-inclusive business through facilitating global networking of like-minded disability-inclusive business owners, sharing good practices and the development and utilization of a disability-inclusive business index.

Products and services

- Integrating universal design principles to create accessible products and services as core business products is critical for companies to maximize their value chains.
- Accessible digital design is applicable across all sectors. In the Asia-Pacific region, the tourism, financial services and apparel sectors are taking concrete actions to make their products and services accessible.
- Governments can mandate businesses to produce universal design based products and services.
- Development finance institutions are collaborating with governments and businesses to support the provision of accessible services.

Human resources

- It is important to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities across all phases of the employment life cycle, from attracting talent to ensuring inclusive recruitment practices, retention and engagement programming.
- Asia-Pacific Governments are supporting the employment of persons with disabilities by setting legal and policy frameworks, providing services designed to support employees with disabilities and developing inclusive education and skills training to prepare persons with disabilities for the labour market.
- Development finance institutions and international organizations are supporting disability-inclusive employment by bringing together business networks to share good practices and promote inclusive employment and providing technical and vocational skills training.

Procurement

- Businesses can support disability-inclusive businesses, especially those owned by persons with disabilities, by developing an inclusive supply chain and influencing their supply chain to have an increased focus on disability inclusion and accessibility.
- Two critical tools to help governments advance disability-inclusive businesses through public procurements are: (a) requiring the production of accessible goods and services, and (b) preferential contracting.
- International organizations, including the United Nations and business networks, are also using procurement procedures as a means to support disability-inclusive businesses.

Entrepreneurship

- Entrepreneurs with disabilities face unique challenges because of ableist attitudes and low expectations stemming from negative stereotypes, discrimination and misconceptions about their skills and potential.
- Governments support entrepreneurs with disabilities through programmes targeted at providing funding for starting or expanding businesses.
- CSOs, including organizations of persons with disabilities, are raising capital and providing networks of support and talent development for entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Impact capital is starting to invest in companies that support entrepreneurs with disabilities, including making direct investments in start-ups that have the potential to scale into market-leading businesses.

To further advance disability-inclusive businesses, the following five components are key: leadership; operations including product and service development, logistics, marketing and sales, and after-sales services; human resources; procurement; and support for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

In addition to the critical role of businesses, the disability-inclusive business ecosystem comprises the following:

- (a) Government interventions, direct, through disability-specific policies and indirect, such as through disability-inclusive labour market policies or supplier diversity policies and accessibility standards;
- (b) Development finance support through thought leadership, country loans and technical assistance;
- (c) CSOs and industry and professional associations that provide platforms for action and networks for sharing lessons learned;
- (d) Investors that support the facilitation of investment in disability-inclusive businesses and the development of new markets, such as assistive technology;
- (e) Organizations of persons with disabilities that provide support and advocacy for the community.

This ecosystem helps to create the conditions for greater disability inclusion and the advancement of disability-inclusive businesses across Asia and the Pacific.

The continued engagement of persons with disabilities is central to the success of disability-inclusive businesses and the ecosystem interventions designed to support them. The private sector can fast-track cultural and perception shifts in Asia and the Pacific through the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Disability-inclusive businesses can serve as an example of the opportunities and benefits of moving from a “nothing about us without us” perspective to a more proactive and inclusive “nothing without us” approach.¹⁰⁴

The objective of this chapter is to explain how business engages in disability inclusion within different dimensions of the business value chain by providing good practice examples and an overview of the government and other ecosystem interventions that support the development and success of disability-inclusive businesses across Asia and the Pacific. Given the outsized role of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across the Asia-Pacific region, a section of the chapter is dedicated to the importance of creating opportunities for persons with disabilities to become entrepreneurs and how they can receive better support across the ecosystem.

As disability-inclusive business remains an emerging area of interest and existing research is limited, the examples given below should not be seen as exhaustive. They represent selection of good practices across various industries, enterprise sizes and geographical

¹⁰⁴ For more information on these two phrases see Jonathan Kaufman, “Mindset matters: looking beyond nothing about us, without us towards a new horizon in business and culture”, *Forbes*, (12 August 2022.).

locations used to emphasize that all kinds of businesses can and should reflect on how they can become inclusive of persons with disabilities in all their diversity. These examples were compiled through a combination of secondary literature reviews, online research and recommendations from experts on disability-inclusive business.

4.1 Leadership, commitments and collective action

The leadership and management of a company dictate the direction of the company and how the components of the value chain will be executed. **By setting a vision of disability inclusion as part of the core business strategy and establishing operational systems, policies and budgets for disability inclusion, executive-level managers and leadership boards can promote an inclusive culture throughout the company. The leadership of persons with disabilities, within businesses, government and business ecosystem organizations is instrumental in ensuring policies are designed based on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities and meet their needs.**

Business

Executive-level managers can set a vision that disability inclusion is an essential function of their company because it is the correct thing to do and is also an effective business strategy to increase profitability. **They can do this by promoting disability inclusion based on disability rights and equality in the company's main corporate governance documents and DEI initiatives. Moreover, leaders with disabilities within a company can share their personal experiences and insights on disability. By doing this, employees may feel safer sharing their full and authentic selves at work.**

Many leading disability-inclusive businesses have created a position called chief accessibility officer whose primary role is to ensure accessibility. Companies with dedicated teams or individuals devoted to coordinating disability inclusion strategies tend to achieve better outcomes than those that spread out the responsibilities among many individuals. Businesses can also consider holding leaders at all levels accountable for implementing disability inclusion strategies to improve outcomes.¹⁰⁵

Executive-level managers can also play a signalling role in the business imperative of inclusion by making public statements on their commitments to disability inclusion as part of their core business. Many disability-inclusive business networks regularly publish private sector commitments from their members of country-level

and global CEOs. This collective action is designed to showcase support and awareness of the importance of disability inclusion for business and encourage more engagement related to it across sectors and countries.

Valuable 500, a global business partnership of 500 companies working to end disability exclusion, calls for “synchronised collective action” among its members and wider business – *“Moving in the same direction, at the same time, against the same system barrier. Unified in our purpose to accelerate inclusion for the one in five people living with a disability, we are transforming business systems to transform society.”* In a survey of Valuable 500 members, 54 per cent of the companies reported having an active disability inclusion policy.¹⁰⁷

As of July 2023, there were 95 member companies of Valuable 500 based in Asia and the Pacific who have made public commitments. Most of these companies are concentrated in Japan, India and Australia.¹⁰⁶ These companies span industry sectors, with the most well-represented sectors being finance, information and communications technology (ICT) and consumer goods. Examples of disability commitments made by companies range from general diversity statements to specific actions over time.¹⁰⁸

Examples of Valuable 500 commitments: Lenovo (China) CEO: Yang Yuanqing

“As a global technology leader, Lenovo touches the lives of millions, whether it be through the people we employ around the world or the solutions and experiences that are delivered to customers and clients...Disability inclusion and accessibility remains a top business priority for Lenovo, and this year we pledge to:

- *Increase disability accessibility as part of the corporate business agenda. Increase the representation of and improve the employee experience for people with disabilities within Lenovo.*
- *Continue developing our Product Diversity Office to ensure accessibility and inclusivity are prioritized at all stages of the design process of Lenovo products and solutions.*
- *Continue conducting internal audits to assess areas for improvement as it pertains to accessibility, in order to build upon our commitment to an inclusive work environment for all employees.”*

¹⁰⁵ Stephane Leblois, Valuable 500, “Dedicated Leadership Roles”, comment to authors, 29 September 2023.

¹⁰⁶ For more information, see <https://www.thevaluable500.com>

¹⁰⁷ Valuable 500, “Valuable truth report 2022: tracking progress in global business disability inclusion” (2022). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Valuable-Truth-2022.pdf> (accessed on 13 October 2023).

¹⁰⁸ The statements of Valuable 500 members are available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/members>

Dynapack Asia (Indonesia) CEO: Tirtadaja Hambali

“Dynapack Asia has always given opportunities for people with disabilities to work in our workplace and factories, as we believe disability inclusion creates a positive contribution to our business value.

Our CEO has now aligned to put disability inclusion as one of the key priority initiatives from 2019. We will encourage all our subsidiaries in Indonesia, Singapore, Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia, and China to get more engaged and increase their cooperations with disabled communities and institutions. We trust this will support people-development with skills required in our manufacturing industry, as well as enhancing their daily lives with stable revenues.”

Japan Airlines (Japan) President and Representative Director: Yuji Akasaka

“We will continue to improve accessibility at our facilities and in our services so that our customers can enjoy traveling with minimal barriers. We will continue improving the environment at airports and in the aircraft to promote a comfortable experience both on the ground and in the air. We will also provide useful information so that customers will be motivated to travel.

Furthermore, we will be proactive in human resource development and create employee-friendly workplaces, where each person can unleash their individual potential.

1) Improvement of the Environment

We will utilize the latest technology to improve the environment so that customers can travel smoothly. Our efforts will include the following initiatives:

- Improvement of accessible facilities and equipment at airports.
- Utilization of assistive tools to promote universal communication.
- Utilization of assistive tools, such as wooden wheelchairs for smoother mobility.
- Enhancement of inflight entertainment programs.

2) Promote and communicate attractive travel features

We will provide information to customers that may feel anxious to travel due to a disability. Our actions will include:

- Developing the website where customers can find information with ease

- Organizing events to experience boarding procedures and practice sitting in an aircraft in a way to remove any anxiety for air travel

- Disseminating information on travel destinations, new ways to enjoy traveling, and promote attractions through the website

3) Provision of travel options

We will promote accessible tourism so that everyone can participate and enjoy traveling without any concerns.

- Offering travel ideas, such as dual-ski tours
- Providing support for mobility and accommodation for a stress-free experience before, during, and after the trip.

4) Human resource development (removing psychological barriers)

We will develop human resource management to improve customer service skills

- Provide training to remove psychological barriers
- Providing customer service training to employees in the service division

5) Promotion of employees' growth and development

We will create workplaces where all employees can unleash their unique traits and capabilities.

- Promoting the employment of persons with disabilities and increasing opportunities for all individuals
- Improving the work environment by utilizing information technology and offering flexible workstyles
- Proactive participation by employees with disabilities to improve accessibility standards.

In addition to private sector leaders who are supportive of persons with disabilities and push forward inclusive policies, leaders who self-identify as a person with a disability can be role models for all and alter perceptions about how persons with disabilities can contribute to business and the wider society. A documented example of a board member who has publicly spoken about his disability is Jun Sawada, Chairman of the Board of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Company (NTT).¹⁰⁹ Disclosure of a disability by leaders can help set the tone for more inclusive employment practices in an organization and contributes to greater societal acceptance.

Inclusion of and disclosure by persons with disabilities at the executive-level management or corporate

¹⁰⁹ Jun Sawada, and Caroline Casey, “Japan’s company leaders can lead by example on disability inclusion”, Nikkei Asia, 9 April 2023. Available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Japan-s-company-leaders-can-lead-by-example-on-disability-inclusion>

board level is an important lever for the development of more disability-inclusive businesses. There is positive movement in this area as the importance and benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion topics are better understood at the board level and as more data are made available and regulatory bodies, such as the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), consider changing board diversity regulations.¹¹⁰ Research consistently shows that there are a number of business benefits associated with diversity on corporate boards and in senior leadership. These include the benefits of diversity of thought and experience to address complex business challenges as well as offering a better representation of stakeholder interests. There is a correlation between diversity and increased revenue. A McKinsey and Company study has found that companies with diverse executive boards, measured based on women and foreign nationals (as a proxy for cultural diversity), enjoy significantly higher earnings and returns on equity.¹¹¹

However, much progress still needs to be made as a Valu-

able 500 report recently showed that among the executive-level managers of companies listed in the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 Index, only three have openly disclosed having a disability.¹¹²

Self-identification of experiencing a disability is a complex issue. While it is important to be able to identify executives and other employees and persons with disabilities hired by a company, there are social and privacy concerns and methodological issues. **Due to stigmas and discrimination against persons with disabilities, some persons with disabilities might feel uncomfortable disclosing that they have a disability.** They might be fearful of being stereotyped and labelled solely as a person “with disabilities” rather than a person “with any other skills and qualities”. They may also fear being discriminated against and mistreated. Many disabilities are non-apparent, especially if an employee is working remotely. Businesses should assume that some of their employees have a disability but have chosen not to disclose it.

Box 5

Collecting data on employees with disabilities

How a business defines disability and why and how disability identity data are collected have major implications for the psychological safety of staff and the accuracy of the data collected. The United Nations defines disability as a result the interaction between external physical, institutional, and mindset barriers and impairments, and does not constrict the notion of “a person with disabilities” to those who obtain an official disability card or certificate. Identification is based on persons who identify themselves as having “functional difficulties”.

Businesses may define disability differently, which would affect staff self-reporting and data accuracy. Due to ableist discrimination, employees may not feel comfortable disclosing their disability status, especially if the purpose, use and anonymity level of the survey are not clearly explained.

A United Nations entity is piloting a staff survey to inform their policies on disability inclusion for staff. The questions are formulated similarly to the following:

- Do you consider yourself to have a disability? (optional)
- Do you have difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
- Do you have difficulty hearing, even when using a hearing aid?

The questions are being monitored for potential improvement. An important strategy used in the current questions is the approach of asking employees if they identify as having a disability and asking separately about experiences of functional difficulty. By asking about functional difficulty, the organization is in a better position to understand the needs of staff.

¹¹⁰ Disability:IN, “Bloomberg law: disability advocates seek inclusion in SEC Board diversity rule”, 30 September 2021. Available at <https://disabilityin.org/in-the-news/bloomberg-law-disability-advocates-seek-inclusion-in-sec-board-diversity-rules>

¹¹¹ Thomas Barta, Markus Kleiner and Tilo Neumann, “Is there a payoff from top-team diversity?”, McKinsey & Company, 1 April 2012. Available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/is-there-a-payoff-from-top-team-diversity>

¹¹² Valuable 500, “The importance of inclusive leadership”, The Valuable 500 global trends report, issue 11 (2023). Available at https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Valuable-500-Trends-Report-Issue-11-FINAL_a11y.pdf

Government

Leadership of persons with disabilities in policymaking

The leadership of persons with disabilities in policymaking is crucial to ensuring business-related policies are disability-inclusive. Across the Asia-Pacific region, persons with disabilities are underrepresented in parliamentary positions. A recent survey by ESCAP found that of the 10 Governments that provided responses, only six reported that persons with disabilities held parliamentary positions, representing 0.8 per cent of the total number of parliamentarians in those 10 countries and territories. Only three of the 10 countries reported having women parliamentarians with disabilities, representing 0.2 per cent of the total parliamentary positions in the 10 countries and territories that provided responses to the survey.¹¹³

Policymakers with disabilities provide a critical lived experience perspective to policy design, implementation and monitoring. This can involve enacting legislation on accessibility standards and reasonable accommodation in workplaces and public spaces, as well as promoting inclusive hiring practices and providing financial support and training opportunities for businesses to foster disability-inclusive environments. By raising awareness and challenging societal perceptions about disability, policymakers can contribute towards creating a culture of inclusivity and respect. Through their actions, government policymakers in Asia and the Pacific have the potential to pave the way for greater disability inclusion in the business sector.

For example, Lyazzat Kaltayeva, Senator, Senate of the Parliament, Kazakhstan, has shown exceptional leadership in disability-related policymaking. As Chairperson of the Central Asian Disability Forum and the Association of Women with Disabilities "Shyrak," and a wheelchair user, she actively participates in shaping policies as a member of the National Council on Disability and the National Commission for Women's Affairs, Family,

and Demographic Policy. Through her influential role, Kaltayeva has successfully established a network of women with disabilities in Central Asia and initiated research projects to assess the specific challenges they face in the region. Her commitment extends to organizing impactful informational and advocacy campaigns that raise awareness and promote tolerance towards women with disabilities.¹¹⁴

As a senator of the Upper House of the Royal Thai Parliament and former member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Monthian Buntan, who is blind, has been instrumental in advocating the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. He made a substantive contribution to the drafting, negotiation and adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a member of the delegation of the Government of Thailand. After the Convention went into effect, Buntan served as a member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, monitoring the implementation of the Convention around the world. In Thailand, his recent efforts include promoting public procurement to ensure accessible goods and services and working on establishing the multi-ministerial access board, which would oversee the development and implementation of accessible standards and public procurement systems.¹¹⁵

Environmental, social and governance and diversity, equity and inclusion policies

ESG and DEI guidelines offer an opportunity to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities within cooperate governance and other aspects of business. ESG regulations have been adopted by Asia-Pacific Governments through various government agencies and regulatory bodies, with a particular focus on the financial and investment sectors. They are intended to enhance transparency, accountability and sustainable economic development. Countries, such as Indonesia,¹¹⁶ Japan,¹¹⁷ Malaysia,¹¹⁸ the Philippines,¹¹⁹ the Republic of

¹¹³ *A Three-Decade Journey towards Inclusion: Assessing the State of Disability-Inclusive Development in Asia and the Pacific*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.F.18 (2022).

¹¹⁴ Make The Right Real, "Ms. Lyazzat Kaltayeva, Chairperson, Central Asian Disability Forum, and Chairperson, Association of Women with Disabilities 'Shyrak', Almaty, Kazakhstan", Make the Right Real (n.d.). Available at <https://www.maketherightreal.net/champions/lyazzat-kaltayeva> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹¹⁵ Make The Right Real, "Mr. Monthian Buntan, Member-elect of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Bangkok, Thailand", Make the Right Real (n.d.). Available at <https://www.maketherightreal.net/champions/monthian-buntan> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹¹⁶ International Finance Corporation and Otoritas Jasa Keuangan, "IFC and OJK: raising the bar on environmental, social, and corporate governance standards", 25 February 2021. Available at <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/ifc-ojk-ifc-collaboration-case-brochure-fin.pdf> Baker & McKenzie, "ESG, Indonesia page", 5 September 2022. Available at <https://resourcehub.bakermckenzie.com/en/resources/fsr-momentum-monitor/apac/indonesia/topics/esg>; PwC Indonesia and Oxford Business Group, "ESG in Indonesia: Access to Finance 2023" (2023). Available at <https://www.pwc.com/id/en/esg/esg-in-indonesia-2023.pdf>

¹¹⁷ Japan, Public Relations Office, "Revision of Japan's corporate governance code and guidelines for investor and company engagement", November 2021. Available at https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202111/202111_09_en.html#:~:text=The%20Corporate%20Governance%20Code%20is,with%20each%20company's%20specific%20circumstances

¹¹⁸ Malaysia, Securities Commission, Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (as at 28 April 2021) (2021), p.33, 5.10. Available at <https://www.sc.com.my/api/documentms/download.ashx?id=239e5ea1-a258-4db8-a9e2-41c215bdb776>

¹¹⁹ ESGN Asia, "Philippines Introduces new code on ESG disclosure", 15 April 2019. Available at <https://esgn.asia/philippines-introduces-new-code-on-esg-disclosure/>; Philippines National Economic and Development Authority, "Philippines Action Plan for sustainable consumption and production (PAP4SCP)", 29 January 2020. Available at <https://sdg.neda.gov.ph/philippine-action-plan-for-sustainable-consumption-and-production-pap4scp/>

Korea,¹²⁰ and Thailand¹²¹ have introduced mandatory ESG reporting requirements for listed companies or implemented voluntary reporting guidelines and frameworks. However, ESG reporting related to disability inclusion is largely absent.¹²² For example, research on the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited has found that although companies are required to submit ESG reports every year and disclose information about corporate social responsibility, the reports seldom mention the issue of the employment of persons with disabilities.¹²³

accountability mechanisms to further drive disability disclosure.¹²⁴

A recent study by Disability:IN and the Thomson Reuters Foundation found that although many of the countries included in the analysis require corporate board diversity disclosure, most did not include disability in the requirements. Moreover, they found that the market is primarily driving board-level disability disclosure. Based on the findings of the report, countries are urged to implement legal frameworks and



Table 1
Guidance and Laws Governing Corporate Board Diversity and Disability Worldwide

	Guidance on Diversity Disclosure	Guidance on Disability Disclosure	Laws Requiring Diversity Disclosure	Laws Requiring Disability Disclosure	Are these Laws Enforced	Any Oversight Mechanism
Australia	✓	✓				✓
Brazil	✓		✓		✓	✓
Canada	✓	✓	✓	✓ ^o	✓	✓
China	✓		✓			
European Union	✓		✓		✓	✓
France	✓	✓				✓
Germany	✓		✓		✓	✓
India	✓		✓		✓	✓
Japan			✓		✓	✓
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

^o Laws requiring disability disclosure apply to federal public issuers only

Source: Disability:IN and Thomson Reuters Foundation, “Global boardroom diversity: legal findings on disability and diversity” (2023). Available at <https://disabilityin.org/resource/global-boardroom-diversity-legal-findings-on-disability-diversity/>

¹²⁰ Mark Uhrynyuk, Wei Na Sim and Joey C.Y. Lee, “South Korea’s FSS introduces new ESG rating guidelines to enhance transparency”, Eye on ESG, Mayer Brown, 27 January 2023. Available at <https://www.eyeesg.com/2023/01/south-koreas-fss-introduces-new-esg-rating-guidelines-to-enhance-transparency/>

¹²¹ Bank of Thailand, “Joint statement sustainable finance initiatives for Thailand”, joint press release, 18 August 2021. Available at <https://www.bot.or.th/en/news-and-media/news/news-20210818.html>

¹²² Valuable 500, “Let’s discuss: Disability inclusion and ESG”, 4 May 2023. Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/spotlight/lets-discuss-disability-inclusion-and-esg>.

¹²³ Zhijian Guan, Mingdie Xu and Junjie Xu, “Workplace inclusion: the role of entrepreneur in disability employment”, City University of Hong Kong, 16 March 2020 [in Chinese]. Available at <https://www.cityu.edu.hk/cshk/files/PolicyPapers/CSHKPP16-CHI.pdf> (accessed on 25 July 2023). Taking 2018 as an example, among the 50 companies that constitute the constituent stocks of the Hang Seng Index, only six companies mentioned the number or proportion of employees with a disability in their ESG Reports and only two companies mentioned the installation of facilities to assist employees with disabilities in office work.

¹²⁴ Thomson Reuters Foundation and Disability:IN, “Global boardroom diversity: legal findings on disability & diversity”, executive summary (2023). Available at <https://disabilityin-bulk.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/TRF+DisabilityIN+ENE+508.pdf>

One positive example is the principles outlined by the Australian Securities Exchange Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations, which emphasize the need for listed entities to have and openly disclose a diversity policy, specifically one that commits to the inclusion of all individuals, including those with disabilities.¹²⁵

Similarly, DEI policies offer an opportunity for Governments to highlight the importance of the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Countries, such as Australia,¹²⁶ Japan,¹²⁷ New Zealand,¹²⁸ and the United States,¹²⁹ have implemented various policies and laws to promote DEI, such as affirmative action programmes, anti-discrimination laws and measures to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Business and Human Rights Action Plans

A recent report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Fostering Disability Inclusion and Business Integrity in ASEAN, also points to the potential for national action plans on business and human rights to serve as a tool for disability-inclusive business, particularly related to employment. Several member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are in the process of developing initial national action plans on business and human rights and Thailand is developing its second plan.¹³⁰

The Government of Japan adopted the Business and Human Rights Action Plan, 2020–2025 with the aim to promote respect for human rights in the context of business activities. The Plan was developed in response to emerging trends of businesses becoming more aware of human rights based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which were practised for the organization of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic games. It calls for awareness-raising actions on universal design, accessibility, employment of persons with disabilities and preferential

contracting for persons with disabilities in collaboration with the Cabinet office, ministers and agencies responsible for social welfare and labour, tourism, land and infrastructure and legal affairs. The Plan considers that working on these elements will give Japanese companies a competitive edge in the global market.¹³¹

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

Global networks and CSOs provide ecosystem support to the development of disability-inclusive business practices. Beyond leadership commitments and development, they support the realization of the value chain benefits from the inclusion of persons with disabilities by facilitating the sharing of practical lessons learned and collective education across business sectors.

The ILO Global Business and Disability Network, set up in 2010, serves as a worldwide platform for business-to-business support and peer-to-peer learning on disability issues. It aims to encourage companies of all types to adopt disability-inclusive employment policies and practices. Along with promoting the sharing of knowledge through global and regional conferences, webinars and business-to-business round tables on technical topics, this employer-led network provides technical advisory services and facilitates connections between national-level business initiatives, organizations of persons with disabilities and other global and local partners.¹³² In Asia and the Pacific, 10 national business and disability networks have been created to enhance experience-sharing among member companies; most of them are hosted by employers' federations. Except for one national business and disability network, the national networks in the region are ILO Global Business and Disability Network members.¹³³

For example, the Australian Network on Disability aims to foster disability-inclusive cultures within the

¹²⁵ ASX Corporate Governance Council, Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations, 4th edition, Australian Securities Exchange (ASX). Available at <https://www.asx.com.au/documents/asx-compliance/cgc-Wapprinciples-and-recommendations-fourth-edn.pdf>

¹²⁶ Australian Public Service Commission, "Diversity and inclusion", *In State of the Service Report 2019–2020*, Chapter 3: Your APS (Canberra, 2020).

¹²⁷ Japan, "Diversity and inclusion", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.japan.go.jp/diversity/index.html>

¹²⁸ New Zealand, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, "Equity, diversity and inclusion capability fund", 13 February 2023. Available at <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/funding-information-and-opportunities/investment-funds/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-capability-fund/>

¹²⁹ See United States Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, 25 June 2021. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/25/executive-order-on-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce/>; United States Agency for International Development, "Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (n.d.)" Available at <https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/diversity-equity-inclusion>; United States Office of Personal Management, "Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility." Available at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility/>

¹³⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Fostering disability inclusion & business integrity in ASEAN" (2023). Available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/fostering-disability-inclusion-and-business-integrity-asean>

¹³¹ Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Business and Human Rights Action Plan (2020–2025) [in Japanese]. Available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100104121.pdf> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹³² ILO Global Business and Disability Network, "Mission", web page. Available at <https://www.businessanddisability.org/mission/> (accessed on 18 March 2023).

¹³³ International Labour Organization, *EmployAbility – Tapping the Potential of Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific – A Guide for Employers* (Geneva, 2022).

Box 6

Asia and the Pacific national business and disability networks

Country	ILO Global Business and Disability Network
Australia	Australian Network on Disability
Bangladesh	Bangladesh Business and Disability Network
China	China Chapter of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network
India	India Business Disability Network
Indonesia	Indonesia Business and Disability Network
New Zealand	New Zealand Disability Employer's Network
Pakistan	Pakistan Business Disability Network
Philippines	Philippine Business and Disability Network
Sri Lanka	Employers' Network on Disability

Source: ILO Global Business and Disability Network, "National business and disability networks". Available at <https://www.businessand-disability.org/members/>

corporate, governmental and non-profit sectors in Australia. It serves as a platform for sharing insights and techniques to create accessible and inclusive workplaces. The Access and Inclusion Index tool enables organizations to gauge and enhance their inclusivity initiatives. Through its award-winning programmes, the Network facilitates meaningful engagements among students, job seekers with disabilities and disability-confident organizations, thus creating a conducive ecosystem for mutual growth and understanding. Additionally, its significant representation of more than 350 members in policy dialogues underscores its pivotal role as a conduit between disability-inclusive enterprises and governmental decision-making.¹³⁴

The ILO Global Business and Disability Network has also developed a self-assessment tool, which is designed to aid local businesses in setting priorities for actions targeting disability inclusion. The tool focuses on the inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees, potential future employees, customers and stakeholders, enabling business leaders to create a disability-confident and inclusive corporate culture. The tool is free and confidential, and users receive a report indicating progress and priorities.¹³⁵

Companies that understand and are committed to the business case for disability, such as members of Valuable

500, have made noticeable progress in mainstreaming disability considerations into their business operations. Launched at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in 2019, Valuable 500, is now the largest community of global CEOs dedicated to promoting disability inclusion in their businesses. The network has achieved its initial goal of getting 500 multinational organizations to publicly pledge their commitment to disability inclusion, sparking a movement towards a new era of disability inclusion in the business world. With a combined revenue that exceeds \$8 trillion, market capital of \$23 trillion and a workforce of 22 million employees worldwide, the network seeks to establish a community that supports and empowers its members to systematically transform their businesses to be disability-inclusive.¹³⁶

The Disability Equality Index of Disability:IN is a disability rating tool designed to assist businesses in advancing inclusion practices. Developed jointly with the American Association of People with Disabilities, the tool helps companies see how they compare with other companies and identify areas for improvement based on six categories: culture and leadership; enterprise-wide access; employment practices (highest weighting); community engagement; supplier diversity; and non-U.S. operations (not weighted). In 2023, 485 companies were evaluated using the tools, including more than 70 per cent of Fortune 100 companies and almost 50 per cent of Fortune 500 companies. The Disability Equality Index has initially focused

¹³⁴ Australian Network on Disability, "How we can help you" (n.d.). Available at <https://and.org.au/> (accessed on 9 October 2023).

¹³⁵ International Labour Organization, "ILO GBDN Self-Assessment", 9 November 2022. Available at <https://www.businessanddisability.org/news/ilo-gbdn-self-assessment/> (accessed on October 7, 2023).

¹³⁶ Valuable 500, "Valuable truth report 2022: tracking progress in global business disability inclusion" (2022). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Valuable-Truth-2022.pdf> (accessed on 13 October 2023).

on United States-based companies, however, a pilot initiative for a global disability equality index was completed in 2021–2022 and the global disability equality index benchmark is scheduled to be officially launched in 2024.¹³⁷

Business Disability International was founded by Susan Scott-Parker OBE, Barclays, GSK and Infosys in 2016, to facilitate a dialogue involving leaders in business and persons with disabilities around the world. It offers advice to global companies, governments, disability organizations and international development bodies seeking to engage the private sector as a valued stakeholder and potential partner of persons with disabilities.

This consortium enables businesses to position disability equality as an economic and ethical imperative. It supports the development of national disability business networks and actively collaborates with the world's two global leadership networks – Valuable 500 and the ILO Global Business and Disability Network. In 2021, Business Disability International launched the “Disability Ethical? AI” campaign to alert the world that unless the unintended consequences of AI-enabled human resources technology are urgently addressed, hundreds of millions of persons with disabilities worldwide face lifetimes of economic and societal exclusion.¹³⁸

The Return on Disability Group, created and managed by Rich Donovan, who has cerebral palsy, provides data-driven insights and designs that leverage disability (identity and functionality) to help clients “delight” their customers and employees as well as comply with global regulations pertaining to persons with disabilities. Its services include the creation of consumer and employee insights gathering/analysis, and product and experience design. These services aim to help companies adjust their products and improve customer and employee experiences by teaching them how to embed insights and models into their design process for scale and continuous improvement. In addition, the Return on Disability Group provides global and country analysis, which benchmarks the actions of private sector companies, to reveal the value that disability inclusion can bring to corporate profitability.¹³⁹

Development finance institutions are also promoting the leadership of persons with disabilities within the business ecosystem. **The Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

engages with organizations of persons with disabilities as a way of integrating thematic and country-level concerns into programming, including the support for disability-inclusive businesses. ADB hosts the NGO and Civil Society Center, which provides opportunities for leaders of the disability community to participate in the Bank's country-level policies and co-create guidance for its staff on how to engage with organizations of persons with disabilities.¹⁴⁰

Developing leadership programmes for persons with disabilities is critical to increasing disability inclusion across all sectors. There are many examples of programmes led by CSOs across Asia and the Pacific. For example, the Australian Disability Leadership Institute, “established by disability leaders for disability leaders”, offers leadership development programmes for future leaders, activists and CEOs¹⁴¹ and the Duskin Institute¹⁴² and the Tomodachi Disability leadership programme¹⁴³ in Japan are designed specifically to support young persons with disabilities. Valuable 500 also has an initiative focused on “Generation Valuable”, a high-level leadership programme and mentoring opportunity for persons with disabilities.¹⁴⁴

4.2 Operations: product and service development

The development of products and services is the primary function of the business value chain. Businesses are starting to realize the potential of the market for accessible goods and services. The concepts of accessibility and universal design are key to the development of better products and services, which, in turn, often deliver market share and greater profitability for disability-inclusive businesses. Governments are critical in setting detailed standards for accessibility across physical and digital environments. The wider ecosystem, which includes development finance institutions, also plays a major role in ensuring that standards of accessibility are met in the projects that they finance across countries.

Accessibility and universal design

Integrating universal design principles to create accessible products and services is critical for companies to maximize their value chains. **Megatrends in the Asia-Pacific region, such as perhaps ageing populations and climate change, are pushing companies to do more to gain a better understanding of future market needs and how accessible products and services can pro-**

¹³⁷ For more information, see <https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/disability-equality-index/>

¹³⁸ See Business Disability International, web page. Available at <https://www.businessdisabilityinternational.org/>; Disability Ethical? AI, web page. Available at <https://disabilityethicalai.org/>

¹³⁹ Return on Disability Group, “Designing delight from disability” (n.d.). Available at <https://www.rod-group.com/> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹⁴⁰ Asian Development Bank, *Highlights of ADB's Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations 2021: Celebrating 20 years of the NGO and Civil Society Center* (Manila, ADB, September 2021).

¹⁴¹ Disability Leadership Institute, “The Disability Leadership Institute has been established by disability leaders for disability leaders”, web page (n.d.). Available at <https://disabilityleaders.com.au>

¹⁴² Duskin Leadership Training in Japan, “About us”, web page. Available at <https://www.normanet.ne.jp/~duskin/english/index.html>

¹⁴³ TOMODACHI Initiative (n.d.) “About us”, web page. Available at <https://usjapantomodachi.org/about-us>

¹⁴⁴ Valuable 500, “Leadership”. Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/our-work/leadership> (accessed on 17 July 2023).

wide value-creation opportunities. This is important across industry sectors as the benefits of good design are experienced by everyone.

Globally, significant progress has been made in the development of accessibility standards and the identification of inclusive design principles. Spanning the

physical and digital experience, these standards can be used by the public and private sectors to improve the consumer experience of persons with disabilities and the wider community. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has numerous standards on accessibility, including in relation to tourism, the built environment and ergonomics.¹⁴⁵

Box 7 Thinking about accessibility

Accessibility applies to the built environment and digital technologies. It also applies to the development of communication, consultation and engagement strategies and tools.

Accessibility can refer to the following:

- Private and public buildings, urban areas and rural settlements, refugee camps, squares, natural spaces, open facilities like stadiums and markets, playgrounds, riverbanks, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.
- Land, air, sea, river and lake means of transportation, private and public and formal and informal (buses, trains, taxis, tuk-tuks, rickshaws, paratransit, ferries and planes); the related infrastructure (such as stations, airports and bus stops); and the connective system that allows them to circulate (road network, bridges and underpasses, sidewalks).
- Written communication (books, newspapers, leaflets); graphic communication (banners, posters, way-finding panels in buildings); verbal and mixed communication (meetings, conferences, workshops, radio, televisions); and adapted communication techniques (sign language interpretation, easy-to-read documents, braille printing).
- Websites, mobile applications, files and software, information technology equipment, audio-visuals, telecommunication and specific digital aids (screen readers, captions and subtitles, adapted keyboards and mouses).

Source: World Bank, "The World Bank technical note on accessibility", 20 April 2022. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability/publication/technical-note-on-accessibility>

Key to accessibility is the concept of universal design, which is **"the design of products, environments, programs, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design."**¹⁴⁶ Universal design promotes independence, dignity and the social inclusion of everyone, regardless of their age, gender, disability, or socioeconomic status in society. Seven principles are considered in the design of inclusive products and services (box 8).

When universal design and assistive technology are not available or useful, the provision of **reasonable accommodation** on a case-by-case basis enables the participation of individual persons with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation refers to necessary and appropriate modification and adjustment, not imposing

a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others all human rights and fundamental freedoms.¹⁴⁷ Reasonable accommodation is particularly relevant for service-oriented businesses, where universal design and assistive technology may not always be possible.



¹⁴⁵ For more information see International Organization for Standardization, "Accessibility", web page. Available at <https://www.iso.org/news/tag.html?tag=accessibility>

¹⁴⁶ See A/RES/61/106, article 2, definition.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Box 8

Universal design principles

Principle 1: Equitable use

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Principle 2: Flexibility in use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Principle 4: Perceptible information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Principle 5: Tolerance for error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Principle 6: Low physical effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use

Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of the user's body size, posture or mobility.

Source: Ireland, National Disability Authority, "The 7 Principles", web page. Available at <https://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/#p1>

The provision of reasonable accommodation empowers persons with and without disabilities by creating an accessible, safe and inclusive workplace beneficial for all. It enables the career progression and development of employees in the organization. The lack of appropriate accommodation could explain the underperformance of workers with disabilities in some circumstances.¹⁴⁸ Research also shows that most workplace accommodation incurs a near-zero expense or a one-time cost of only \$500,¹⁴⁹ while the positive ripple effects are substantial.

Business

The following business sectors were identified as showing particular promise for the application of universal design and accessibility, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Digital design and technology

Accessible digital design is critical across all sectors, as data show that consumers do not click on inaccessible websites. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, it is calculated that businesses lose up to 2 billion British pound sterling (£) a month by ignoring accessibility.¹⁵⁰ To date, 75 per cent of the companies on the London Stock Exchange do not meet basic levels of web accessibility, and, as a consequence, miss out on more than \$147 million in revenue.¹⁵¹ Legal cases involving digital accessibility rose by 181 per cent from 2017 to 2018, as companies offering digital products became increasingly vulnerable to extremely expensive and damaging legal battles.¹⁵²

The web content accessibility guidelines 1.0, first defined in 2008 by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), is

¹⁴⁸ Silvia Bonaccio and others, "The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle: employer concerns and research evidence", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 35 (2020) pp. 135–138.

¹⁴⁹ Job Accommodation Network, "Costs and benefits of accommodation", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm> (accessed on 22 March 2023).

¹⁵⁰ Purple, "The Purple Pound – Infographic" (n.d.). Available at <https://wearepurple.org.uk/the-purple-pound-infographic/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁵¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Factsheet on persons with disabilities". Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁵² 3MEDIWEB, "The truth behind 2018's massive increase in web accessibility lawsuits", 3Play Media, 12 June 2019, updated 13 July 2021. Available at <https://www.3playmedia.com/blog/2018sweb-accessibility-lawsuits/> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

Box 9

What is web accessibility?

Web accessibility means that websites, tools and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. More specifically, people can do the following:

- Perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the web
- Contribute to the web

Web accessibility encompasses all disabilities that affect access to the Web, including, for example:

- Auditory
- Cognitive
- Neurological
- Physical
- Speech
- Visual

Web accessibility also benefits people without disabilities, for example:

- People using mobile phones, smart watches, smart televisions, and other devices with small screens or different input modes
- Older people with changing abilities due to ageing
- People with “temporary disabilities” such as a broken arm or who are unable to see well due to lost glasses
- People with “situational limitations”, such as in bright sunlight or in an environment where they cannot listen to audio
- People using a slow Internet connection or who have limited or expensive bandwidth

Source: W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, “Introduction to web accessibility” (February 2005, updated 31 March 2022). Available at <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>.

currently in the third iteration. The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative develops technical specifications, guidelines, techniques, and supporting resources that describe accessibility solutions. These are considered international standards for web accessibility; for example, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 is also an ISO standard: ISO/IEC 40500.

The private sector has taken the lead in the implementation of digital accessibility standards through the integration of universal design principles into their products and services. Providing accessible consumer interfaces is a critical task. For example, global technology giants, such as Apple and Google, are integrating accessibility into their products and services to ensure they meet the needs of their consumers, both retail and business.

Apple engineers have been innovators in the accessibility space. They have been working with the disability community to integrate different functions into their prod-

uct development. Their initial work on VoiceOver on the iPhone, the world’s first gesture-based screen reader, ensures that accessibility features are above the fold on menu selections.¹⁵³

“Assistive Access” is designed for persons with cognitive disabilities by streamlining interfaces across products and making it easier to communicate and share.¹⁵⁴ The magnifier tool already allows blind users and users with low vision to use their phones to locate doors, people and signs and is to be complimented by a feature called “point and speak”, which will use the device camera and a scanner to help interact with physical objects that have several text labels. This will be available in Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Ukrainian.¹⁵⁵ Google has invested in accessibility from its inception. With vision statements from its 2004 international public offering (IPO) letter “Committed to significantly improving the lives of as many people as possible”¹⁵⁶ to the updated

¹⁵³ Apple Inc., “iPhone user guide”, Apple support (2023). Available at <https://support.apple.com/en-us/guide/iphone/iph3e2e4367/ios> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁵⁴ Apple Inc., “Apple introduces new features for cognitive accessibility, along with Live Speech, Personal Voice, and Point and Speak in Magnifier”, Press release, 16 May 2023. Available at <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2023/05/apple-previews-live-speech-personal-voice-and-more-new-accessibility-features/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Google, “Committed to significantly improving the lives of as many people as possible: 2004 Founders’ IPO Letter”, Google’s Commitments (n.d.). Available at <https://about.google/commitments/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

mission statement “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful”,¹⁵⁷ there has been a consistent understanding of the importance of how inclusive design is better for all. The company’s Android operating system, which works across devices, integrates features that are critical for persons with disabilities and useful for everyone. Accessibility features are integrated across all their software products from search to email to Google Assistant, the mobile and home digital assistant. Similar to Apple, Microsoft and other tech giants, Google works directly with persons with disabilities to innovate and build these tools and products. Google has opened a number of “accessibility discovery centers” to ensure it continues to build products and services that meet the needs of consumers and businesses.¹⁵⁸

In an analysis of its user data, entertainment company Netflix found that 40 per cent of its viewing hours across the globe were accompanied by subtitles. The company has introduced a more customizable solution to give users more choice and control over the size and style collection. This is in addition to brightness and font size controls, ensuring integration with screen reading software and activating voice commands, which make the consumer experience more accessible and forms a key part of its value proposition.¹⁵⁹

Kindle, an e-reader designed and marketed by Amazon, is also an example of accessibility in technology, particularly for individuals with visual impairments. The Kindle is equipped VoiceView feature, which reads aloud menu options, thereby enabling blind and individuals with print-disabilities to navigate the device.¹⁶⁰ For example, Kindle Fire Tablets are compatible with Bluetooth refreshable braille displays through the Amazon BrailleBack app, and the built-in VoiceView screen reader.¹⁶¹

Across Asia and the Pacific, there are numerous examples of disability-inclusive businesses, both large and small, that have developed accessible digital solutions for consumers and business-to-business solutions to improve accessibility.

Akbank, a multinational banking and financial services company based in Türkiye, prioritizes accessibility and inclusivity in its products and services, offering accessible digital banking platforms and mobile applications with such features as screen reader compatibility, adjustable font sizes and simplified navigation.¹⁶² By providing accessible digital communication channels and accommodating diverse customer needs, Akbank ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to its services.¹⁶³

The Okayama Housou, also known as OHK, a local TV broadcast company, based in Okayama prefecture, Japan, made an executive commitment to inclusive broadcasting as a business strategy, particularly through providing sign language interpretation on general TV programmes. Built on its 30-year history of producing Japanese sign language TV programmes on social welfare programmes, Okayama Housou encourages companies to fund the provision of sign language interpretation for TV programmes. For example, recently, the Toyota Corporation funded the provision of sign language for a high-speed auto race. In addition, a local soy sauce company bought a sign language provision service from OHK after it produced a TV commercial. Moreover, OHK sells “Shuwa Q” QR codes, which leads consumers to videos with a sign language description of a site, such as a restaurant or tourist destination. For these ongoing efforts, Okayama Housou was included in the Zero Project awards list in 2022.^{164,165}



¹⁵⁷ Google, “Our approach to search”, Google Search - How search works (n.d.). Available at <https://www.google.com/search/howsearchworks/our-approach/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁵⁸ Rachael Bleakley, “The Accessibility Discovery Centre is open for collaboration”, Google Europe Blog, 2 December 2022. Available at <https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/united-kingdom/the-accessibility-discovery-centre-is-open-for-collaboration/amp/> (accessed on 26 July 2023).

¹⁵⁹ Netflix, “Accessibility on Netflix”, Netflix Help Center. Available at <https://help.netflix.com/en/node/116022> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Chidi, “8 Amazon Kindle accessibility features worth exploring”, MakeUseOf, 3 August 2023, Available at <https://www.makeuseof.com/amazon-kindle-accessibility-features/#:-:text=Let%20Your%20Kindle%20Read%20the%20Screen%20for%20You%20With%20VoiceView&text=It%20reads%20the%20book%20aloud,with%20limited%20or%20no%20sight> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁶¹ Amazon, “Use a braille display with your fire tablet”, Available at <https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=201829370> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁶² Akbank, “2020 Akbank Integrated Report” (2020) p. 140. Available at https://www.akbankinvestorrelations.com/en/images/pdf/akbank_integrated_report_2020.pdf (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁶³ Akbank, “Our understanding of diversity and inclusion” (n.d.). Available at https://www.akbankinvestorrelations.com/en/images/pdf/Akbank_Diversity_and_inclusion.pdf (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁶⁴ 8OHK, “Sign language broadcasting as a business model: interest the World Media Conference, 4 June 2023. Available at <https://www.ohk.co.jp/data/26291/pages/>

¹⁶⁵ Okayama Broadcasting System, “Sign language broadcasting as a business model to ‘leave no one behind’... the world is interested in OHK’s initiatives”, 6 June 2023. Available at <https://www.fnn.jp/articles/-/537816>

Box 10 Zero Project

The Zero Project is dedicated to the pursuit of a world without barriers. Its primary mission is centred on finding and sharing solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of all persons with disabilities.¹⁶⁶ A collaborative initiative, in partnership with the United Nations Office in Vienna, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Essl Foundation the Zero Project takes a pioneering approach by identifying, showcasing and disseminating innovative solutions that enhance the quality of life and legal entitlements of persons with disabilities.¹⁶⁷ The Zero Project is a worldwide endeavour that embodies the transformative spirit of the CRPD, as it strives to dismantle obstacles and forge a more equitable future.¹⁶⁸

The focus of the Project's research and awards rotates every four years between independent living and political participation, education, employment and accessibility. Additionally, ICT is covered every year. Through peer-reviewed research and selection, the Project identifies ground-breaking solutions that break down the barriers hindering individuals with disabilities from participating fully in society. The ICT solutions encompass areas, such as gaming, translation tools, orientation systems and digital libraries. All of the previous winners are included in the comprehensive Zero Project database.¹⁶⁹

The solutions identified by the Zero Project can serve as inspiration for governments, the private sector and ecosystem actors. By spotlighting solutions that promote accessible technologies and support systems, the project advances the mission of creating a more inclusive society and also highlights the business potential inherent in catering to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. This intricate interplay underscores the mutual benefits of innovation, empowerment and economic growth, positioning the Zero Project as a key resource for promoting disability inclusivity within the business realm.

Source: Zero Project, the Essl Foundation. For more information, see <https://zeroproject.org>

Tourism

Tourism is a major driver of economic growth across the Asia Pacific region. However, recent data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicate that tourism is rebounding at a slower rate than before the pandemic. The World Tourism Organization articulated recommendations on accessible tourism in 2013, which have provided the benchmark and standards for the travel and tourism sector and they have recently developed a new set of inclusive recovery guides in partnership with the European Network for Accessible Tourism, the ONCE Foundation of Spain and Travability from Australia. The guides provide updated recommendations for public and private sector actors on how to put inclusivity at the centre of tourism recovery plans, which is critical for post-pandemic recovery.

There are many examples of disability-inclusive businesses in the travel sector across the Asia Pacific region, ranging from transportation companies to hotels and accommodation providers and also including tour companies that specifically cater to persons with disabilities.

All Nippon Airways (ANA), a member of Valuable 500, has demonstrated a commitment to inclusive and universal service for individuals with disabilities at airports across the Asia Pacific region.¹⁷⁰ The company provides a range of airport wheelchairs, including reclining and larger wheelchairs, to cater to customers with different needs. It also ensures smooth boarding through passenger boarding lifts, wheelchair stair lifts and boarding ramps. In response to customer feedback, the airline introduced assisted stretchers at airports without passenger boarding lifts, enabling customers requiring assistance to embark and disembark with ease. Additionally, its Sorapass Book, designed with input from medical specialists, aids customers, including those with developmental disabilities, in understanding the air travel experience through visual guides. The All Nippon Airways Disability Desk assists more than 1,500 customers annually, addressing inquiries and providing the necessary support and assistive devices.¹⁷¹

In addition to its ongoing assistance for persons with reduced mobility, Changi Airport in Singapore offers assis-

¹⁶⁶ Zero Project, "Solutions for a world with zero barriers" (n.d.). Available at <https://zeroproject.org/> (accessed on 20 August 2023).

¹⁶⁷ Zero Project, "Zero Project and the United Nations" (n.d.). Available at <https://zeroproject.org/about/the-zero-project-network> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Zero Project, "Solutions for a world with zero barriers" (n.d.). Available at <https://zeroproject.org/> (accessed on 20 August 2023).

¹⁷⁰ All Nippon Airways (ANA), "ANA's approach", ANA official website (n.d.). Available at <https://www.ana.co.jp/en/us/travel-information/customers-with-disabilities/ana-approach/> (accessed on 26 July 2023).

¹⁷¹ All Nippon Airways (ANA), "Promoting diversity & inclusion", web page (n.d.). Available at https://www.ana.co.jp/group/en/csr/human_resources/promotion_diversity/ (accessed on 18 July 2023).

tance for persons with non-apparent disabilities, such as autism, anxiety or dementia. The services include an interactive social story that enables passengers to familiarize themselves with the airport processes, the option to wear a lanyard that alerts staff that the traveller may need extra support and staff trained to assist persons with these disabilities.^{172,173}

Amilla Maldives Resort and Residences, the world's first IncluCare Verified resort, has transformed its luxury accommodations to ensure total guest inclusion, catering to individuals with additional mobility, sensory, or cognitive requirements.¹⁷⁴ Its commitment to accessibility and inclusivity is leading the way in creating an inclusive travel experience in Maldives and inspiring legislative change for access and inclusion provision.¹⁷⁵

Moreover, Globe4all goes beyond offering accessible travel services by training persons with disabilities to become tourist guides, creating employment opportunities and promoting inclusivity in the tourism industry. The company's commitment to disability inclusion and empowerment has earned it recognition, including the Zero Project Award and being named a finalist in the 2020 Asia Pacific Social Innovation Partnership Award.¹⁷⁶

Across the region, there are also good examples of trade associations supporting the tourism sector's expansion into disability-inclusive businesses. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), based in Thailand, is a membership association dedicated to promoting travel and tourism in the Asia-Pacific region. It provides a platform for networking, collaboration and knowledge exchange among industry stakeholders, including CSOs, governments, and businesses. PATA also actively advocates equal opportunity and non-discrimination in travel, ensuring that all travellers, including those with disabilities, are treated fairly and without harassment. Through their research, events and training programmes, PATA works to create a more inclusive and accessible tourism industry for everyone.¹⁷⁷

Financial Services

To date, persons with disabilities have been underserved

by banks and financial institutions. The results of a 2019 Disability and Development report of the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs indicated that in some developing countries between 8 and 64 per cent of persons with disabilities considered banks to be inaccessible. Meanwhile, crowdsourced data from developed countries indicate that 28 per cent of banks are not accessible.¹⁷⁸ Financial services organizations can expand their customer base by making their products and services accessible.

In an IFC report on inclusive banking,¹⁷⁹ some emerging practices across a set of global banks were identified:

- Accessibility of in-person facilities and services for customers with disabilities;
- Training and capacity-building of branch staff to support customers with disabilities;
- Collection of feedback to support continuous improvement in service delivery;
- Inclusive design in product development and digital platform;
- Removal of exclusionary language in product descriptions.

The Australian Banking Association has developed a code of practice and accessibility principles for banking services to ensure that all banking products and services are accessible to all users. The principles of the code of practice cover the design and delivery of general banking services, websites, mobile banking services, physical terminals, automated teller machines (ATMs), electronic funds transfer at point of sale (EFTPOS), telephone banking, and voice-based and AI services and authentication.¹⁸⁰

The State Bank of Pakistan has a specific "policy for financial inclusion of persons with disabilities" in place. This policy covers the inclusion of customers and employees. It requires banks to have a board-approved policy framework and strategy document for the inclusion of customers and employees with disabilities; create accessible infrastructure, products and services; build capacity by increasing awareness and delivering training, enhance their employment, retention and career development plans for persons with disabilities; and provide financial literacy

¹⁷² Changi Airport Group, "Special assistance: extra help is always at hand to make your travel experience extra comfortable", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.changiairport.com/en/airport-guide/special-assistance.html#anchorAssistanceforPeoplewithInvisibleDisability>.

¹⁷³ Valuable 500, "Technological innovation for disability inclusion: the Value 500 global trends report", Issue 8 (2022). Available at https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Valuable-500-Global-Trends-Report-Issue-8_Revised.pdf

¹⁷⁴ IncluCare is a United Kingdom-based organization that offers inclusive and accessible travel training, assessment, and accreditation for the tourism industry. For more information see <https://www.incluCare.com>

¹⁷⁵ Amilla Maldives Resort and Residences, "Our accessibility commitment", web page. Available at <https://amilla.com/inclusive-hospitality/> (accessed on 18 July 2023).

¹⁷⁶ Globe4all, "Tourism for all –What kind of traveler are you?", web page. Available at <https://globe4all.net/en> (accessed on 18 July 2023).

¹⁷⁷ Pacific Asia Travel Association, "Sustainability Resource Centre", web page. Available at <https://src.pata.org/> (accessed on 18 July 2023).

¹⁷⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities, United Nations publication, Sales No. 19.IV.4 (2019). Available at

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/UN-flagship-report-on-disability-and-development.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ International Finance Corporation (IFC), "Inclusive banking: emerging practices to advance the economic inclusion of persons with disabilities", 6 April 2022. Available at <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/202203-inclusive-banking-for-persons-with-disabilities.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ Australian Banking Association, "Every customer counts: accessibility principles for banking services" (November 2018). Available at https://www.ausbanking.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Accessibility_Principles_for_Banking_web.pdf (accessed on August 8, 2023).

and awareness sessions, including on the use of digital services.¹⁸¹

The focus on Fintech and mobile banking by financial institutions, especially those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the virtual new normal has increased the development of accessible, easier to use interfaces. AI and chatbots can contribute towards bridging information gaps by helping customers navigate banking tasks and using conversational interfaces. Contactless payments are useful not only in stores but also at ATMs. Users can choose to interact with familiar devices, such as accessible smartphones, rather than with human interfaces. The use of text-to-speech or speech-enabled digital processes based on natural language processing has important implications for those with sensory limitations. In addition, intuitive tools, such as debit card spending controls and transaction monitoring, can be useful for developing financial independence.¹⁸²

Askari Bank Limited, a large domestic banking and financial services company in Pakistan, has taken significant steps to ensure accessibility in its core financial services. This includes the establishment of model branches with features, such as ramped entrances and service counters with a lower height. The bank also provides customized braille stationary and a "talking" ATM equipped with speech interpretation software whereby all customers can use the machine with audio inputs and outputs. These initiatives demonstrate the bank's commitment to creating a welcoming and accommodating environment for customers with disabilities.¹⁸³

Sunny Bank in Japan offers a web accessibility audit service and provides technical advice for accessible product development to other companies. The services are extended by persons with different types of disabilities, who are contractors of Sunny Bank. The bank also provides regular training for persons with disabilities to be professional web auditors, equipped with technical knowledge and knowledge about international web accessibility technical standards. Demand for these services is increasing as companies in Japan learn more about disability inclusion, including through Japanese anti-discrimination law.¹⁸⁴

The banking sector is a good example of how companies are starting to realize the market potential of customers with disabilities. The Disability 100 Findings Report, a study of the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 companies conducted by Tortoise and Valuable 500, found that the finance sector provided more information on disability in their reporting than other sectors.¹⁸⁵ Developing products and services for this customer segment is under way; the rise of fintech will be important to continue this progress. The finance sector needs to ensure that it works together with governments and other stakeholders to close the digital divide to make it possible for persons with disabilities to take advantage of these services, which contribute towards greater financial inclusion.



Apparel

The global apparel market is forecast to grow in the coming years to reach a market value of \$2 trillion by 2027. The Asia-Pacific region houses some of the largest apparel markets in the world, including, among them, China, India, and Japan. In terms of international trade, China is the largest apparel exporter in the world. In addition, among the top five exporters are Bangladesh and Viet Nam. Many Asian economies have established garment, textiles, and footwear manufacturing industries that contribute considerably to their GDP and the global apparel market.¹⁸⁶

According to Statista, the adaptive clothing market represents a market value of \$300 billion in 2021,

¹⁸¹ State Bank of Pakistan, External Relations Department, "President of Pakistan launches SBP's policy for financial Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities", 21 June 2021. Available at <https://www.sbp.org.pk/press/2021/Pr-21-Jun-2021.pdf> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹⁸² Mastercard, "Technology and financial inclusion for persons with disabilities", 30 May 2022. Available at <https://www.mastercard.com/news/eemea/en/newsroom/press-releases/press-releases/en/2022/may/technology-can-accelerate-financial-inclusion-for-persons-with-disabilities-finds-mastercard-study/inclusion.php#:~:text=Synopsis%3A%20Financial%20inclusion%20for%20persons,their%20financial%20inclusion%20and%20independence> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹⁸³ Askari Bank Limited, "Financial inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs)" (n.d.) Available at <https://askaribank.com/about-us/financial-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-pwds/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁸⁴ Sunny Bank, "Information on web accessibility diagnosis" (n.d.) [in Japanese]. Available at https://sunnybank.jp/business/service/accessibility_diagnosis/

¹⁸⁵ Tortoise Intelligence and Valuable 500, "Disability 100 findings report" (May 2021). Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Tortoise-Disability-100-Report-Valuable500-accessible.pdf>

¹⁸⁶ S. Ganbold, "Apparel market in the Asia-Pacific region – statistics & facts", Statista, 24 July 2023. Available at <https://www.statista.com/topics/10690/apparel-market-in-the-asia-pacific-region/#topicOverview>

with a global growth outlook of 16 per cent by 2024.¹⁸⁷

Adaptive clothing is defined by Disability World as “clothing, garments, and footwear specially designed for persons with physical disabilities, the elderly, the infirm and post-surgery patients”.¹⁸⁸ Integrating accessibility into the function of garments is important to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. Accessibility is also being integrated into mainstream fashion by disability-inclusive businesses that understand the universality of better design.

For example, through investigations with athletes of all abilities, Nike uncovered several design challenges to their traditional sneaker design and introduced fly-ease shoes to the market in 2015¹⁸⁹ and handsfree shoes in 2021.¹⁹⁰ Despite challenges with availability in the beginning, these shoes meet the unmet needs of many persons with disabilities and appeal to other segments in the market.

Uniqlo is a multinational apparel and retail company headquartered in Japan that is practising inclusivity in the apparel industry through its accessible clothing for individuals with disabilities.¹⁹¹ One example of its accessible clothing is a line of garments with easy-to-use designs and adjustments, making dressing and undressing easier for those with physical disabilities. These include features, such as magnetic closures, adjustable straps and expandable waistbands. Uniqlo also addresses sensory issues by creating clothing without tags or seams that prioritize comfort and minimize sensory discomfort for individuals with sensory sensitivities.

In addition to global players, such as Nike and Uniqlo, many smaller businesses are set up to meet the unmet needs of the market in their country. Examples of this in the Asia Pacific region include Zyenika¹⁹² and Move Ability in India¹⁹³ and The Shapes United in Australia.¹⁹⁴

Government

Through the creation and implementation of comprehensive and detailed technical accessibility standards for physical and digital spaces, governments can mandate more accessible designs and encourage the private sector to be more disability-inclusive in the development of products and services.

The Republic of Korea has passed several laws to promote accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities as consumers. The Act on Guarantee of Promotion of Convenience of Persons with Disabilities, the Aged, Pregnant Women and Nursing Mothers (1998)¹⁹⁵ mandates accessibility improvements in various areas, including parks, public buildings and public facilities, such as religious facilities, sales facilities, hospitals, passenger facilities and tourist accommodation facilities.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, in accordance with the Act on the Promotion of the Transportation Convenience for Mobility Disadvantaged Persons (2004), mobility rights for low-mobility citizens in government and individually run transportation services are secured through the installation of convenient mobility equipment. This Act mandates transport business entities to comply with specific standards for the installation of equipment, such as wheelchair lifts, elevators, sidewalks and other facilities designed to enhance the transportation convenience of persons with mobility impairments.¹⁹⁷ Mobile application software accessibility guidelines also have been incorporated into web accessibility standards and a certification system was introduced for ICT product manufacturers to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons. While the Republic of Korea has set statutory grounds for accessibility improvements, some exemptions, such as buildings

¹⁸⁷ P. Smith, “Market value of the inclusive clothing market worldwide from 2019 to 2024”, Statista, 19 December 2022. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/875613/global-adaptive-apparel-market-size/> (accessed on 26 July 2023).

¹⁸⁸ Disabled World, “Adaptive clothing information for disabled and elderly”, 25 March 2015. Available at <https://www.disabled-world.com/assistivedevices/adaptive-clothing.php#:~:text=Adaptive%20clothing%20is%20garments%20and,be%20abrasi ve%20to%20the%20skin> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁸⁹ Edgar Alvarez, “Nike designed a sneaker for people with disabilities”, Engadget, 13 July 2015. Available at <https://www.engadget.com/2015-07-13-nike-zoom-soldier-8-flyease.html> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁹⁰ Nike, “This is Nike GO FlyEase”, 1 February 2021. Available at <https://about.nike.com/en/newsroom/releases/nike-go-flyease-hands-free-shoe> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

¹⁹¹ Valuable 500, “Fast retailing’s Valuable 500 commitment” (n.d.) Available at <https://www.thevaluable500.com/member/fast-retailing> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁹² Salma Nassar, “Clothing is a fundamental right: how Zyenika is making fashion inclusive”, Edited by Annika Ledebøer, Enpact News Archive, 22 March 2022. Available at <https://enpact.org/news-archive/clothing-is-a-fundamental-right-how-zyenika-is-making-fashion-inclusive/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁹³ Moveability, “About us” (n.d.). Available at <https://www.moveability.net/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁹⁴ The Shapes United, “The Shapes United - Fashionable accessible clothing,” Available at <https://www.theshapesunited.com/en-us> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

¹⁹⁵ See Act on Guarantee of Convenience Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, Senior Citizens, Pregnant Women and Nursing Mothers, Act No. 5332 (10 April 1997), amended by Act No. 10220 (2010). Available at https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?lang=ENG&hseq=20818

¹⁹⁶ See Enforcement Decree of the Building Act, Article 2, para 17. Available at https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=33006&type=part&key=34

¹⁹⁷ See Act on Promotion of the Transportation Convenience for Mobility Disadvantaged Persons (2005), amended in 2020. Available at https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=55696&type=part&key=41

that were constructed before 1998 and buildings occupying less than 300 square metres and a lack of cognitive impairment-specific guidelines, remain areas for further attention and improvement.¹⁹⁸

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law in the United States in 1990. As a comprehensive civil rights law, under the Act, discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all aspects of public life, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, and government services is prohibited.¹⁹⁹ To ensure accessibility, the United States Access Board develops and maintains the ADA Accessibility Guidelines, which covers various areas, such as building design and construction, facilities, and transportation systems.²⁰⁰ These guidelines serve as a blueprint for accessible design, significantly influencing inclusive practices in the public and private sectors. As a result, businesses are encouraged to prioritize disability-inclusive development, fostering a more accessible and inclusive society for all.

The city of Akashi, Hyogo prefecture, Japan, has demonstrated its dedication to supporting small to middle-size enterprises by providing reasonable accommodation for customers with disabilities through the "subsidy on the provision of reasonable accommodation" scheme.²⁰¹ This initiative offers financial assistance to retail stores and restaurants to implement accessibility measures, including communication tools, such as braille menus and communication boards; accessibility support equipment, such as portable ramps; and construction improvements for better accessibility. Subsidies of up to 50,000 Japanese yen (¥) (\$370) for communication tools, ¥ 100,000 for accessibility support equipment and ¥ 200,000 for construction enhancements are available. Businesses receiving the subsidy proudly display stickers indicating their commitment to inclusivity, fostering an environment where all customers are welcomed and accommodated. Other municipal governments in Japan have been following suit.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Enabling Masterplan 2025 is a regional initiative that aims to promote inclusivity and accessibility for persons with disabilities.²⁰² Through its efforts to enhance the common consumer protection framework and ensure inclusive legislation, it strives to protect the rights of all consumers, including those with disabilities. Additionally, by pro-

moting a more inclusive economy through tax exemptions on assistive devices, the Masterplan recognizes the importance of enabling persons with disabilities to increase their productivity and participation. It aims to promote inclusivity and accessibility through key initiatives. This includes ensuring universal access to built environments, integrating universal design principles into urban planning, enhancing access to information and campaign materials for persons with disabilities, promoting financial inclusion and developing a strong universal health-care industry. These efforts contribute towards accessible and sustainable infrastructure in political processes, financial services, education and health-care services.

The European Union Accessibility Act is designed to improve the function of the internal market for accessible goods and services across the European Union.²⁰³

It helps businesses by providing common rules on accessibility in the European Union, reducing costs, making cross-border trade easier and providing more market opportunities for accessible products and services. The benefits for persons with disabilities are more accessible products and services in the market at more competitive prices; fewer barriers when accessing transport, education and the labour market; and more jobs in areas in which accessibility expertise is needed.²⁰⁴



¹⁹⁸ ESCAP, *Disability at a Glance 2019: Investing in Accessibility in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, 2019).

¹⁹⁹ United States Access Board, "Americans with Disabilities Act: accessibility standards" (n.d.). Available at <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/> (accessed on July 26, 2023).

²⁰⁰ ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) 1991 edition and later supplements, as amended through September 2002. Available at <https://www.access-board.gov/adaag-1991-2002.html> (accessed on 26 July 2023).

²⁰¹ Akashi City, "Subsidies to support the provision of reasonable accommodation", updated on 24 July 2023 [in Japanese]. Available at https://www.city.akashi.lg.jp/fukushi/fu_soumu_ka/sabetsu/joseikin.html (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²⁰² ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025 – Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Jakarta, 2019).

²⁰³ European Commission, "European Accessibility Act" (n.d.). Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1202> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

Development finance institutions work with governments to support the provision of accessible services. Across the region, ADB has worked with governments' transport and tourism sectors to ensure that services are as inclusive and accessible as possible for persons with disabilities.

The Mumbai Metro Rail Systems Project, in India, included consultations as part of the project development process, to ensure equitable representation and participation by women, older persons and persons with disabilities.²⁰⁵ One of the outputs was an inclusive design of platforms in ticket halls and carriages for persons with disabilities. The project delivered training for staff on how to interact with customers with disabilities and ensured that feedback collected was disaggregated. It also created three types of multimedia information campaigns to demonstrate ease of access, safety, comfort and other advantages, as well as declare "zero tolerance" for sexual and other forms of harassment that could be experienced by older persons, women, children and persons with disabilities.

The Karachi Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Red Line Project in Pakistan will establish universal access and safety features for women, children and persons with disabilities in the 29 BRT stations and buses.²⁰⁶ At least 80 per cent of BRT riders surveyed indicated increased awareness of safe practices through multimedia behaviour campaigns on the safety of all riders, including women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. The project team has reported that "besides the full disability accessibility for the entire bus fleet and all stations, we are also investing in urban space upgrades all along the 28-km corridor. This includes tactile paving tiles for persons with sight disabilities as well as level pedestrian facilities for persons using wheelchairs" and that the implementing agency, TransKarachi, has also committed to accessibility reviews and audits by local disability rights organizations.

In conjunction with the Global Disability Innovation Hub, ADB has worked with the Government of Georgia to develop national-level inclusive design guidelines.²⁰⁷

The guidelines provide universal design solutions, accessibility standards and case studies on inclusive urban development that accommodate the needs of the marginalized, especially persons with disabilities and the elderly.

The Nippon Foundation, in Japan, has developed a barrier-free map application called "Bmaps" to enable persons with disabilities to navigate outdoor spaces freely. This showcases its commitment to creating a foundation for daily life that is inclusive of all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities.²⁰⁸ Additionally, through its collaborative efforts with the PwC Japan Group, it has embarked on an inclusion and diversity project led by an individual with a disability. The project is leveraging digital technologies to address daily challenges faced by persons with disabilities. This endeavour explores digital technologies, such as AI and virtual reality to devise solutions. The inclusion and diversity project exemplifies a concerted effort to develop and commercialize products that significantly enhance societal life for persons with disabilities, showcasing a disability-inclusive approach in product and service development.²⁰⁹

Global groups of CSOs have also been working together to ensure digital tools are accessible for persons with disabilities, improving their access to the online presence of businesses. The DAISY Consortium collaborates with a range of influential stakeholders to advance accessibility and inclusivity for individuals with disabilities. It actively engages with the Accessible Books Consortium, which is led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), to increase the availability of books in accessible formats, such as braille, audio, and e-text, for those with print disabilities.²¹⁰ Moreover, through projects commissioned by the European Union, the consortium has established a European collaboration network to promote good practices and maximize opportunities for inclusive publishing under the European Accessibility Act.²¹¹ Additionally, the DAISY Consortium has been supported by Google.org through a grant to develop essential tools that empower publishers to create digital books accessible to all, regardless of their disabilities.²¹²

G3ict actively collaborates with various United Nations

²⁰⁵ Asian Development Bank, "India: Mumbai Metro Rail Systems Project" (n.d.). Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/49469-007/main> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²⁰⁶ Asian Development Bank, "Pakistan: Karachi Bus Rapid Transit Red Line Project" (n.d.) Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/47279-002/main> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²⁰⁷ Global Disability Innovation Hub, "Asian Development Bank - inclusive tourism" (n.d.) Available at <https://www.disabilityinnovation.com/projects/asian-development-bank-inclusive-tourism> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²⁰⁸ The Nippon Foundation, "Developing the barrier-free map application "Bmaps"(n.d.) Available at https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/what/projects/inclusive_society/bmaps (accessed on 6 October 2023).

²⁰⁹ The Nippon Foundation, "【TNF Journal】 Business's New Relationship with Disabilities (Part 25)", 24 August 2022. Available at <https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/news/articles/2022/20220824-76681.html>

²¹⁰ The DAISY Consortium, "Accessible books consortium" (n.d.). Available at <https://daisy.org/activities/projects/abc/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²¹¹ The DAISY Consortium, "European inclusive publishing forum" (n.d.). Available at <https://daisy.org/activities/projects/european-inclusive-publishing-forum/> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²¹² PR Newswire, "DAISY Consortium wins grant from Google.org", 12 April 2016. Available at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/daisy-consortium-wins-grant-from-googleorg-300250002.html> (accessed on August 10, 2023).

agencies, including ITU and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to advance accessible ICTs for persons with disabilities.²¹³ Notably, G3ict is partnering with ITU to develop the G3ict-ITU e-accessibility Policy Toolkit for Persons with Disabilities, which provides practical guidelines and policy recommendations for governments and organizations.²¹⁴ Additionally, G3ict has launched the Global Charter for accessible ICTs in public procurement and the public procurement online portal, advocating the need to prioritize accessible technologies in public procurement processes.²¹⁵ G3ict also plays a significant role in the global inclusive Smart Cities for All initiative, working with World Enabled to promote accessible urban environments for all individuals, including those with disabilities.²¹⁶ The International Association of Accessibility Professionals, a division of G3ict, extends the Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies credential, as well as domain specific certifications in web accessibility, document accessibility and built environments.

Many organizations of persons with disabilities are actively involved in advocating more inclusive services for persons with disabilities. They have led extensive campaigns and legal challenges to push large multinational companies to become more accessible.²¹⁷ At the local level, organizations of persons with disabilities conduct accessibility audits of businesses and make suggestions for ways to improve accessibility. Telenor Pakistan, in partnership with Special Talent Exchange Program, an organization of persons with disabilities, began to train management and staff in disability equality, leading to improved accessibility in infrastructure and facilities, including information technology services.²¹⁸ Subsequently, Telenor Pakistan has integrated disability inclusion into its company policies.

4.3 Operations: logistics

An important part of the development of an inclusive supply chain is logistics management. **Disability-inclusive businesses look at their logistics strategy (such as transport and warehousing) to ensure that**

persons with disabilities can play an equal part as employees by ensuring that accessibility measures are taken to help dispel myths about the types of jobs a person with disabilities can or cannot do. For example, across Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and the Philippines, driving licenses are granted to motorists with hearing impairments, in accordance with the country's respective transport laws.²¹⁹ Access to transportation jobs is a key opportunity for persons with disabilities. Uber has introduced "Project Beethoven" in the Philippines to help deaf drivers communicate with their passengers.²²⁰ This included adding notifications for the customers that the driver was deaf, changing the notification systems to visual from audio and replacing call driver functions with a text-only messaging system.

In India, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, formulated accessibility standards for persons with disabilities.²²¹ These standards are primarily focused on the development of the cruise and passenger terminal sector in India and transport hubs in ports and harbours. Making ports more accessible offers greater opportunities for persons with disabilities to engage as customers and employees in the logistics sector.

4.4 Operations: marketing and sales

As well as ensuring that all marketing is accessible in various formats, disability-inclusive businesses should include images of persons with diverse disabilities as part of their sales and marketing strategy. Persons with disabilities rarely are featured in product and service marketing and advertising outside of a medical model of disability. A study by Nielsen of its advertising intelligence data, including nearly 450,000 primetime advertisements on broadcast and cable TV in the United States in 2021, showed that only 1 per cent of the advertisements included disability-related themes, visuals or topics.²²²

Common pitfalls around stereotyped ideas and "inspiration" narratives can be avoided by marketing teams

²¹³ G3ict, "United Nations", web page. Available at https://www.g3ict.org/about-us/united_nation (n.d.) (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²¹⁴ International Telecommunication Union, G3ict and Centre for the Internet and Society. "E-accessibility policy toolkit for persons with disabilities" (n.d.). Available at <http://www.e-accessibilitytoolkit.org/> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²¹⁵ G3ict, "Our story" (n.d.). Available at <https://g3ict.org/about-us/our-story> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²¹⁶ G3ict, "G3ict and World Enabled launch smart cities for all toolkit for building accessible & inclusive cities", 3 May 2017. Available at <https://g3ict.org/news-releases/g3ict-world-enabled-launch-smart-cities-for-all-toolkit-for-building-accessible-inclusive-cities> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²¹⁷ For example, Kindle's device previously lacked accessibility features for users who are blind. The National Federation of the Blind in the United States of America sued Arizona State University to prevent them from utilizing a Kindle device for all students because the device was not accessible for blind students. Kindle then updated their product to be accessible. Source: United States, National Federation of the Blind, "National Federation of the Blind commends Amazon on unveiling of new accessible Kindle", 29 July 2010. Available at <https://nfb.org/about-us/press-room/national-federation-blind-commends-amazon-unveiling-new-accessible-kindle>

²¹⁸ For more information on the Special Talent Exchange Programme, see <https://www.step.org.pk/>

²¹⁹ Philkotse, "Deaf drivers: Is the road a place for them?", 16 Aug 2022. Available at <https://philkotse.com/safe-driving/deaf-drivers-is-the-road-a-place-for-them-4399> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ India, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, *Guidelines for Accessibility Standards in Port Sector* (New Delhi, 2022).

²²² Nielsen, "Visibility of disability: Portrayals of disability in advertising", web page, August 2021. Available at <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2021/visibility-of-disability-portrayals-of-disability-in-advertising/>

working with persons with disabilities to ensure that advertising is authentic and integrates disability as a part of many people's lives. For example, Microsoft released its "we all win" advertisement in the 2019 American Football Superbowl featuring the Xbox adaptive controller (developed with the AbleGamers Foundation and other accessibility experts).²²³ ASOS, a global fashion company, worked with a Paralympian to develop and advertise a specific item of accessible clothing.²²⁴ Benefit Cosmetics, introduced Kate Grant, an Irish model with Down syndrome, as a brand ambassador in 2019.²²⁵ Apple released an advertisement called "The Greatest", which shows how Apple products are able to be an integrative and supportive part of people's lives across a variety of disabilities.²²⁶

In addition to these individual examples, Valuable 500 plans to launch a synchronized collective action on the development of inclusive representation key performance indicators for its members. Proctor and Gamble, a member of Valuable 500, has developed a partnership with the World Federation of Advertisers and other key industry partners to promote a drive to achieve 100 per cent advertising accessibility across Europe by 2025. The size of the market of consumers with disabilities, the additional market share for friends and family and the ageing population across Asia and the Pacific provide disability-inclusive businesses with an opportunity to build market share and optimize this role in the value chain.

Box 11 Moving away from charity to recognizing quality

Artwork, goods and items designed by persons with disabilities have been available at social welfare-related fairs and markets for many years. Traditionally, they were often marketed from a charity-based approach, encouraging consumers to buy the products in order to support persons with disabilities, even though the products may not be commercially viable or of good quality.

Inclusive business challenges this notion and promotes disability branding in cases in which products and artwork designed by persons with disabilities are of good quality and market value.

Heralbony is a Japanese company that produces artwork, clothing and household goods designed by persons with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities.²²⁷ The motto of the company is "Let out your exceptionality."²²⁸ The company aims to challenge societal stereotypes and promote the abilities and talents of individuals with disabilities.²²⁹ It strives to create a culture under which the potential of persons with disabilities is recognized, and their high-quality products are sold internationally. This approach contributes to changing perceptions and fosters inclusivity.²³⁰

4.5 Operations: after-sales services

Even though products may be accessible, if the services that enable customers to use them, including installation, training, repair and customer services, are not accessible, then persons with disabilities will not be able to fully utilize them.

Standard Chartered India has launched a sign language service proposition for clients with hearing impairments and is working on making product offering videos in sign language to promote a greater understanding of their products.²³¹ Microsoft has a dedicated disability answer-desk through which customers with diverse disabilities can find specific support for using Microsoft products.²³² A series of

²²³ Kevin Webb, "Microsoft stole the show with its Super Bowl ad about a customizable Xbox controller that lets anyone game", 5 February 2019. Available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/xbox-adaptive-controller-super-bowl-ad-microsoft-2019-2> (accessed 8 August 2023).

²²⁴ Kameron Virk, "Asos praised for disabled-friendly clothes", BBC News, 5 July 2018. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44721385>.

²²⁵ Stephanie Montes, "Benefit's new campaign stars a model with Down syndrome, increasing visibility for those with disabilities", Elite Daily, 15 January 2019. Available at <https://www.elitedaily.com/p/benefit-cosmetics-new-roller-liner-campaign-stars-a-model-with-down-syndrome-15797516> (accessed on 8 August 2023).

²²⁶ Keely Cat-Wells, "Apple's 'The Greatest' continues to win big for creatives and disability communities", Forbes, 25 May 2023. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/keelycatwells/2023/05/25/apples-the-greatest-continues-to-win-big-for-creatives-and-disability-communities/?sh=1ea7b75270cc> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

²²⁷ Tokyo Updates, "HERALBONY's mission: changing society with the art of artists with disabilities (Part 2)", 11 August 2021. Available at <https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-367/> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²²⁸ Tokyo Updates, "HERALBONY's mission: Changing society with the art of artists with disabilities (Part 1)", 5 August 2021. Available at <https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-366/> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²²⁹ Tokyo Updates, "HERALBONY's mission: Changing society with the art of artists with disabilities (Part 2)", 11 August 2021. Available at <https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-367/> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²³⁰ Herbalbony, "About Herbalbony", web page. Available at <https://store.heralbony.jp/pages/about> (accessed on 10 August 2023).

²³¹ Livemint, "Standard Chartered launches sign language service for hearing impaired", 2 November 2021. Available at <https://www.livemint.com/companies/news/standard-chartered-launches-sign-language-service-for-hearing-impaired-11635842645399.html> (accessed on August 10, 2023).

²³² Microsoft, "Accessibility tips", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/disability-answer-desk?activetab=contact-pivot%3aprimararyr8>

disability answer-desk videos are posted on the Microsoft YouTube channel. The company is considering integrating Chat GPT-4 into the disability answer desk.²³³ Microsoft also offers customer support in American sign language through video phone calls.

The airline industry is another example in which companies must ensure that passengers are able to use the tickets they have purchased by making the airport and flight experience accessible. Cathay Pacific Airways provides mobility assistance for passengers in need, including wheelchair services and attendants for those who require them. The cabin crew assists passengers in need to move within the airport area to the boarding gate or aircraft door. Cathay Pacific Airways also provides assistance for visually impaired passengers, including assisting customers using service animals or canes, assisting escort customers for boarding and disembarkation, and priority boarding.²³⁴

4.6 Human resources

Supporting the primary activities (those that go directly into the creation of a product or service) of every disability-inclusive business is a set of robust human resources policies and practices, which cover secondary activities (those that help make primary activities more efficient) of the business value chain and enable the participation of persons with disabilities as employees and also as suppliers/distributors. This section provides a small selection of some good practices from businesses and examples of how government laws and policies support the engagement of persons with disabilities in these roles.

Building on the previous publication: Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific²³⁵ are a number of emerging good practice examples across the Asia-Pacific region in which disability-inclusive businesses, governments and CSOs have developed successful employee strategies to ensure talent is maximized.

Business

Companies that invest in the employment of persons with disabilities often gain an important competitive advantage through their access to a wider talent pool and the realization of greater innovation, productivity and improved staff retention. Employers can support the

inclusion of persons with disabilities across all phases of the employment life cycle, from attracting talent to ensuring inclusive recruitment practices and ensuring that they have consistent strategies and programming in place to engage and retain persons with disabilities as they develop their careers.

There are several critical factors when developing talent management strategies for persons with disabilities. A successful disability-inclusive business ensures that the correct tone is set, starting with top management, about the importance of disability inclusion. A visible external stance on disability inclusion is maintained through board and leadership statements and inclusive imagery in reports and advertising. These executives listen and engage with persons with disabilities by building relationships with disability-focused CSOs and as part of CSR outreach. This process builds internal knowledge and opportunities for staff with disabilities through the creation of employee resource groups. It also entails collecting disaggregated data on persons with disabilities to inform talent management. Recognizing the individual nature of accommodations and ensuring that the organization has policies and practices that provide support across the employee life cycle is critical. The support should start with accessible recruitment and continue throughout the employees' careers to ensure that needs are met speedily and consistently across the organization.

It is important to note that many disabilities are non-apparent, meaning that employers are likely to have employees with disabilities without realizing it. By working towards becoming a more disability-inclusive business, employers can not only attract new talent, but they can also attain better performance among their existing employees by increasing their sense of safety at work and making functions more accessible.

Attracting talent

To ensure an optimum talent pool of candidates for available roles, a disability-inclusive business ensures that its external websites, recruitment campaigns and processes are accessible to all. The following examples from disability-inclusive businesses in Asia and the Pacific showcase emerging practices.²³⁶

Accessible recruitment process

The Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited (ANZ), a multinational banking and financial services

²³³ Valuable 500, "The importance of inclusive leadership", The Valuable 500 global trends report, issue 11 (2023). Available at https://www.thevaluable500.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Valuable-500-Trends-Report-Issue-11-FINAL_a11y.pdf

²³⁴ Cathay Pacific Airways, "Disability and mobility assistance"(n.d.). Available at https://www.cathaypacific.com/cx/en_US/prepare-trip/help-for-passengers/disability-and-mobility-assistance.html (accessed on 11 August 2023).

²³⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), *Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific* United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.F.3 (2021).

²³⁶ For an additional resource on reasonable accommodation during the recruitment process, see Disability:IN, "Applicants and candidates reasonable accommodation infographic- in partnership with Bank of America" (n.d.). Available at <https://disabilityin.org/resource/applicants-candidates-reasonable-accommodation-infographic/>

company based in Australia, demonstrates its commitment to disability inclusion in the recruitment process by providing accessible websites with information about policies and accommodations.²³⁷ The bank strives to meet WC3 standards for website accessibility and ensure that potential employees with disabilities have an inclusive and supportive experience throughout the application, interview and onboarding stages.²³⁸ The ANZ Accessibility and Inclusion Plan (2023–2025) outlines the bank's dedication to creating an open and accessible employment environment for individuals with disabilities, and offers adjustments and support for employees with disabilities, including flexible working hours, assistive technologies, additional training, and access to sign language interpretation services or captioning.²³⁹

Telstra, a telecommunication company in Australia, offers clear instructions on its website about how candidates should contact a recruiter about accommodations from the recruitment to interviews.²⁴⁰ It has worked with the Australian Network on Disability to remove barriers to the recruitment process and is now recognized by the Network as a Disability Confident Recruiter Organization.²⁴¹

Although not as common as some other practices, the Disability:IN 2023 Disability Equality Index indicates that of the participating companies, 69 per cent make all job interview candidates aware of the option to request accommodations for interviews.²⁴²

Active recruitment

Lemon Tree Hotels in India has developed an inclusion programme that focuses on hiring and training persons with disabilities, including those from marginalized backgrounds, such as individuals with physical and psychosocial disabilities.²⁴³ The company actively seeks out candidates with disabilities for various positions throughout their hotels, including in such functions as housekeeping, hotel reception and guest services, using targeted tools to identify and attract qualified

individuals.²⁴⁴ As a result of this commitment to inclusive hiring practices, approximately 15 per cent of its workforce are persons with disabilities, showcasing their dedication to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace environment.²⁴⁵

Retaining talent

Once through the door, activities need to be put in place to ensure that retaining persons with disabilities is also an important priority.

Promoting an inclusive workplace culture

Wipro Limited is an Indian technology services and consulting company that is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce. To achieve this, it has developed the strategic framework CREATE – career, recruitment, enablement, accessibility, training and engagement – which serves as a holistic approach to disability inclusion in all aspects.²⁴⁶ As part of its Global Policy for Equal Employment Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities,²⁴⁷ Wipro ensures that its advertisement and application channels and methods are inclusive. For example, the company's website and applications adhere to the recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1), and its documents are in an accessible Word document format, Optical Character Reader based PDF formats or EPUB format. To further support inclusive hiring practices, a dedicated internal accessibility team maintains the accessibility of all Wipro digital platforms, including apps and training courses for employees with disabilities.²⁴⁸ Wipro has pledged to make all positions open to persons with all types of disabilities, collaborate with organizations of persons with disabilities to attract suitable talent, and provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to attend the selection process and work effectively. One of its inclusive hiring programmes, Train and Hire, aims to onboard persons with disabilities who fit the needs of the organization and hone their skills to go beyond industry standards.²⁴⁹

²³⁷ ANZ, "Accessibility statement" (n.d.). Available at <https://www.anz.com.au/about-us/accessibility-statement/> (accessed on August 21, 2023).

²³⁸ ANZ, "Creating an accessible workplace" (n.d.). Available at <https://www.anz.com.au/about-us/esg/workplace-participation-diversity/accessible-workplace/>

²³⁹ ANZ, *Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2023-2025* (Australia, December 2022).

²⁴⁰ Telstra, "Championing accessibility for all", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.telstra.com.au/careers/diversity-and-inclusion/disability-employment>

²⁴¹ Australian Network on Disability, "Become a disability-confident recruiter", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://and.org.au/how-we-can-help-you/become-a-disability-confident-recruiter/#:~:text=Australian%20Network%20on%20Disability's%20Disability,inclusive%20for%20people%20with%20disability>

²⁴² American Association of People with Disabilities and Disability:IN, "2023 DEI Disability Equality Index: the most comprehensive benchmarking tool for disability inclusion in business" (2023). Available at <https://disabilityin.org/2023-dei-report/>

²⁴³ Aradhana Lal, "How India's Lemon Tree Hotels has embraced disability inclusion to tackle the challenges of recruitment and retention in the hospitality sector", MB100 (n.d.). Available at <https://www.meaningful.business/how-indias-lemon-tree-hotels-has-embraced-disability-inclusion-to-tackle-the-challenges-of-recruitment-and-retention-in-the-hospitality-sector/> (accessed on August 21, 2023).

²⁴⁴ STAAH, "Lemon Tree Hotels – an inspiring example of workplace inclusiveness", 4 February 2019. Available at <https://blog.staah.com/success-stories/lemon-tree-hotels-a-inspiring-example-of-workplace-inclusiveness> (accessed on August 21, 2023).

²⁴⁵ Newz Hook, "Lemon Tree launches universally accessible hotels in Gurugram", 12 May 2017. Available at <https://newzhook.com/story/10368/> (accessed on August 21, 2023).

²⁴⁶ Wipro Limited, "Hiring of persons with disabilities", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://careers.wipro.com/pwd?lang=en-US> (accessed on August 22, 2023).

²⁴⁷ Wipro Limited, *Global Policy for Equal Employment Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities* (Bengaluru, India, 2022).

²⁴⁸ Wipro Limited, *Realizing an Equitable World for All: Annual Report on Inclusion & Diversity 2022-23* (Bengaluru, India).

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Box 12

EY Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence

EY, a multinational company headquartered in London that provides professional services to other businesses, operates globally with a workforce of approximately 400,000 employees. EY provides a broad range of professional services, including auditing, tax advisory, consulting, and financial advisory.

EY has established the Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence to promote inclusivity and empower neurodivergent individuals in the workplace.²⁵⁰ These centres are intended to create a more diverse and inclusive business environment by providing tailored support, training and career development opportunities to employees who are neurodivergent.

The objective of the Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence is to address the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals in the workplace and harness their skills and perspectives. The company recognizes the untapped potential of persons who are neurodivergent and aims to create a work environment where they can thrive and contribute towards solving complex business problems. EY has implemented inclusive recruiting processes, including performance-based assessments, to accurately evaluate the strengths and potential of neurodivergent candidates. It also has redesigned onboarding and management models to accommodate diverse learning styles and provide the necessary support. Most importantly, awareness, education and training have helped accelerate inclusive leadership so that EY teams are performing better and have an even greater depth of belonging.

EY has launched the Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence in multiple countries, employing and upskilling neurodivergent individuals. Since the programme's inception in 2016, it has expanded to 21 cities and has hired and trained more than 500 neurodivergent team members. The programme boasts a 92 per cent retention rate of individuals hired through the Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence. The Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence teams have consistently demonstrated 1.2 to 1.4 times greater productivity, quality, and timeliness of output compared to teams without Neuro-Diverse Center of Excellence members.

Source: Contribution of Hiren Shukla, EY Global Neuro-Diverse Centers of Excellence Leader.

Ensuring accessibility and reasonable accommodation

Genashtim, a social enterprise based in Singapore, actively promotes equal opportunities and accessibility for persons with disabilities by providing customized e-learning courses tailored to their specific needs, including those with visual or hearing impairments.²⁵¹ With 70 employees, of which 90 per cent of them are persons with disabilities, from more than 10 countries, the founder and CEO of Genashtim, Thomas Ng, is dedicated to challenging barriers and providing employment opportunities for marginalized communities.²⁵² By adopting a 100 per cent work-from-home model, Genashtim has created a flexible and inclusive work environment that empowers employees with disabilities to contribute and succeed on a global scale.²⁵³

CANYOU Group, a social enterprise founded in 1997, has evolved into a diverse conglomerate encompassing enterprise, social organization and a foundation. Notably, 90 per cent of the workers employed by CANYOU Software Co., Ltd. and CANYOU ZHIJIAN Co., Ltd. and 65 per cent

employed by CANYOU Biotechnology are persons with disabilities. The dedication of CANYOU extends to comprehensive employee support, including accessible facilities and their social organizations provide services for employees' daily lives, including meals, accommodation, laundry, commuting and psychological counselling.²⁵⁴ Additionally, CANYOU has installed O2BOX hyperbaric oxygen chambers for employees who need hyperbaric oxygen therapy. In 2005, CANYOU adopted a retirement support system to ensure lifelong salaries for employees who lose work capacity, irrespective of the government's retirement age requirement.²⁵⁵

Shin Shin Apparels Limited, a domestic company in the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh, has partnered with the Center for Disability in Development under the Innovation to Inclusion (I2I) Project.²⁵⁶ Through this project, the Center for Disability in Development has conducted assessments and organized inclusive training sessions for various departments at the factory level with

²⁵⁰ EY, "Neurodiversity-powered transformation" (n.d.). Available at https://www.ey.com/en_us/innovation/neurodiversity-powered-transformation (accessed on August 21, 2023).

²⁵¹ Genashtim, "Certified B Corporations", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://genashtim.com/> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁵² Genashtim, "Testimonials", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://genashtim.com/about-social-impact/> (accessed on 17 July 2023).

²⁵³ Genashtim, "About us", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://genashtim.com/about-us/> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁵⁴ CANYOU, "CANYOU career" (n.d.) [in Chinese]. Available at <http://canyoucn.com/framework/index.html> (accessed on 24 July 2023).

²⁵⁵ Interview with CANYOU, online, 14 July 2023.

²⁵⁶ Center for Disability in Development, "Shin Shin Apparel Ltd.: a journey towards inclusion" (n.d.). Available at <https://cdd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Shin-Shin.pdf> (Accessed on 17 July 2023).

the intention to promote an accessible workplace. The company offers accommodations, extra rest time, adapted chairs and improved physical accessibility with ramps and signage for employees with disabilities. New employees also undergo inclusion and diversity training, which fosters a discrimination-free environment for career growth.

SAP, a German multinational software corporation, has established a global diversity and inclusion office that has dedicated experts who focus on disability inclusion in the workplace.²⁵⁷ In recent years, the office's efforts include fostering accessible meetings and events by offering subtitles and speech recognition technology that help persons who are hard of hearing or who are vision impaired.²⁵⁸ These tools are also advantageous for persons without impairments but for whom a subtitle or a voice message helps enhance comprehension if they are not familiar with a language. In cooperation with a start-up company, the office also offers eye-tracking solutions for people who are

facing physical barriers, such as a broken arm or suffering from arthritis, which limits their ability to use a keyboard or mouse.²⁵⁹

Talent optimization is a critical part of value chain analysis. Understanding the benefits and opportunities of engaging persons with disabilities as employees prompts disability-inclusive businesses to adapt their processes, policies and procedures to optimize the talent that is available to them. For more examples of how to build an inclusive workplace, ILO has produced an employability guide, *EmployAbility - Tapping The Potential Of Persons With Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*.²⁶⁰ This and the publication *Disability at a Glance 2021: The shaping of disability-inclusive employment in Asia and the Pacific* present a thorough overview and examples of actions that disability-inclusive businesses should consider as they explore the opportunities offered by inclusive talent management across their organizations.

Box 13 Deloitte Japan

Deloitte Japan provides consultancy services to other companies and public entities to enhance and maintain their compliance with local requirements, and to help them attain solid and sustainable growth. The Group's executives are committed to being a disability-inclusive business as part of their core business strategy. They engage in business-to-business advocacy and disability-inclusive practices in the areas of employment, internship management and accessibility enhancement. By working with employees with disabilities and external organizations that employ persons with disabilities, the Group believes that it can facilitate innovation in the essential components of its services. The "Chief Talent Officer", a senior position separate from the human resource manager, focuses on diversifying its entire workforce and creating innovation. As a result, the Group has hired an experienced person with disabilities to be the human resource division director, regularly organizes seminars on the benefits of disability-inclusive business, and offers a five-month internship opportunity to persons with diverse disabilities to create a competent technology talent pool with persons with disabilities. Regarding employment, 94 per cent of the current employees with disabilities are either persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities, who are engaging in a wide range of jobs ranging from technical jobs to working in the mail room or pantry. The company has its own café run by persons with disabilities available for its employees and their guests. The Group is conducting an accessibility audit with external experienced organizations of persons with disabilities. A partnership with Valuable 500 was formed to advance disability-inclusive business in Japan and beyond.

Source: Interview with Rie Okubo, Chief Talent Officer; Masako Okuhira, Director, Human Resources; and Michiko Aono, Certified Public Psychologist, Manager, Human Resources Division, on 7 September 2023.

²⁵⁷ SAP, "Diversity & inclusion at SAP" (2022), Available at <https://www.sap.com/about/company/our-values/diversity.html> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁵⁸ Stefanie Nennstiel and Renate Dötzer, "Accessibility at SAP: achievements and future vision", Blog by Tim Yannopoulos, SAP, 11 July 2019. Available at <https://blogs.sap.com/2019/07/11/accessibility-at-sap-achievements-and-future-vision/> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁵⁹ Renate Dötzer, "Eye-tracking: control your computer with your gaze", SAP News Center, 19 August 2021. Available at <https://news.sap.com/2021/08/eye-tracking-control-computer-with-gaze/> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁶⁰ International Labour Organization, *EmployAbility - Tapping the Potential of Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific – A Guide for Employers* (Geneva, 2022).

Government

Governments across Asia and the Pacific support appropriate conditions for disability-inclusive employment through a combination of legal and policy frameworks, the provision of employment services designed to support employees with disabilities, and the development of inclusive education and skills training to prepare persons with disabilities for the labour market.

The majority of countries in the region have adopted employment equity and non-discrimination laws to protect persons with disabilities against discriminatory practices.²⁶¹ Many of these laws require employers to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDA) of 2015, enacted by the Marshall Islands, outlines specific measures to ensure the protection of persons with disabilities, including women, against employment discrimination. The Act also requires that workplace adjustments accommodate the employment of persons with disabilities and facilitate their performance; this provision was strengthened by the Consequential Amendments Bill, which applies the term “reasonable accommodation” to more closely align with the CRPD.²⁶² Governments across the region have developed laws and programmes to better support persons with disabilities in the workplace through a combination of quota schemes, preferential contracting, return-to-work programmes and other social protection benefits measures. Many of these interventions can persuade private sector entities to further develop their inclusion journey and their value proposition for persons with disabilities.

The Government of Azerbaijan has fostered disability inclusion through various measures. The country’s National Socioeconomic Development Strategy 2022–2026 aims to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the labour market through targeted policies, such as improved sick leave policy, workplace accommodation, flexible work schedule and skills training.²⁶³ These provisions build upon

extensive policy frameworks that safeguard the rights of employees with disabilities in Azerbaijan. Other relevant legislation includes the Employment Strategy for 2019–2030, which accommodates the creation of appropriate infrastructure and the expansion of a network of rehabilitation centres for the provision of employment services for persons with disabilities. The Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers No 616 titled “Procedure for financing of the wages of the insured”, passed in December 2019, further outlines joint co-financing between the State Employment Service and employers to include persons with disabilities in the labour market.²⁶⁴

Governments also support disability-inclusive businesses by developing inclusive education and skills training that respond to labour market needs. There are examples across the region of governments working with technical and vocational education and training institutions to develop interventions that more efficiently support persons with disabilities in gaining employment.

Vanuatu has adopted the National Disability-Inclusive Development Policy (2018–2025) for the technical and vocational education and training sector, and the national sustainable development plan, all of which prioritize accessible governmental services, inclusive education and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.²⁶⁵ The country’s partnership with the Government of Australia in the technical and vocational education and training programme has also empowered persons with disabilities through skills development and inclusive community programmes, leading to self-employment and income-generation opportunities.²⁶⁶ The Government’s commitment to implementing these policies and providing the necessary resources demonstrates its dedication to supporting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Governments are also partnering with the private sector to better enable employment and livelihoods for persons with disabilities. One example is Advance Personnel Management in Australia. This organization collaborates with the Government of Australia to deliver its Disability

²⁶¹ For more examples of non-discrimination laws in Asia and the Pacific please see annex E of ESCAP, *Disability at a Glance 2021: The Shaping of Disability-Inclusive Employment in Asia and the Pacific* United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.F.3 (2021).

²⁶² United Nations, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Initial report submitted by the Marshall Islands under article 35 of the Convention, due in 2017, 28 April 2020 (CRPD/C/MHL/1).

²⁶³ Sarah Michael and Marijana Jasarevic, “Including persons with disabilities into society is a strategic priority for Azerbaijan”, World Bank, 2 December 2022. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2022/12/02/including-persons-with-disabilities-into-society-is-a-strategic-priority-for-azerbaijan> (accessed on 28 August 2023).

²⁶⁴ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Relevant information of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan in connection with the questionnaire on support systems to ensure community inclusion of Persons with Disabilities”, Input for Human Rights Council resolution 49/12 on the rights of persons with disabilities. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/disability/cfi-hrc-49-12/states/2023-01-04/Azerbaijan.docx> (accessed on August 28, 2023).

²⁶⁵ Vanuatu, Vanuatu National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018–2025. Available at <https://www.nab.vu/sites/default/files/documents/Vanuatu%20National%20Disability%20Inclusive%20Development%20Policy%202018-2025.pdf> (accessed on 16 August 2023).

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

Employment Services programme. Advance Personnel Management assists eligible job seekers by providing training in specific job skills and resume writing. It also helps job seekers develop their interview skills and provides job search assistance.²⁶⁷ As well as meeting its social mission, in fiscal year 2021, Advance Personnel Management generated revenue of 1 billion Australian dollars and made its initial public offering on the Australian Securities Exchange. It is active in 1,000 locations in 11 countries and provides a blueprint for successful public and private sector support of disability employment services.²⁶⁸

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

In addition to the enabling employment environment that governments can provide to disability-inclusive businesses, support is also available from other organizations that are committed to improving livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities and contributing towards the creation of a vibrant labour market. Development finance institutions are often key in this space as are international organizations, such as ILO.

Development finance institutions help to create the conditions for more disability-inclusive employment through their environmental and social frameworks. Development finance institutions have social safeguards to assess and encourage project-level inclusion for all and specific provisions for disability inclusion. Many projects across the Asia-Pacific region showcase practices for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is implementing several projects across the region that support clients across different sectors in creating better employment solutions for persons with disabilities. In Mongolia, EBRD is working with Tavan Bogod, a food and consumer electronics retailer, to improve inclusion in its workplace. With high employee turnover, the client wants to ensure that it can tap into all talent pools. In that regard, EBRD is developing more inclusive recruitment practices and workplaces to encourage persons with disabilities to join the company.²⁶⁹ In Kazakhstan, EBRD is involved in a project with the Almaty Airport Authority. The national

quota for employment of persons with disabilities is 3 per cent, while in reality, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is approximately 1 per cent across organizations. The airport authority is committed to increasing inclusion and diversifying its workforce. EBRD will provide accessibility audits of the workplace and capacity-building support through the development of disability-inclusive policies and procedures.²⁷⁰ In Türkiye, EBRD is working with a garment manufacturer to create a disability action plan, which will help the manufacturer achieve objectives to improve employment numbers beyond a national quota and to ensure that the shop floors in its factories are accessible.^{271,272}

IFC, the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, has set performance standards that clearly articulate the need for the consideration of persons with disabilities as conditions of its loan agreements. This is reflected through due diligence processes and anticipated impact measurement as part of project processing. In addition, IFC has extended its inclusion programming beyond gender to include persons with disabilities. It has produced thought leadership on leading practices in the financial sector and just completed a peer-learning partnership. The IFC programme Together We Can+ has benefited 12 companies in Sri Lanka through concrete actions on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. The partnership has offered an opportunity for a group of leading Sri Lankan companies to learn, share knowledge and make commitments to promote more inclusive workplaces, products and services. Over the course of 18 months, IFC, under its Women in Work Partnership with the Government of Australia, through Together We Can+, supported 12 companies to take 65 actions to advance opportunities for persons with disabilities and/or LGBTI persons. These actions ranged from raising awareness on disability and/or LGBTI inclusion, adapting company policies and procedures on recruitment to partnering with community organizations to build a pipeline for inclusive hiring. By taking these actions, more than 80 per cent of the companies realized positive business impacts, including, for example, increased employee satisfaction, increased employee safety at work, access to new markets and reduced absenteeism.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Advanced Personnel Management (APM), "APM is a global health and workplace services provider", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://apm.net.au/> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁶⁸ Economist Impact, "Addressing inclusion in livelihood investments", web page (n.d.). Available at https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/advancing-impact-in-asia/addressing-inclusion-in-livelihood-investments.html?utm_source=PaidSocial&utm_medium=Twitter&utm_campaign=AVPN&utm_content=ArticleLivelihoods

²⁶⁹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "The EBRD in Mongolia", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.ebrd.com/mongolia.html> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁷⁰ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "The EBRD in Kazakhstan", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.ebrd.com/kazakhstan.html> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁷¹ Interview with Marco Stermsek, Inclusion Specialist, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), on 2 June 2023.

²⁷² Dilara Sari, "EBRD takes equity stake in Turkish retail giant DeFacto", European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 20 January 2023. Available at <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2023/ebrd-takes-equity-stake-in-turkish-retail-giant-defacto-.html> (accessed on 21 August 2023).

²⁷³ Interview/email with John Arzinos, Economic Inclusion Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC), on 24 May 2023.

The Asian Development Bank focuses on disability-inclusive development and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its projects. It provides safeguarding advice, country loans and technical assistance across the region. The Bank is involved in a number of key projects that highlight promising practices, which help create the conditions for greater employment of persons with disabilities. Projects in Bangladesh,²⁷⁴ Bhutan²⁷⁵ and Georgia²⁷⁶ work across partnerships with the government and the private sector to focus on the provision of technical and vocational training (TVET) and the development of job skills and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Work with the private sector in Mongolia²⁷⁷ includes a commitment to ensure that 4 per cent of the staff employed in the restaurants are persons with disabilities, restaurants are accessible and the staff is trained in gender-sensitive disability inclusion.²⁷⁸

The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network is unique in that it synergizes employers, disability organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners towards fostering a disability-inclusive workforce in Bangladesh. As the first network of its kind in the country, the Network not only facilitates employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities but also raises awareness regarding the business merits of employing such individuals and serves as a cohesive voice for employers in policy dialogues related to disability inclusion. Through its innovative model of promoting knowledge-sharing and collaboration among a wide array of stakeholders, the Network contributes to the enrichment of diversity, corporate social responsibility and legal adherence in the employment sector, and by extension, augments the capacity of organizations to address the multifaceted needs related to human resources and disability inclusion.²⁷⁹

PurpleSpace is a global networking and professional development hub dedicated to employees with disabilities and also works with network and resource group leaders spanning various sectors. Originating from the collaborative efforts of Kate Nash Associates with distinguished organizations,

such as Fujitsu, Barclays, EY, PwC, GSK and Transport for London, it aims to ease employees' navigation through the challenges of ill health, disability or accidents, while ensuring that they continue to thrive professionally. The hub's mission is executed through a threefold strategy: pioneering the world's first professional development and best practice exchange for disability network leaders, fostering vibrant disability networks that encourage individuals to bring their authentic selves to work and aiding employers in enhancing business performance by garnering insights directly from employees with disabilities. Additionally, the ethos of PurpleSpace is grounded in building disability confidence from the "inside out", a notion that materialized through a unique "movement" comprising employees with disabilities and their allies, champions and executive sponsors.²⁸⁰

The Employers' Network on Disability in Sri Lanka formed in 1999 by the Employers' Federation of Ceylon with support from ILO, facilitates the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector by bridging the business and disability communities. To enhance the employability of persons with diverse disabilities, the Network provides specialized training ranging from soft skills, such as entrepreneurship, women's empowerment and stress management, to technical ICT skills, such as operating MS Windows and Office and CISCO software.²⁸¹ In particular, it also provides distance learning facilities to support participants who are unable to travel to the capital, Colombo.²⁸² At the same time, the Network implements disability sensitization programmes for corporations to ensure inclusivity in the business sector. Such programmes include training on disability etiquette, basic sign language, preparing accessible materials, guidance on creating accessible websites and providing accessibility audits to improve the physical accessibility of workplaces.²⁸³

Businesses are also supporting other businesses in promoting disability-inclusive hiring practices. The Vulcan Coalition, established in 2020, provides business-to-business services by facilitating effective and sustainable

²⁷⁴ Asian Development Bank, "Bangladesh: Skills for employment investment program – Tranche 3", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/42466-017/main>

²⁷⁵ Asian Development Bank, "Bhutan: pathways for emerging skills and jobs project". Web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/54464-001/main>

²⁷⁶ Asian Development Bank, "Georgia: modern skills for better jobs sector development program, subprogram 1", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/52339-001/main>

²⁷⁷ Asian Development Bank, "Mongolia: Tavan Bogd COVID-19 food security and inclusive job creation project", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.adb.org/projects/56275-001/main>

²⁷⁸ Asian Development Bank, "How a Mongolian company is providing jobs and hope for people with disabilities", Project result/ case study, 1 June 2023. Available at <https://www.adb.org/results/how-mongolian-company-providing-jobs-and-hope-people-disabilities>

²⁷⁹ Bangladesh Business and Disability Network, "Who we are" (2023) Available at <https://www.bbdn.com.bd/who-we-are/https://www.bbdn.com.bd/who-we-are/>

²⁸⁰ PurpleSpace, "About PurpleSpace" (n.d.). Available at <https://www.purplespace.org/about> (accessed on 9 October 2023)

²⁸¹ The Employers' Federation of Ceylon, "Specialised Training and Disability Resource Centre," Leaflet, 23 December 2020. Available at <https://employers.lk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Specialised-Training-and-Disability-Resource-Centre.pdf> (accessed on 31 August 2023).

²⁸² International Labour Organization, "International Day of Persons with Disabilities: shaping an Inclusive world of work in Sri Lanka," Press release, 3 December 2018. Available at https://ilo.org/colombo/info/pub/pr/WCMS_651984/lang-en/index.htm (accessed on 31 August 2023).

²⁸³ The Employers' Federation of Ceylon, "Specialised Training and Disability Resource Centre," Leaflet, 23 December 2020. Available at <https://employers.lk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Specialised-Training-and-Disability-Resource-Centre.pdf> (accessed on 31 August 2023).

employment of persons with disabilities among 69 partner companies in Thailand. While companies are mandated by Thai law to employ persons with disabilities,²⁸⁴ many of them do not know how to reach qualified candidates with disabilities and find it difficult to select the most qualified ones and maintain their employment. The Vulcan Coalition substitutes such actions on their behalf by creating a pool of professional candidates with disabilities, assessing their performance and working with them to improve their performance. In addition to supporting the employment of persons with disabilities, the Coalition has been filling the labour shortage gap related to data labelling for machine learning of Thai language sources by training blind and deaf persons to complete this work.²⁸⁵



4.7 Procurement

Business entities can support disability-inclusive businesses, especially those owned by persons with disabilities, by developing an inclusive supply chain. In addition, businesses can enhance their disability-inclusive business practices by actively participating in public procurement that seeks to promote accessibility.

Public procurement and preferential contracting also serve as critical tools for governments to advance disability-inclusive businesses. Public procurement supportive of disability inclusion requires potential suppliers for government contracts to prove that they can produce accessible goods and services. Preferential contracting is procurement in which the tenderer preferentially chooses disability-inclusive businesses as suppliers.

Public procurement produces considerable economic activity. For developing countries, public procurement amounts to an average of 15 to 20 per cent of GDP and up to 50 per cent or more of government expenditure. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are estimated to spend 12 per cent of GDP on public procurement. In the European Union, this percentage amounts to 17 per cent of the European Union GDP, equivalent to more than EUR 1.9 trillion annually.²⁸⁶

Business

Disability-inclusive supply chains and preferential contracting

Businesses can promote disability inclusion by supporting businesses owned by persons with disabilities through the development of inclusive supply chains and working with persons with disabilities throughout the procurement process. In addition to government regulations, commercial benefits push organizations to diversify their supply chain. A diverse supply chain can provide access to qualified talent, offer informed perspectives concerning the market and contribute to innovation through creative product design and the development of new products. Including disability-owned businesses in a supply chain strategy can improve an organization's competitive advantage and contribute to its ESG performance and reporting.

Developing an inclusive supply chain must start outside of procurement, involve senior leadership messaging and be supported by an overall disability inclusion strategy. This process can include establishing strategic planning committees that set goals and accountability, showing community support by engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities and strategically using social media to have direct conversations with persons with disabilities to develop a deep understanding of disability-related issues and build relationships.

Leading practices of disability-inclusive supply chains include partnerships with suppliers and customers that create communication channels and product design collaboration. When all stakeholders are invested in disability inclusion, it becomes easier to overcome barriers and maximize benefits. Without support, suppliers with disabilities face many barriers to getting into the supply chain. One leading practice is to build a community of internal and external champions that can find high-potential talent and suppliers. Many

²⁸⁴ Thailand, National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, *Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act B.E.2550*. Available at <http://web1.dep.go.th/sites/default/files/files/news/2.pdf>

²⁸⁵ Elliott Smith, "Vulcan Coalition helps people with disabilities train for AI jobs", Microsoft News, 17 November 2022. Available at <https://news.microsoft.com/apac/features/vulcan-coalition-ai-jobs/> (accessed on August 8, 2023).

²⁸⁶ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Disability-inclusive public procurement: promoting universal design and accessibility", Social Development Policy Papers No. 2019/01 (2019). Available at https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/PP%202019-01_Disability%20Inclusive%20Procurement_rev.pdf

CSOs offer these services to the private sector, which can include certification of disability-owned businesses, education programming and matchmaking for interested parties. Mentoring programmes run by procuring companies for disability-owned businesses can also be used to support their integration into the supply chain.

The following are examples of companies that are developing their supply chains and interacting with persons with disabilities as suppliers and distributors.

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), a multinational technology company headquartered in the United States, has a procurement policy that incorporates a strong emphasis on supplier diversity by actively reaching out to and collaborating with businesses owned by underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities.²⁸⁷ Through its supplier diversity programme, IBM identifies and engages with diverse suppliers, including those owned by persons with disabilities, to foster inclusivity in its supply chain.²⁸⁸ By actively engaging with and supporting businesses owned by persons with disabilities, IBM exemplifies its dedication to promoting disability inclusion and creating a more inclusive and diverse private sector ecosystem.

Westpac Banking Corporation, a multinational bank headquartered in Australia, incorporates disability inclusion as an evaluation criterion when assessing suppliers. The bank's Supplier Inclusion and Diversity Principles indicate its commitment to supporting Australian Disability Enterprises.²⁸⁹ By partnering with these enterprises, Westpac not only supports their growth and sustainability, but also provides business opportunities to individuals with disabilities employed by these enterprises. This collaboration helps increase the representation of disability-owned businesses in the bank's supply chain.

The private sector promoting accessibility through procurement

Disability-inclusive businesses also review and embed the current and future workplace accessibility needs as part of their own internal procurement practices. By investing in good design and ensuring

that infrastructure, such as desks, doors, meeting room furniture, lifts, toilets and workspaces, meets accessibility standards, regardless of the status of their country-based regulations, private sector companies can build demand for accessible products and services.

Participation in public procurement promoting accessibility

The response of private sector entities to public procurement regulations on accessibility can have far-reaching positive knock-on effects. For example, in response to the United States Section 508 guidelines, discussed in further detail in the Government subsection below, large ICT manufacturers, such as IBM, Adobe and Microsoft, have made many of their mainstream products accessible to meet the guidelines. This provides accessible products not only to the market in the United States but also to global markets.²⁹⁰

Government

As mentioned above, public procurement refers to the process by which public authorities (procurers) purchase work, goods or services from an external contractor (supplier) that they have selected for this purpose. Procured goods and services can include equipment including furniture; services in, for example, schools, hospitals, ministries, public transport and the built environment; infrastructure public works; urban planning; water supplies; and waste treatment. **If this purchasing power is used to ensure that universal design and accessibility standards are the norm, then it can be an effective lever for change, which will influence and expand the scale of inclusion for all.**

Public procurement promoting accessibility

The European Union plays a significant role in promoting disability inclusion in businesses by implementing the European Public Procurement Directive (2014).²⁹¹ This directive mandates member States to use procurement processes to enhance accessibility. Specifically, article 42 of the directive requires that suppliers and distributors bidding for tenders must incorporate accessibility fea-

²⁸⁷ IBM, "Supply chain: supplier diversity", web page (n.d.). Available at <https://www.ibm.com/ibm/responsibility/2016/supply-chain/supplier-diversity/index.html#:~:text=We%20have%20also%20expanded%20our,disempowered%20groups%20wherever%20we%20operate> (accessed on 16 August 2023).

²⁸⁸ IBM, "Supplier diversity", web page (n.d.). Available at https://www.ibm.com/ibm/responsibility/2015/supply_chain/supplier_diversity.html#:~:text=Suppliers%20qualify%20by%20being%20at,with%20disabilities%20or%20LGBT%20individuals (accessed on 16 August 2023).

²⁸⁹ Westpac Group, "Supplier inclusion & diversity principles", August 2021, Available at https://www.westpac.com.au/content/dam/public/wbc/documents/pdf/aw/sustainability/WBG_Supplier_Inclusion__Diversity_Policy.pdf (accessed on 16 August 2023).

²⁹⁰ International Telecommunication Union., "Standard in the procurement of accessible ICT products and services", Accessible Europe 2019 background paper (2019). Available at https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Events/2019/Accessible%20Europe/1008_ICT%20Accessibility%20standards%20Procurement%20FINAL.pdf

²⁹¹ European Union, Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on Public Procurement and Repealing Directive 2004/18/EC Text with EEA Relevance, 26 February 2014. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014L0024>

tures for persons with disabilities and design their products or services to be inclusive for all users, unless justifiable circumstances are demonstrated. By enforcing this requirement, the European Union ensures that suppliers and distributors prioritize accessibility and consider the needs of persons with disabilities when developing their offerings.

In parallel with the efforts of the European Union, the Government of the United States has implemented Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which mandates federal departments and agencies to procure electronic and information technology products and services that meet stringent accessibility standards. To ensure compliance, the Government employs various mechanisms, such as a complaints process, the appointment of a Section

508 Accessibility Committee, the use of voluntary product accessibility templates and a reporting system. These comprehensive efforts exemplify the Government's commitment to fostering equal access and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in public procurement, while also providing support, coordination and accountability within agencies.²⁹²

Preferential contracting

Preferential contracting within the public sector can act as an incentive for companies to adopt more disability-inclusive policies and to develop inclusive supply chains. An ESCAP policy paper²⁹³ provides an extensive overview of leading practices across the region. Some of the benefits of preferential contracting for persons with disabilities are increased employment

Box 14

The United Nations promoting accessibility through procurement

The United Nations has been making its own efforts to “walk the talk” by promoting accessibility and the engagement of persons with disabilities through procurement processes. In 2019, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), requiring all United Nations entities to mainstream disability perspectives and to engage persons with disabilities in their work. UNDIS provides 16 indicators that all entities use to self-assess their performance on topics ranging from institutional policies on disability inclusion to accessibility, procurement, employment and communications.²⁹⁴ The Guidelines on the Implementation of Indicator 8: Procurement was published in 2022.²⁹⁵ The standard operating procedure for the United Nations is now being updated to require entities to practise disability inclusion through identifying potential suppliers of goods and services run by persons with disabilities or that hire significant numbers of persons with disabilities and integrating accessibility compliance as a condition to participating in bidding. ESCAP has started its process on disability-inclusive procurement through knowledge enhancement on the subject matter and identifying potential suppliers fitting the criteria.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO have also engaged in strategic procurements. Through a joint global tender and long-term agreements with competitive suppliers, they have facilitated the provision of affordable assistive devices. For example, in Rwanda, UNICEF has supplied low-cost, life-altering hearing aids to children. This initiative, implemented in partnership with the Government of Rwanda and supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, is part of a pilot programme that arranged for a 94 per cent reduction in the cost of these crucial devices, making them available to the government at \$118 per unit, a stark contrast to the commercial cost of \$2,000 within Rwanda. The project has also invested in local capacity-building by training local staff on hearing aid fitting and testing.

Sources: United Nations, Disability Inclusion Strategy. Available at <https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/>; UNICEF, “UNICEF supplies hundreds of children with life-changing hearing aids”, 24 June 2022. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/unicef-supplies-hundreds-children-life-changing-hearing-aids>

²⁹² United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Disability-inclusive public procurement: promoting universal design and accessibility”, Social Development Policy Papers No. 2019/01 (2019). Available at https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/P-P%202019-01_Disability%20Inclusive%20Procurement_rev.pdf

²⁹³ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Preferential contracting for persons with disabilities: approaches to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for persons with disabilities and disability inclusion in business practices”, Policy Paper No. 2022/06. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/preferential-contracting-persons-disabilities-approaches-improving-employment-opportunities>

²⁹⁴ Indicator 8: Procurement has the following indicators: APPROACHES REQUIREMENTS: Procurement policies ensure that the procurement process is accessible and Procurement policies ensure that relevant goods and services acquired are accessible or do not create new barriers. MEETS REQUIREMENTS: Target is established and met for number/ percentage of relevant procurement documents that have accessibility as a mandatory requirement, in addition to the above two indicators. EXCEEDS REQUIREMENTS: Procurement policy promotes purchasing from disability-inclusive suppliers, and guidelines have been developed for this purpose. HLCM Procurement Network Secretariat, Guidelines on the Implementation of Indicator 8: Procurement (Copenhagen, 2020). Available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/01/2020_un_disability_inclusion_strategy_guidelines_indicator_8.pdf

²⁹⁵ United Nations, Disability Inclusion Strategy. Available at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/01/2020_un_disability_inclusion_strategy_guidelines_indicator_8.pdf

opportunities; strengthened provision of technical support and training for disability-owned business enterprises; better and more accessible working conditions; enhanced social inclusion; and spillover economic benefits for families and communities.

The commitment of the Government of New Zealand to inclusive procurement practices is evident by the consideration of social factors and fairness in its procurement rules. Among the newly adopted rules during the COVID-19 pandemic, Rule 18A obliges contracting agencies to consider creating quality employment opportunities for groups with traditionally high rates of unemployment, including persons with disabilities.²⁹⁶

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

Several organizations support the private sector in the diversification of their supply chains to be disability-inclusive. Examples from Asia and the Pacific include the India Business and Disability Network which promotes disability inclusion within the corporate sector's supply chain and distribution networks. Through knowledge creation, dissemination, advocacy and dialogue, the Network engages and empowers persons with disabilities, while providing a bridge between companies and suitable service providers. Their disability inclusion policy extends to clients, vendors, suppliers and dealers, making the agenda of disability inclusion mutually reinforcing across organizations.²⁹⁷

BuyAbility is an initiative of the National Disability Service (NDS) in Australia. BuyAbility is committed to increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through socially responsible procurement opportunities for BuyAbility Social Enterprises. The BuyAbility website provides governments and private businesses with easily navigated information, which can be searched by location or business category to identify and source BuyAbility Social Enterprises nationally.²⁹⁸

The Global Impact Sourcing Coalition (GISC) catalyses inclusive employment, especially for individuals overcoming employment barriers, by enforcing its Impact Sourcing Standard to guide companies towards fostering more inclusive global supply chains during procurement processes. Through resources like the Autism Empower-

ment Toolkit, GISC imparts insights into establishing empowering work environments for individuals with disabilities to companies. This coalition strives to assimilate disadvantaged individuals into formal jobs by amplifying the demand for inclusive suppliers during procurement. This venture underscores a wider movement to harness procurement and global supply chains for propelling inclusive business practices.²⁹⁹

4.8 Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is an important employment opportunity for persons with disabilities. Often, persons with disabilities turn to self-employment and small business development for several reasons, including, among them, the lack of disability-inclusive practices in the labour market and the benefits of greater control, flexibility and choice as the owner of their businesses. Surveys indicate that MSMEs in the Asia-Pacific region comprise 98 per cent of all enterprises and employ 50 per cent of the workforce.³⁰⁰

Understanding the number of entrepreneurs with disabilities is challenging in countries where disability status is not captured by government surveys. Although not an exact measure of entrepreneurship, data from ILO show that in most countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific, a higher proportion of employed persons with disabilities are engaged in self-employment compared to employed persons without disabilities.

While the aforementioned disability-inclusive business practices in the previous sections could be applied by entrepreneurs, given the significant role of MSMEs in the Asia-Pacific region, it is important to consider how the private sector, governments and business ecosystem can support persons with disabilities as entrepreneurs.

Business

There are many examples of entrepreneurs with disabilities. From global business leaders, such as Richard Branson of the Virgin Group, who openly talks about his learning difficulties,³⁰¹ to small business owners, such as Tanzila Khan, who started an app to deliver menstrual products to persons with disabilities.³⁰² Another example is Kanpassorn Suriyasangpetch, who wanted to seek profes-

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ For more information, see <https://ciiibdn.com>

²⁹⁸ For more information, see <https://buyability.org.au>

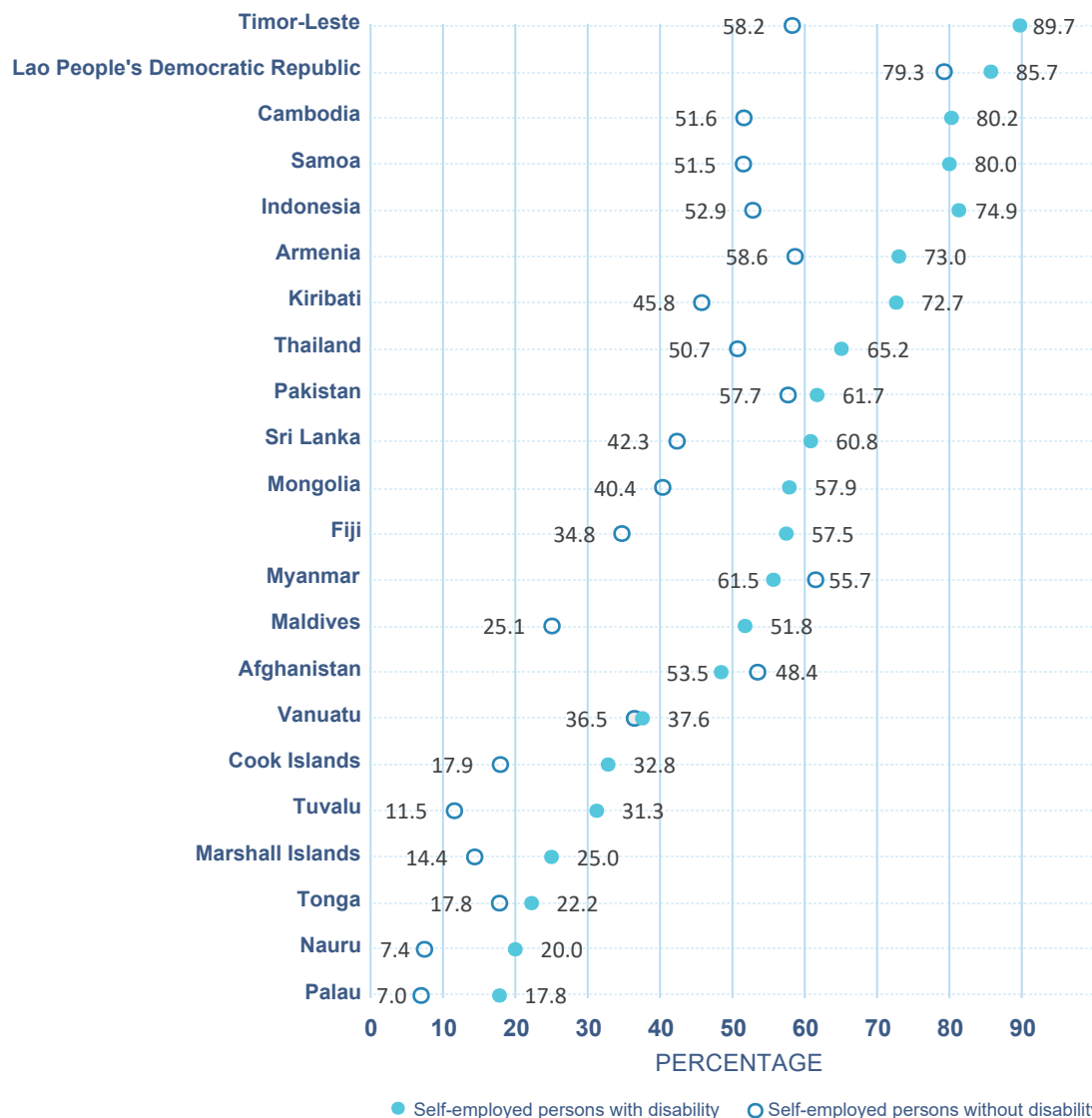
²⁹⁹ Global Impact Sourcing Coalition, "The Impact Sourcing Standard", (n.d.). Available at: <https://gisc.bsr.org/resources>

³⁰⁰ United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Policy Guidebook for MSME Development in Asia and the Pacific*, 2nd Edition, ST/ESCAP/3000 (Bangkok, 2022).

³⁰¹ Emily K. Schwartz, "Richard Branson and the dyslexia advantage", The Washington Post, 7 November 2012. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-innovations/richard-branson-and-the-dyslexia-advantage/2012/11/07/67a05b2a-2906-11e2-bab2-eda299503684_story.html

³⁰² Leah Rodriguez and Gaëlle Langué, "This Pakistani activist created an app to deliver menstrual products to people with disabilities", Global Citizen, 8 May 2019. Available at <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/girlythings-pakistan-period-products-disabilities/>

Figure 8
Self-employment rate, by disability status



Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 12 September 2023).

sional help for her mild depression and was frustrated with how difficult her experience was. She, as a result, started Ooca, the first mental health app in Thailand.³⁰³ Entrepreneurs with disabilities can often see the challenges inherent in current products, processes and services, and innovate to create new solutions to meet consumer needs that are not being met.

Entrepreneurs often face similar challenges, such as a lack of access to capital. Entrepreneurs with disabilities, however, have reported that this is magnified by ableist behaviours and low expectations stemming

from negative stereotypes and misconceptions. Traditional funding channels are often a challenge for entrepreneurs with disabilities. This is because they may not want to give the personal asset guarantees often required for loans, may have credit-related issues or may be wary of unintended government benefits traps, which prohibit them from obtaining additional earnings.³⁰⁴ Inaccessible systems and processes, lack of targeted support and advice, and competing funding priorities for investors further reduce the already limited opportunities available to entrepreneurs with disabilities. A study conducted in the United Kingdom suggested that only 17 per cent

³⁰³ Suwittha Chaiyong, "App that helps others is in need of help", Bangkok Post, 30 June 2022. Available at <https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/2336883/app-that-helps-others-is-in-need-of-help>

³⁰⁴ United States, National Disability Institute, "Small business ownership by people with disabilities: challenges and opportunities", executive summary (April 2022). Available at <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ndi-small-business-research-report-executive-summary.pdf>

of entrepreneurs with disabilities felt they were treated equally to entrepreneurs without disabilities with regard to investment opportunities.³⁰⁵ As already discussed, the financial services sector is improving the accessibility of its products and services, but much more needs to be done to ensure loan processes are accessible to all. So-called “social capital” is also often unavailable to persons with disabilities when they launch a business. Many entrepreneurs with disabilities lack connections to mentors, business advisers and collaborators who can facilitate market growth opportunities. Arguably, social capital is just as important to the success of a business as financial capital.

Impact capital is starting to support entrepreneurs with disabilities. These are typically funds invested based on a double bottom line of purpose and profit. Investments are made in businesses that have founders with disabilities, in sector-specific companies that benefit persons with disabilities, such as assistive technologies (both physical and digital), or in companies that help create better outcomes for persons with disabilities, such as firms working on skills development. There are a growing number of firms in this space. Among them are, for example, the Disability Impact Fund in Hong Kong, China,³⁰⁶ the Assistive Tech Impact Fund in the United Kingdom³⁰⁷ and Enable Ventures in the United States.³⁰⁸ Ideally, more impact capital firms will further their engagement with the businesses in which they invest to provide resources related to social capital.

Government

Governments also fund specific programmes for entrepreneurs with disabilities. For example, the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation, a company owned solely by the Government of India, provides financial assistance and loans to persons with disabilities, empowering them to start income-generating activities and fostering their overall empowerment.³⁰⁹ Through various schemes, such as Divyangjan Swavalamban Yojana³¹⁰ and Vishesh Micro-finance Yojana,³¹¹ the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation promotes entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities in, for example,

agriculture, the service sector and the trading sector for persons with disabilities, contributing to their economic inclusion and empowerment.

The Philippines has implemented several programmes to support entrepreneurs with disabilities. TULAY, run by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, encourages persons with disabilities to set up self-employment projects and provides technical and financial assistance.³¹² The Department of Trade and Industry hosted an online trade fair during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote the products of entrepreneurs with disabilities.³¹³ It also runs the SME Roving Academy, which offers courses for further development of SMEs. The Academy, which is open to all MSMEs, has also taught a number of persons with disabilities.³¹⁴

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

Civil society organizations and development finance institutions play a critical part in developing the ecosystem for entrepreneurs with disabilities. They call attention to new market opportunities for investors, raise capital and provide networks of support and talent development for entrepreneurs with disabilities. They also help collect and report data on entrepreneurs with disabilities for the wider business community.

The NEDAR Foundation in India has established a “virtual incubator”, offering comprehensive support to entrepreneurs with disabilities, including access to entrepreneurship knowledge, business counselling, mentoring and financial connections. The foundation’s business network brings together more than 200 entrepreneurs working in the manufacturing, services, retail and trading industries.

The Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability, headquartered in Bangkok, was established as a regional centre for disability and development. With endorsements from the United Nations, particularly through ESCAP resolutions, and continuing collaborative partnerships, the Center actively supports entrepreneurs with disabilities by promoting inclusive ecosystems, raising awareness of

³⁰⁵ Access2Funding, “Transforming opportunities and outcomes for disabled entrepreneurs,” (2023). Available at <https://static1.square-space.com/static/619e1d7a522f9748f55d6a17/t/638b7007b3b4ae3a0159b28e/1670082578331/Access2Funding.pdf>

³⁰⁶ For more information, see <https://disabilityimpact.com>

³⁰⁷ For more information, see <https://atimpactfund.com/about>

³⁰⁸ Enable Ventures, “Building an inclusive economy through disability investment” (2022). Available at <https://www.enableventures.vc>

³⁰⁹ India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 10 February 2006. Available at <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/93612/109496/F-838532634/IND93612.pdf> (accessed on 16 August 2023).

³¹⁰ Shahrukh, “Divyangjan Swavalamban Scheme”, Govt Schemes India, 5 March 2022. Available at <https://govtschemes.in/divyangjan-swavalamban-scheme#gsc.tab=0> (accessed on 16 August 2023).

³¹¹ India, “National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation”, 27 July 2021. Available at <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/national-handicapped-finance-and-development-corporation.php> (accessed on 16 August 2023).

³¹² World Bank, *Philippines: Social Protection Review and Assessment*, 8 October 2018 (Washington D.C., World Bank).

³¹³ Kris Crismundo, “DTI launches online trade fair for PWD entrepreneurs”, Philippine News Agency, 30 July 2020. Available at <https://www.pna.gov.ph/index.php/articles/1110624>

³¹⁴ For more information, see “Tzhe Philippines’ contribution to the OHCHR analytical report on the rights to work and the enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities (PWDs)” (n.d.). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ESCR/RighttoWork/CFI-right-to-work-persons-with-disabilities/States/Philippines.docx>

market opportunities, and fostering networks for support and talent development in the Asia-Pacific region. It trains persons with disabilities through its 60+ Plus Projects in bakery skills, chocolate making and hotel services. Many of the trainees have gone on to start their own businesses.³¹⁵

IFC is a key player in providing financial support for entrepreneurs with disabilities. It collaborates closely with banks, companies and investors to foster economic inclusion, particularly focusing on persons with disabilities as entrepreneurs. As an investor, IFC deploys capital with a specific “inclusion lens,” which is aligned with its Performance Standards and the Sustainable Development Goals. The objective of these standards and goals is to eliminate social and economic exclusion. This financial commitment is instrumental in the post-COVID-19 context in which

the need for sustainable economic development is acute, especially for marginalized groups, such as entrepreneurs with disabilities. Through these targeted investments and partnerships, IFC is actively contributing to the creation of an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem for persons with disabilities.³¹⁶

Despite their prevalence in the region, MSMEs are often underrepresented in national business and disability networks. Indonesia and Sri Lanka are the only countries where all of the company members of their respective national business and disability networks are MSMEs. In other parts of the region, MSMEs constitute less than 40 per cent of the total company membership base.³¹⁷



³¹⁵ For more information, see Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APDC). Available at <https://www.apcdfoundation.org/en/60-plus-bakery-chocolate-cafe>

³¹⁶ International Finance Corporation (IFC), “Inclusive banking: emerging practices to advance the economic inclusion of persons with disabilities”, 6 April 2022. Available at <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/202203-inclusive-banking-for-persons-with-disabilities.pdf>

³¹⁷ International Labour Organization, “Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises: analysis of a survey among National Business and Disability Networks” (2023). Available at <https://www.businessanddisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Disability-Inclusion-in-SMEs.pdf>

Box 15

The Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub) Accelerate Programme

The Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub), headquartered in London, runs a programme called Accelerate, which focuses on driving the development and scaling of assistive and accessible technology solutions. Through its Insights Hub, Venture Studio and Bespoke Consultancy, GDI Hub plays a crucial role in supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities and fostering an ecosystem that promotes inclusive supply chains and market opportunities. The objective of Accelerate is to harness the value of innovation and empower entrepreneurs with disabilities to create market-ready products and solutions. The programme aims to bridge the gap in access to assistive technology by providing research, support and consultancy services to propel the development and scaling of disability-focused businesses.

Insights Hub for new ideas: Accelerate provides an accessible collection of leading-edge research, data, evidence and insights through its Insights Hub. This valuable resource enables start-ups, entrepreneurs and researchers to explore global knowledge critical to the development of new assistive technology products and solutions.

Venture Studio for acceleration: The Venture Studio programme nurtures the next generation of assistive technology pioneers by creating a safe space for ventures and start-ups to rapidly explore new concepts and business models. GDI Hub Accelerate offers resources, tools and accelerators, such as Innovate Now (the first AT accelerator in Africa) and the Assistive Tech Impact Fund, which provides grant capital and venture building support to scale tested solutions in new markets.

Bespoke Consultancy for rapid scaling: GDI Hub Accelerate collaborates with businesses, governments and multilateral organizations to deliver global assistive technology solutions across ecosystems. By leveraging their expertise in research, design, development, manufacturing and supply chains, these partner organizations help take products and ideas to national and global markets, overcoming challenges and maximizing impact.

Promoting inclusive supply chains: The efforts of GDI Hub Accelerate contribute towards the development of inclusive supply chains by supporting entrepreneurs and businesses that prioritize accessibility and inclusive design in their products and services. This helps create a marketplace that is more accessible and responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Calling attention to market opportunities: Through Insights Hub and consultancy services, GDI Hub Accelerate calls attention to new market opportunities for investors in the disability sector. By identifying gaps, trends and potential areas of growth, it attracts investment and promotes the development of innovative solutions that address the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Source: Global Disability Innovation Hub, "Global Hub Accelerate", brief (n.d.). Available at <https://cdn.disabilityinnovation.com/uploads/images/GDI-Accelerate.pdf?v=1675683730>

5.1 Conclusions

This publication has shown how disability-inclusive business can provide a pathway for advancing disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific.

A confluence of megatrends is affecting the Asia-Pacific region as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the realities of climate change, an ageing population and rapid urbanization, Governments need to build more innovative and sustainable solutions, particularly with regard to disability inclusion.

The Sustainable Development Goals, the CRPD, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the United Nations Global Compact require and encourage business compliance and actions to promote human rights at all phases of the business value chain.

Business has an outsized role to play in delivering economic development and growth. Increasingly, the wider investor market is asking questions as to how organizations are contributing to the global sustainability agenda through company actions on ESG. Generational wealth transfer is bringing different expectations into the marketplace, as younger generations are more focused on sustainability in all its forms, people and the planet.

These changes have fostered a renewed focus on disability inclusion. A disability-inclusive business assesses and capitalizes on opportunities to promote and mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into all phases of a business value chain and ensures the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all their diversity as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs, substantive experts and valued stakeholders.

Practising disability-inclusive businesses can create multi-faceted benefits for companies, including, among them, improved performance, innovation, reputation and exploration of an untapped market of consumers with disabilities, all of which can lead to higher profitability.

The publication presented five key components of practising disability-inclusive business: leadership; operations, including product and service development, logistics, marketing and sales and after-sales services; human resources; procurement; and support for entrepreneurs with disabilities. Examples of good practices from businesses in the Asia-Pacific region and globally were presented, to inspire other businesses. The publication further presented examples of how an “ecosystem” comprised of governments, development finance institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities and other CSOs, industry associations and investors can support the advancement

of disability-inclusive businesses.

A note of caution in this endeavour is that it is necessary to be cognizant of the complexity of the issues and challenges. While not exhaustive, three relevant points are briefly highlighted here:

- **Disability-inclusive business is not only about the employment of persons with disabilities.** Businesses must realize “decent work” and ensure the dignity, fair income, equality and safety of employees with disabilities.³¹⁸ However, businesses should not be complacent with hiring a few persons with disabilities without looking at other aspects of the business value chain and where disability inclusion could be effectively integrated.
- **The empowerment of persons with disabilities in all their diversity warrants due attention.** Experiences and the trauma of being discriminated against and mistreated, continuing stigma and labelling, and any other manifestations of ableism can inhibit and disempower persons with disabilities from asserting their disability identity, addressing their needs for accessibility or reasonable accommodation, and actively engaging in innovation within a company. Businesses should ensure disability inclusion is incorporated into DEI training and education efforts.
- **Even when the disability community and business executives or professionals are at the same table, they do not always use the same language.** Persons with disabilities may use advocacy language, while the company may use business language. This disparity may lead to miscommunications and frustration for both sides. When interacting, both sides should consider the perspectives of the other and be open to listening and learning from each other.

5.2 Recommendations

In reviewing emerging and good practices and lessons learned from disability-inclusive businesses across the Asia-Pacific region and with reference to existing global literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

For businesses starting or developing their disability inclusion journey (regardless of size)

- Executives and managers should take part in a benchmarking exercise, such as utilizing the ILO Global Business and Disability Network self-assessment tool, which is applied to assess the status of an organization with regard to building a disability-inclusive business throughout its business value chain.
- Executives and managers should consult with and involve persons with disabilities when developing disability inclusion policies and activities and taking steps to integrate persons with disabilities as leaders, employees, consumers, suppliers/distributors, subject

³¹⁸ International Labour Organization, Business as Usual: Making Workplaces Inclusive of People with Disabilities (Geneva, ILO, 2014). Available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

experts and valued stakeholders. During consultations, business requirements should be discussed along with brainstorming on where disability inclusion can start and how it can be practised in practical terms.

- Executives and managers should lead and develop a core disability inclusion strategy with indicators and timelines.
- Executives and managers should join a local, national, regional or global disability-focused business and action network and learn from other companies' practices on disability inclusion.
- Executives and managers should receive internal participatory training, such as disability equality training, to help them gain a better understanding of the social model of disability.
- Executives and managers should allocate an appropriate and sustainable budget for implementing a disability inclusion strategy.
- Ways to integrate universal design and accessibility principles along with ways to provide reasonable accommodation should be explored to ensure that company documents and websites, workplaces, products and services, procurement, marketing and sales practices and all other aspects of work are disability-inclusive. The power of good design is maximized by addressing employees' needs and reaching out to potential consumers.
- Change always starts at the individual level. Leaders and all employees should be encouraged to educate themselves on disability inclusion and their role as an ally for the community. This would build trust from current and future employees within the organization.
- Company practices and lessons learned should be shared with other businesses and actors working on disability-inclusive business, so that others can learn which initiatives have been effective and which have been unsuccessful.

For businesses already engaged in disability inclusion

Continuing to implement the recommendations above and beginning to adopt the following additional actions are recommended:

Board level

- Assess the strength of the board's awareness of local and regional human rights issues and disability inclusion.
- Assess the strength of the board's awareness of local and regional human rights issues and disability inclusion.
- Review the composition and expertise of the board and its committees regarding disability-inclusive business.

- Provide board briefings on disability inclusion to help build capacity.
- Report on disability inclusion programming and progress in meeting commitments and key performance indicators and develop clear metrics for accountability.

Leadership level

- Update the action points, indicators and timeline of an existing disability inclusion strategy by thoroughly reviewing its implementation with external subject experts with disabilities.
- Position the work related to disability inclusion as part of senior executives' job description and their regular appraisals and identify disability inclusion coordinators.
- Conduct accessibility audits of all parts of the business value chain, including facilities, websites, documents, equipment products and services, as well as human resources management cycles.
- Assess the strength of the leadership and managerial teams' awareness of local and regional human rights issues and disability inclusion. Continue to provide training on disability equality for them and aim to provide training to all staff at all levels.
- Build awareness of the impact of new technologies (such as AI) on the value chain and specifically the opportunities they open up for persons with disabilities as employees, potential employees, customers, suppliers and valued stakeholders.
- Assess and strengthen feedback loops from employees with disabilities. Review the internal leadership pipelines to assess how disability-inclusive talent management efforts are functioning. Explore and implement programmes to further empower employees with disabilities.
- Create a centralized funding mechanism to cover the provision of reasonable accommodations for colleagues, customers and valued stakeholders.
- Continue to engage external persons with disabilities, including product and service users, to provide feedback on the company's practice on disability inclusion, and work with them to continue to sensitize employees' awareness and knowledge on disability rights and disability inclusion.

Governments

Governments need to accelerate policy actions that are inclusive of persons with disabilities to ensure they meet their commitments as per the CRPD, the 2030 Agenda and the Jakarta Declaration.

These commitments cover legislation and policy creation and implementation, in addition to working across the Asia-Pacific region to share standards, experiences and good practices. Below are examples of how governments

could take further steps that support businesses to be more disability-inclusive and ensure that persons with disabilities can participate equally in society as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers/distributors, entrepreneurs, substantive experts and valued stakeholders.

- Legislative bodies, in partnership with relevant ministries and departments, should (a) review, amend or develop laws and regulations to ensure non-discrimination and equality of persons with disabilities, which should include provisions to require businesses to provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, (b) review, amend or develop accessibility technical standards to be adhered to by public entities and the private sector; (c) prohibit any form of harassment and abuse against employees with disabilities; and (d) ensure equal pay for equal work for employees with disabilities.
- Ministries and departments responsible for commerce and industry at all levels should consider providing incentives to businesses that demonstrate disability-inclusive business practices, including giving awards to disability-inclusive businesses and highlighting individual champions who promote disability-inclusive business.
- Ministries and departments responsible for commerce and industry should consider incorporating disability perspectives into policies and regulations regarding ESG, DEI, and business and human rights to be adopted by businesses.
- Ministries and departments responsible for media and information, broadcasting and digital communications, in collaboration with the ministries of commerce and industry and marketing and advertising associations, should consider facilitating the development of guidelines and protocols for print, television, social media and the entertainment sector to promote disability inclusion and remove content that could lead to disability-related discrimination, stigmatization, stereotyping and misconceptions.
- The ministries and departments responsible for higher education, science and technology, commerce and industry should consider collaborating with businesses in developing, supporting and implementing a public-private partnership policy framework and facility for advancing research and the development of disability-inclusive products and services.
- The ministries and departments responsible for tourism should consider promoting disability-inclusive tourism along with business associations on tourism and relevant representatives from hospitality, transportation and tourism industries.
- The ministries and departments responsible for dealing with disability-related issues, education and labour should consider working together to establish policies and programmes to better match skills held by persons with disabilities and skills required in the general labour market.
- The focal ministry for disability should consider further collaboration with the ministries responsible for commerce, industrial development, entrepreneurship and financial services; business and industry associations; organizations of persons with disabilities; and international and local pioneers in disability-inclusive business to develop materials and a team of facilitators to deliver cross-sector awareness training on disability-inclusive business, focusing on the potential benefits and leading practices related to operating disability-inclusive practices.
- The government ministry with authority over commerce and business entities, through public-private partnerships, should consider advancing further the incubation of technologies and innovation of universal design-based accessible goods, services and technologies, while considering the economic and social value in making such goods, services and technologies more widely available in the domestic market and for export.
- Relevant government ministries and departments should consider promoting meaningful digital connectivity for persons with disabilities and increasing their digital skills to enable effective participation in the labour market, including remote work, in the digital age.
- The national bureau of statistics should consider contributing towards efforts aimed at understanding the state of disability-inclusive business by ensuring all surveys, particularly labour market surveys, are disaggregated by disability status, including through the use of the Washington Group questions on functioning.
- All government ministries at central and local levels should consider developing and implementing public procurement laws and regulations on preferential contracting to benefit disability-inclusive businesses.
- All government ministries at central and local levels should consider developing and implementing public procurement laws and regulations that mandate participating businesses produce accessible goods and services. This practice should happen in line with internationally compatible accessibility standards and compliance monitoring mechanisms.
- Governments should foster national employer networks and engage in regional platforms to facilitate information-sharing and mutual learning on standards, experiences and good practices on disability inclusion.

Additional ecosystem stakeholders

The national-level chambers of commerce and industry and business associations can further engage persons with disabilities who are experts in disability rights and inclusion, government focal point experts on disability inclusion and organizations of persons with disabilities to help do the following:

- Create standard operating procedures for consulting persons with disabilities on the design of products and services and research and development in general.
- Develop, implement, enforce and monitor an industry code of conduct on prohibiting and combating disability-based discrimination.
- Develop and encourage the adoption of standard operating procedures on the conduct of disability-inclusive private procurement.
- Facilitate employers' networks at national and local levels to enable information-sharing and mutual learning on disability-inclusive business. Consider the development of databases to support employers in recruiting persons with disabilities, businesses in integrating disability-inclusive businesses into their supply chains and investors in investing in disability-inclusive businesses.

- Financial market research institutions that inform investment markets should incorporate disability inclusion in their analyses of ESG business practices and in the range of ESG indices.

United Nations entities, international organizations and development finance institutions also need to accelerate efforts to work with governments, businesses and organizations of persons with disabilities to create conditions required for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. Programmes that focus on accessibility (both physical and digital), education, skills building, employment, entrepreneurship and financial services for persons with disabilities all need to support the creation of a more robust disability-inclusive business community.

Real progress on the 2030 Agenda across Asia and the Pacific requires that the entire ecosystem place persons with disabilities at the core as fundamental contributors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and commitments at the country and organizational levels. Disability-inclusive business offers a catalyst for the inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout society and the achievement of the pledge of leaving no one behind in development processes.

"NOTHING WITHOUT US"



Annex

A. Data tables

Number of countries and territories with laws related to persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, by explicit mention of women with disabilities

	Explicit mention of women with disabilities	Without explicit mention of women with disabilities	Countries and territories with laws and policies related to persons with disabilities
Law on persons with disabilities	16	19	35
Reasonable accommodation	2	24	26
Employment incentives	1	27	28

Country and Territory	Is there a law on persons with disabilities that specifically protects and promotes the rights of women with disabilities?	Is there a law or policy that mandates reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities?	If the answer is "Yes," does the reasonable accommodation law or policy mention women with disabilities?	Are there incentives in law or policy for businesses to employ persons with disabilities (e. g., quotas, tax breaks, wage replacement)?	If the answer is "Yes," does the employment incentives law or policy mention women with disabilities?
Afghanistan	No	No	N/A	No	N/A
Armenia	Yes	Yes	No	No	N/A
Australia	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Azerbaijan	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Bangladesh	No	Yes	No	No	N/A
Bhutan	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Brunei Darussalam	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Cambodia	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
China	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Fiji	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Georgia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Hong Kong SAR, China	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
India-Mumbai	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Indonesia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Iran, Islamic Rep.	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Japan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Kazakhstan	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Kiribati	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Korea, Rep.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyz Republic	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Lao PDR	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Malaysia	Yes	No	N/A	No	N/A
Maldives	No	No	N/A	No	N/A
Marshall Islands	Yes	Yes	No	No	N/A
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Mongolia	Yes	No	N/A	Yes	No
Myanmar	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nepal	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
New Zealand	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pakistan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Palau	No	No	N/A	No	N/A
Papua New Guinea	N/A	Yes	No	No	N/A

Country and Territory	Is there a law on persons with disabilities that specifically protects and promotes the rights of women with disabilities?	Is there a law or policy that mandates reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities?	If the answer is "Yes," does the reasonable accommodation law or policy mention women with disabilities?	Are there incentives in law or policy for businesses to employ persons with disabilities (e. g., quotas, tax breaks, wage replacement)?	If the answer is "Yes," does the employment incentives law or policy mention women with disabilities?
Philippines	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Russian Federation	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Samoa	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Singapore	N/A	No	N/A	Yes	No
Solomon Islands	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Sri Lanka	No	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Tajikistan	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Thailand	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Timor-Leste	N/A	Yes	No	No	N/A
Tonga	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Türkiye	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Uzbekistan	No	No	N/A	Yes	No
Vanuatu	N/A	No	N/A	No	N/A
Vietnam	Yes	No	N/A	Yes	No

Source: World Bank, "Women with disabilities", database. Available at <https://wbi.worldbank.org/en/disability> (accessed on 8 August 2022).

Notes: For the first, third, and fifth column, "Yes" refers to if there is a relevant law that protects the rights of women with disabilities. "No" refers to the existence of a relevant law on persons with disabilities but women with disabilities are not mentioned in the law. "N/A" indicates that there is no mandate, law, or policy for that category.

Employment-to-population ratio, by gender and disability status (per cent)

Country and Territory	Women with disabilities (%)	Women without disabilities (%)	Men with disabilities (%)	Men without disabilities (%)
Afghanistan	11.2	22.3	36.7	73.8
Armenia	41.8	59.4	38.3	64.9
Cambodia	37.2	76.5	54.8	87.6
Cook Islands	20.1*	64.7	41.0*	78.8
Fiji	22.2	38.1	51.1	76.9
Indonesia	30.1	51.8	50.5	79.5
Kiribati	19.6	36.9	29.0	52.1
Lao People's Democratic Republic	11.3	55.2	25.6	61.8
Maldives	28.9	51.3	45.1	77.3
Marshall Islands	21.7	33.5	38.9	56.5
Mongolia	18.5	52.2	26.7	65.6
Myanmar	9.9	51.7	17.9	80.5
Nauru	18.2	54.7	22.1	71.2
Niue	33.3	54.8	22.6*	69.3
Pakistan	7.0	22.6	28.6	77.7
Palau	16.2	60.3	32.1	74.5
Samoa	11.3	35.8	19.7	63.7
Sri Lanka	7.3	30.6	20.8	71.4
Thailand	25.4	63.4	34.6	78.8
Timor-Leste	16.4	27.3	22.7	41.1
Tonga	21.2	42.6	28.0	54.6
Tuvalu	5.0	28.8	22.0	43.9
Vanuatu	22.7	37.0	28.7	46.7

Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 4 August 2023).

Notes:

1. Data from respective sources and latest year available: Afghanistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Armenia - Household Labour Force Survey, 2021; Cambodia - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2021; Cook Islands - Labour Force Survey, 2019; Fiji - Employment, Unemployment Survey, 2016; Indonesia - National Labour Force Survey, 2022; Kiribati - Population Census, 2020; Lao People's Democratic Republic - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Maldives - Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2019; Marshall Islands - Population Census, 2021; Mongolia - Labour Force Survey, 2022; Myanmar - Labour Force Survey, 2015; Nauru - Population Census, 2021; Niue - Population Census, 2017; Pakistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Palau - Population Census, 2020; Samoa - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Sri Lanka - Labour Force Survey, 2020; Thailand - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2019; Timor-Leste - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Tonga - Population Census, 2021; Tuvalu - Population Census, 2017; Vanuatu - Population and Housing Census, 2020.

2. Data with an asterisk (*) are data values considered by ILOSTAT to have low reliability and whose publication should be displayed with a warning concerning their reliability.

Labour force participation rate, by sex and disability status (per cent)

Country and Territory	Persons with disabilities (%)	Persons without disabilities (%)
Afghanistan	27.5	50.3
Armenia	43.2	68.8
Cambodia	44.9	82.2
Cook Islands	30.7*	72.4
Fiji	37.2	60.0
Indonesia	39.5	68.1
Kiribati	25.4	49.8
Lao People's Democratic Republic	18.7	60.4
Maldives	37.0	66.7
Marshall Islands	33.5	50.1
Mongolia	25.3	62.3
Myanmar	13.8	65.4
Nauru	22.4	66.3
Niue	30.4	62.3
Pakistan	22.9	53.5
Palau	24.3	68.5
Samoa	16.3	55.1
Sri Lanka	13.6	52.4
Thailand	31.4	71.2
Timor-Leste	21.3	35.0
Tonga	24.6	49.8
Tuvalu	13.0	49.9
Vanuatu	25.9	43.6

Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 4 August 2023).

Notes:

1. Data from respective sources and latest year available: Afghanistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Armenia - Household Labour Force Survey, 2021; Cambodia - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2021; Cook Islands - Labour Force Survey, 2019; Fiji - Employment, Unemployment Survey, 2016; Indonesia - National Labour Force Survey, 2022; Kiribati - Population Census, 2020; Lao People's Democratic Republic - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Maldives - Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2019; Marshall Islands - Population Census, 2021; Mongolia - Labour Force Survey, 2022; Myanmar - Labour Force Survey, 2015; Nauru - Population Census, 2021; Niue - Population Census, 2017; Pakistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Palau - Population Census, 2020; Samoa - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Sri Lanka - Labour Force Survey, 2020; Thailand - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2019; Timor-Leste - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Tonga - Population Census, 2021; Tuvalu - Population Census, 2017; Vanuatu - Population and Housing Census, 2020.

2. Data with an asterisk (*) is data value considered by ILOSTAT to have low reliability and whose publication should be displayed with a warning concerning their reliability.

Employment by status in employment and disability status (per cent)

Country and Territory	Self-employed persons with disabilities (%)	Self-employed persons without disabilities (%)
Afghanistan	48.4	53.5
Armenia	73.0	58.6
Cambodia	80.2	51.6
Cook Islands	32.8*	17.9
Fiji	57.5	34.8
Indonesia	74.9	52.9
Kiribati	72.7	45.8
Lao People's Democratic Republic	85.7	79.3
Maldives	51.8	25.1
Marshall Islands	25.0	14.4
Mongolia	57.9	40.4
Myanmar	55.7	61.5
Nauru	20.0*	7.4
Pakistan	61.7	57.7
Samoa	80.0	51.5
Sri Lanka	60.8	42.3
Thailand	65.2	50.7
Timor-Leste	89.7	58.2
Tonga	22.2	17.8
Tuvalu	31.3*	11.5
Vanuatu	37.6	36.5

Source: ILOSTAT, "Data catalogue", database. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 12 September 2023).

Notes:

1. Data from respective sources and latest year available: Afghanistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Armenia - Household Labour Force Survey, 2021; Cambodia - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2021; Cook Islands - Labour Force Survey, 2019; Fiji - Employment, Unemployment Survey, 2016; Indonesia - National Labour Force Survey, 2022; Kiribati - Population Census, 2020; Lao People's Democratic Republic - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Maldives - Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2019; Marshall Islands - Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2019; Mongolia - Labour Force Survey, 2022; Myanmar - Labour Force Survey, 2015; Nauru - Population Census, 2021; Pakistan - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Palau - Population Census, 2020; Samoa - Labour Force Survey, 2017; Sri Lanka - Labour Force Survey, 2020; Thailand - Household Socio-Economic Survey, 2019; Timor-Leste - Labour Force Survey, 2021; Tonga - Population Census, 2021; Tuvalu - Population Census, 2017; Vanuatu - Population and Housing Census, 2020.

2. Data with an asterisk (*) are data values considered by ILOSTAT to have low reliability and whose publication should be displayed with a warning concerning their reliability.

Priorities for disability-inclusive development from 2023 to 2030 reported by governments and civil society organizations

Thematic area	Governments (%)	CSOs (%)
Work and employment	79.3	58.3
Access to knowledge, information and communication	62.1	62.5
Disability statistics	62.1	37.5
Access to the physical environment and transportation	58.6	25.0
Health and rehabilitation	55.2	33.3
Social protection	48.3	45.8
Disaster risk reduction and management	44.8	41.7
Quality education	44.8	33.3
Early childhood intervention	37.9	25.0
Changing negative social norms and perceptions	34.5	29.2
Disability mainstreaming and coordination within government	27.6	37.5
Gender equality and women's empowerment	27.6	37.5
Harmonization of national legislation with CRPD	20.7	37.5
Non-discrimination under the law and access to justice	17.2	45.8
Political participation and decision-making	17.2	37.5
Subregional, regional and international cooperation	17.2	37.5
Disability rights advocacy	13.8	50.0
Poverty eradication	13.8	29.2
Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse	13.8	20.8
Ratification of CRPD/Optional Protocol	6.9	12.5

Source: ESCAP analysis based on responses to the Government Survey on the Final Review of the Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022. The survey was conducted in 2021 and 2022.

B. Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032

1. We, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, having assembled at the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, held in Jakarta and online from 19 to 21 October 2022, have adopted the present declaration.

2. We recognize the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³¹⁹ as both a human rights and a development instrument.

3. We recall General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, in which the Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, which is inclusive of persons with disabilities and in which Member States pledged that no one will be left behind, and acknowledged that Member States, while implementing the 2030 Agenda, should, *inter alia*, respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without discrimination of any kind.

4. We take note of General Assembly resolution 76/138 of 16 December 2021 on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, in which the Assembly recognized that the prevalence of disabilities increased with age and that many older persons lived with a disability, and call upon member States to build capacity to alleviate poverty among older persons and to provide social welfare services on the basis of the specific needs of older persons, in particular older women and older persons with disabilities, to strengthen and incorporate a gender and disability perspective into all policy actions on ageing, to address and eliminate discrimination on the basis of age, sex or disability, as well as to collect and use data disaggregated by age, sex and disability for policy design and implementation.

5. In recognition of the disproportionate impacts of disasters on persons with disabilities, we recall the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030,³²⁰ in which emphasis is placed, *inter alia*, on the importance of the empowerment of persons with disabilities and of inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation in disaster risk reduction.

6. We recall Commission resolution 69/13 of 1 May 2013,

by which the Commission endorsed the Ministerial Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific,³²¹ and Commission resolution 74/7 of 16 May 2018, by which the Commission endorsed the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy.³²²

7. We reaffirm Commission resolutions 77/1 of 29 April 2021 and 78/1 of 27 May 2022, to build forward better, and emphasize the importance of implementing equal, sustainable and inclusive recovery strategies in line with the 2030 Agenda.

8. We note the subregional frameworks that have been adopted to strengthen coordination and collaboration among Governments to support national and subregional initiatives in promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities, namely the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³²³ and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,³²⁴ and acknowledge the value of collaborating across regional, subregional and national levels.

9. We acknowledge the progress made by members and associate members of the Commission in implementing the Incheon Strategy and the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, and the contributions thereto of civil society, particularly organizations of and for persons with disabilities, including in the response to, as well as the recovery and rebuilding from, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and welcome the commitments and efforts made by private sector entities engaged in driving disability-inclusive businesses and value chains.

10. We note that the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing rapid population ageing, with the proportion of the population aged 60 years or over projected to increase from 14.3 per cent in 2022 to 25.9 per cent by 2050,³²⁵ which could increase the number of older persons living with disabilities.

11. We note with concern that, in many instances, despite the progress made, persons with disabilities, in particular women, children, youth, indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and those in other vulnerable situations, continue to face discrimination in all dimensions of life,

³¹⁹ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2515, No. 44910.

³²⁰ General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

³²¹ Commission resolution 69/13, annexes I and II.

³²² ESCAP/74/22/Add.1.

³²³ Endorsed at the forty-seventh Pacific Islands Forum, held in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, from 8 to 10 September 2016.

³²⁴ Adopted at the thirty-third ASEAN Summit, held in Singapore from 13 to 15 November 2018.

³²⁵ United Nations, World Population Prospects 2022: Special Aggregates, online edition.

as well as physical, information and attitudinal barriers, and that persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by widening inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and other crises.

12. We also note with concern that the continuing lack of reliable statistics, data and information on the situation of persons with disabilities at the national, regional and global levels contributes to their exclusion in official statistics, policies and programmes, and in this regard we welcome the call for the disaggregation of data by disability in the 2030 Agenda, which recognizes the need to significantly increase the availability of high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable data to measure progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

13. In the context of improving accessibility and facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society, we acknowledge the actions taken and the resources committed by Governments to support sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, placing emphasis on building the resilience of people and leaving no one behind, and we also acknowledge the strong potential of technological innovation and digital transformation.

14. We underscore the need for members and associate members of the Commission and all stakeholders to take urgent actions to protect and reinforce gains and achievements in disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific amid increasing challenges that are brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, climate change and other risks, which have exacerbated the inequalities among population groups and within and across countries, and call for adequate budgetary allocations, innovations and collaborations to strengthen policies and programmes for disability-inclusive development.

15. We reaffirm the continued relevance and importance of the Incheon Strategy and the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities and in accelerating the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and we recommit ourselves to continuing the implementation of all the goals of the Incheon Strategy.

16. We proclaim the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032, to continue to focus on the effective implementation of the Incheon Strategy and the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, underscore the need to make strategic investments for implementation and commit ourselves to taking measures towards disability-inclusive development through a whole-of-society approach in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, particularly organizations of and for persons

with disabilities and private sector entities, to accelerate action to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities as follows:

(a) Harmonize national legislations with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, once the Convention has been ratified or acceded to, by conducting comprehensive and regular reviews of national and local legislations as appropriate, providing guidance on the implementation of the Convention by line ministries and governments at all levels, training all personnel involved in law enforcement, integrating the provision of reasonable accommodation in national policies, programmes and budgets, and developing and strengthening frameworks, as appropriate, to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the Convention;

(b) Promote the meaningful participation of women and men with diverse disabilities of all ages, including by consulting closely and actively involving children and youth with disabilities through their representative organizations, in planning, implementing and making decisions about policies, programmes and political processes through reasonable accommodation, raising awareness and building the capacities of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, as appropriate, and governments at all levels, as well as other stakeholders;

(c) In the context of paying special attention to the distinct needs of persons with diverse disabilities and of women, children and older persons with disabilities, improve the accessibility of the physical environment, public transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, essential information and services related to disaster risks and public health emergencies and other public services, in both urban and rural areas, and promote universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities by developing national standards and guidelines in line with latest international accessibility standards and guidelines;

(d) Galvanize the power of the private sector, including its resources, technological innovations and talents, to advance disability-inclusive development by adopting disability-inclusive public procurement policies to promote the application of universal design and accessibility measures to publicly procured infrastructure, information and communications technologies and services, by deploying policy incentives for private companies to take action towards mainstreaming disability inclusion in their workforces, organizations, products, services, market activities and supply chains and by facilitating the development of industry guidelines and protocols, especially in the media, including social media, and the entertainment sector, to promote diversity and inclusion and remove content that could

lead to discrimination, stigmatization, stereotyping and misconceptions of persons with disabilities;

(e) Promote a gender-responsive life cycle approach to developing and implementing disability-related policies and programmes, paying particular attention to: (i) extending both mainstream and disability-specific social protection schemes to cover young children, adolescents, women and older persons with disabilities; (ii) providing early childhood detection and intervention services for children with disabilities as an integral part of strategies, policies, programmes and investments aimed at building human capital; (iii) ensuring continuous and inclusive education for all learners with disabilities; and (iv) responding to discrimination and barriers that women and girls with disabilities, including older women with disabilities, often face in terms of participation and of gaining access to information and services, including sexual and reproductive health services;

(f) Building upon the information provided by authorized national agencies and other recognized sources, as appropriate, take action to close disability data gaps and strengthen capacities to track progress in disability-inclusive development at the national and subnational levels by producing comparable and quality data disaggregated by sex, age and disability across sectors to inform disability-inclusive policymaking, programme planning and implementation strategies and by incorporating reports on progress made in achieving disability-inclusive development in voluntary national reviews, as appropriate, conducted in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and other global and regional development frameworks.

17. We therefore request the Executive Secretary, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders and leveraging the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations country teams in the region, as appropriate, to take the following measures, in close collaboration with member States and persons with disabilities:

(a) To accord priority to continuing the implementation of the Incheon Strategy and the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, and to strengthening disability inclusion for the full and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032;

(b) To provide technical support to members and associate members of the Commission, upon their request, for the implementation of the present declaration at the regional and national levels;

(c) To support members and associate members of

the Commission, upon their request, in integrating the disability perspective into voluntary national reviews conducted in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, including by creating a mechanism for engaging persons with disabilities and their representative organizations throughout the national review processes;

(d) To continue to utilize the guidance of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, as appropriate, to support the effective implementation of the present declaration, to make progress in achieving the goals set out in the Incheon Strategy and to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific;

(e) To organize a midpoint review in 2027 and a final intergovernmental review in 2032 to assess the progress made by members and associate members of the Commission in implementing the present declaration during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032;

(f) To submit the present declaration to the Commission at its seventy-ninth session for its consideration and endorsement.

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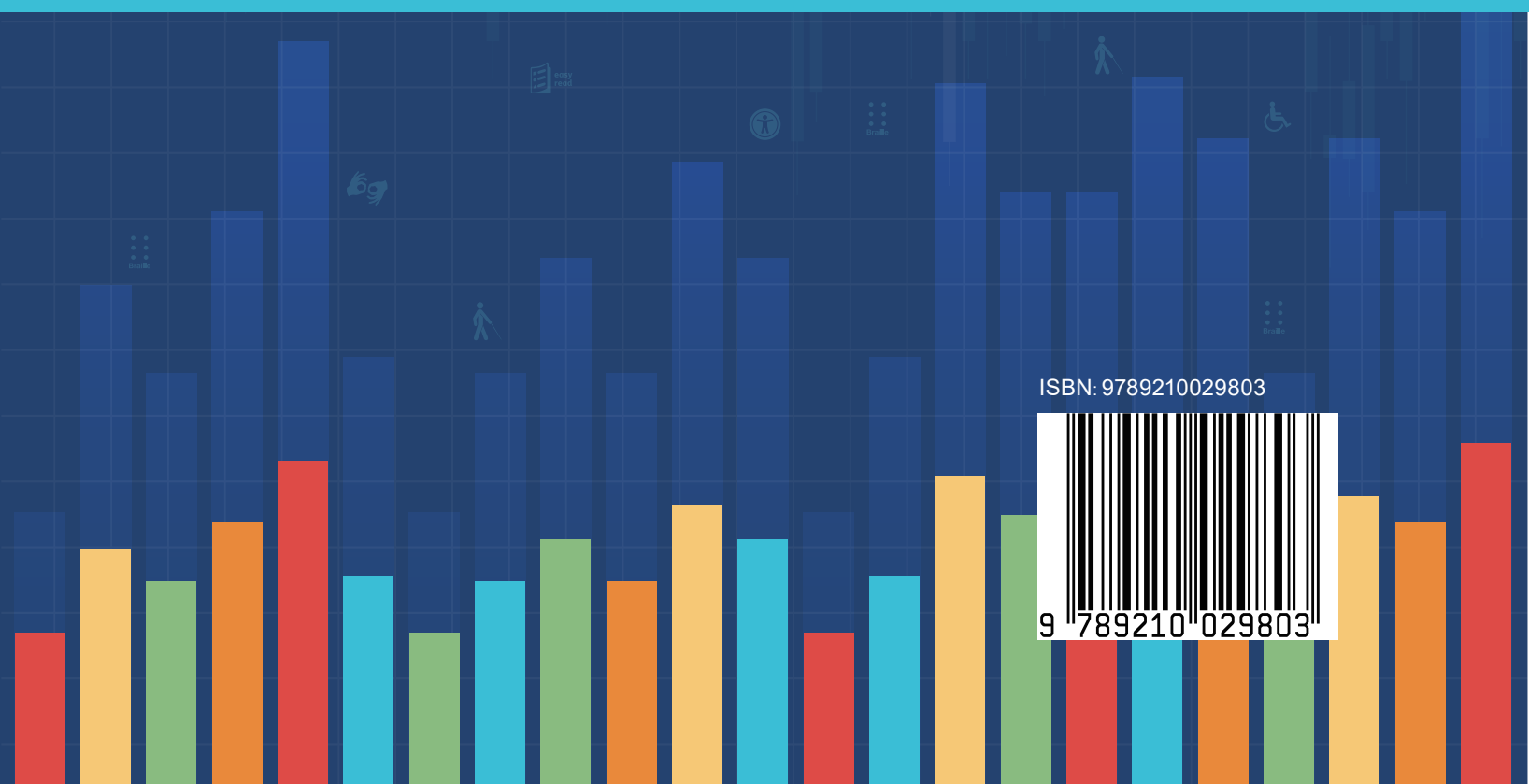
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This publication, *Disability at a Glance 2023: Catalysts of Change: Disability Inclusion in Business in Asia and the Pacific* analyses the evidence, trends and opportunities for disability inclusion in business and provides extensive examples of innovative practices by businesses, Governments and the broader business ecosystem to inspire others to action. Business has a pivotal role to play in accelerating disability-inclusive development through practising inclusion and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of the business value chain by engaging persons with disabilities as leaders, employees, consumers, suppliers/distributors, subject experts and valued stakeholders. In this publication, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific proposes a range of recommendations to Governments, businesses, business associations and other stakeholders towards upholding the rights of persons with disabilities, while at the same time benefiting their businesses and expanding their economies.



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