



Survey on Employment of University  
Graduates and Postgraduates with and without  
Disabilities in ASEAN Countries  
Republic of Indonesia

Final Report

February 2025

The Nippon Foundation

Koei Research & Consulting Inc.

Foreign Exchange Rates

1 USD = 149.642 JPY

1 IDR = 0.00944 JPY

(December 1, 2024 OANDA rate)

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
APINDO	Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia (Indonesia Employers Association)	インドネシア経営者連盟
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
BPS	Badan Pusat Statistik (Statistics Indonesia)	インドネシア中央統計庁
BRIN	Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional (National Research and Innovation Agency)	インドネシア国家研究イノベーション庁
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	障害者の権利に関する条約
CTV	Connected TV	コネクテッドテレビ
DET	Disability Equity Training	障害平等研修
DPO	Disabled People's Organization	障害者団体
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	国内総生産
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems	国際選挙制度財団
IT	Information Technology	情報技術
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
MoECRT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology	教育文化研究技術省
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	非政府組織
OJT	On-the-Job Training	職場内訓練
PERTUNI	Persatuan Tunanetra Indonesia (Indonesian Blind Union)	インドネシア盲人協会
PPDI	Perhimpunan Penyandang Disabilitas Indonesia (Indonesian Association of Persons with Disabilities)	インドネシア障害者協会
SKALA	Sinergi dan Kolaborasi untuk Akselerasi Layanan Dasar (Synergies and Collaboration to Accelerate Service Delivery)	基本サービス加速のためのシナジーとコラボレーションプロジェクト

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for people with disabilities who have received higher education degree. The survey produces seven reports. This report only covers Indonesia and summarizes the findings of the survey in Indonesia. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university and graduate graduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university and postgraduate disabled persons by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and disabled persons' organizations. The field research in Indonesia was conducted over a six-day period from November 25 to 30, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 14 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts in the field of employment for people with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online before and after their return to their home countries.

There were several limitations to this study. Due to the decision to hold local general elections in Indonesia, some interviews that were scheduled to be conducted in person were changed to online, limiting the opportunity to observe the work environment and how they work with their colleagues. In addition, interviews with persons with disabilities working as lawyers were limited to law graduates, and information could not be gathered from persons with disabilities actually practicing as lawyers. This may be due to the extremely low number of job offers for lawyers with disabilities and the almost non-existence of law firms that employ people with disabilities. In addition, we were unable to coordinate appointments with female entrepreneur representing people with hearing disabilities because she did not respond within the deadline, and we were not able to collect information from her. Despite these limitations, we collected secondary information to the extent possible.

## Basic Country Indicators

Indonesia's GDP per capita in 2023 is US\$4,876.3, and the population is approximately 281 million, with an urban population ratio of 59% and a rural

population ratio of 41%. In terms of education, the adult literacy rate is 96%, the primary education enrollment rate is 100%, secondary education is 78.7%, and higher education is 45%, with 4 years of university and 2 years of master's degree programs. The unemployment rate is 3.4%. The average monthly income is Rp. 3,230,000 nationwide and Rp. 5,920,000 in Jakarta. Major industries include manufacturing, wholesale and retail, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and mining.

The population with disabilities is 3.64% of the total population (10,151,126). In terms of legislation regarding persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Affairs oversees the disability sector, while the Ministry of Labor is responsible for policies to promote employment of persons with disabilities. The Law No. 8 on Persons with Disabilities, enacted in 2016, mandates that all public institutions employ 2% of persons with disabilities and private companies employ 1%, but implementation has been shown to be inadequate. In Yogyakarta, entrepreneurship training and vocational rehabilitation for persons with disabilities are being provided, and education on the obligation to employ persons with disabilities for government agencies and private companies is underway. On the other hand, compared to its neighbor Malaysia, Indonesia lacks job coaches and job placement programs, and there are no tax incentives for private companies. Rehabilitation centers are useful for training and vocational rehabilitation for the disabled, but job placement and job security activities are lacking.

## **Employment of university graduates and postgraduates**

Unlike Japan's system of simultaneous recruitment of new graduates, job hunting in Indonesia generally begins after university graduation or after graduation is certified. The main method is to search for suitable companies on the Internet or to obtain employment information by participating in job fairs hosted by universities or government agencies. In recent years, online applications have become increasingly popular, and job hunting activities using the Internet and social networks are also on the rise. However, in-person interviews are still the most common method of interviewing for full-time positions, and online interviews are mainly limited to positions with a time limit or part-time positions. Challenges in the job search process include the fact that applicants are contacted only if they are successful and the timing of notification of acceptance by companies is unclear.

In Indonesia, participation in internships is considered important and is recommended to be undertaken while enrolled in university or graduate school. While participation is mandatory at some universities, students are also free to gain off-campus experience by participating in a program called "Kampus Merdeka". The duration of the internship program varies from university to university, but generally the internship lasts from three to six months during the junior year of university. Internships are often paid, and companies pay a certain amount of compensation to attract the best talent. One challenge is that unpaid internships are common for companies in rural areas, and it has been noted that there are differences in treatment and internship quality from region to region.

With regard to employment conditions, there are differences in the degree of difficulty in finding employment by department, and graduates from departments such as engineering and psychology find it relatively easy to get a job. Start-up companies and government agencies are popular among new graduates, with software-related companies and government agencies offering high benefits particularly attracting attention. No specific industries that make it difficult to find a job were mentioned, but it was noted that university names and English language skills are considered important, making it difficult to find a job unless you are a graduate of a famous university. With regard to work location, many young people prefer to work in Jakarta, and few want to work in rural areas.

## **Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

### **Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions**

In Indonesia, only 2.8% of all persons with disabilities are enrolled in institutions of higher education, and most universities that accept students with disabilities are characterized as institutions with special education departments. Specifically, as a case study of a national university that accepts visually disabled students, more than 10 visually disabled students are enrolled in the university and a supportive environment has been identified. Looking at the breakdown of students with disabilities, while the majority are physically disabled, there are a certain number of visually disabled students, and several visually disabled students have been identified at private universities as well, but the overall number of disabled students is limited. Although the right to education for children with disabilities is legally guaranteed, in reality, the dropout rate is high at the primary education level due to accessibility issues. In order to improve this situation and increase the percentage of students with disabilities who go on to higher education, it has been suggested that it is essential to improve the learning environment at the primary education level.

### **Job Hunting**

Currently, there are several challenges in the job search process for people with disabilities. Students with disabilities often conduct job searches at the same time and in the same manner as the general student population and use "LinkedIn" and other job search tools. However, some students apply for jobs by stating their disability from the beginning because they are often rejected if their disability is revealed during the interview process. Job platforms for people with disabilities include "Difalink," "DNetwork," and "Kerjabilitas," each of which provides job information, skill improvement programs, consulting for companies, career networking, and other support. However, actual employment is mainly limited to students with mild physical disabilities, and visually disabled (Blind) students tend to be hesitant to be hired by employers because they often need mobility assistance. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding and barrier-free facilities for people with disabilities even in government agencies, and there have been cases where

acceptance is revoked after employment due to physical disability. These problems greatly limit employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

### **Internship**

The internship participation status of university and graduate students with disabilities may or may not be mandatory, depending on university credit requirements, regardless of whether they have disabilities or not. Since the Indonesian job market requires work experience, students with disabilities tend to gain work experience in companies through internships and the "Kampus Merdeka" program in the same way as students without disabilities. However, in many cases, students with disabilities are rejected at the application screening stage, forcing faculty and staff to develop individual placements with limited official university support systems. As a result, there have been cases of internships at university-related public schools and at special-needs schools that are the students' home schools, and it has become clear that issues have become apparent from the stage of securing opportunities.

### **Employment status of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities**

Although there is no official data on the employment status of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities, interviews have confirmed the reality that the employment rate is gradually increasing. However, both government agencies and private companies have insufficient understanding of employment of persons with disabilities, and many challenges exist. While visually disabled persons are said to have relatively more employment opportunities, they are mainly employed in call centers and Blind massage parlors, and it is pointed out that they are unable to utilize the expertise they have cultivated through higher education. For visually disabled students majoring in science fields, lack of accessibility to graphics and programming codes in university classes is a barrier, and there is a problem that directly leads to loss of employment opportunities in professional occupations.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Differences in employment rates by gender were noted: two of respondents (female/low vision and male/blind) felt that it was difficult for women with disabilities to find employment, and one (male/blind) stated that it was more difficult for women to find employment than for men. Some argue that traditional gender roles limit women's employment opportunities, and furthermore, women with disabilities often have limited educational opportunities, making it harder for them to acquire occupational skills, thus creating a vicious cycle that makes it more difficult for them to find employment.

There is a trend in the undergraduate choices of students with disabilities, with humanities and social sciences departments being the most popular, especially pedagogy, literature, linguistics, and political science, and fewer going into science departments. This is due to the existence of precedents of students with disabilities majoring in pedagogy and working as teachers in special-needs schools, and of

students with disabilities majoring in literature and linguistics and working in government and research.

### **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

An aspiring Indonesian lawyer, a blind man who currently works as a junior researcher at the University of Indonesia, spoke about the legal industry. He wanted an internship at a law firm after graduating from law school at the university, but could not find an acceptance because of his visual disability. The number of lawyers with disabilities in Indonesia is very small and the exact number is not clear. The Indonesian courts have not digitized their materials, and there is a significant challenge for visually disabled people to access information. These factors have been noted as hindering the entry of persons with disabilities into the legal profession.

### **2. IT Industry**

According to a wheelchair user who works for an IT company in Bandung, while there is a high potential for people with disabilities in the Indonesian IT industry, there are several challenges to employment for people with disabilities. In particular, issues related to mobility and workplace accessibility are cited. Not all companies allow telecommuting, although many are considering remote or hybrid work arrangements. In addition, software accessibility is a major challenge for the visually disabled. Specifically, some programming languages are not compatible with screen readers, resulting in a situation where learning becomes difficult.

He has been working for his current IT company for five years and states that opportunities for advancement are available regardless of education or disability, especially in the skill-oriented IT industry. However, he is the only one of the 30 employees in the same workplace who has a disability.

To promote the employment of people with disabilities in the IT industry, the report points out that training support for acquiring skills is essential, especially practical training. For example, it is necessary to learn how to actually use the skills acquired, such as how to utilize social networking services. For this purpose, the report suggests that it is important to provide training programs for people with disabilities not only through private companies and universities, but also through government funding.

### **3. Government Agency (Agency)**

A Blind researcher working for the Agency of Indonesia, who was unable to find a full-time job for five years after graduating from university and was continually rejected in the selection process when applying to government agencies, began working as a junior researcher at the Ministry of Education in 2018 and has been in her current position since 2022. Although the legal employment rate of persons with disabilities in public administration is set at 2% in Indonesia, the actual number of public officials with disabilities is very small and data collection is inadequate, making it difficult to accurately assess the current situation. Although all ministries and agencies have been promoting the employment of persons with disabilities since the enactment of the Law for Persons with Disabilities, progress has been stagnant.



In 2019, the Inclusive Public Service Forum was established to work toward creating an inclusive work environment for all public servants, regardless of disability. The forum provides recommendations for public sector policies and training, as well as a platform for sharing best practices. On the other hand, there is a reality that it is difficult for people with disabilities to be promoted to higher positions in government agencies because of the strong emphasis on academic backgrounds and the requirement for a master's degree or higher. In order to improve this issue, it is important to collect data on the advancement of persons with disabilities in cooperation with institutions of higher education, and it is necessary to statistically determine the percentage of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the Forum has also made recommendations for improving the workplace environment and promoting barrier-free accessibility, and these efforts may contribute to the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities.

#### **4. Government Agency (Librarian)**

A visually disabled librarian is in charge of the inclusive room at the Library, where she manages braille and audio books and handles visually disabled users. In the civil service examination, she was provided with reasonable accommodations (reading by an assistant and extended examination time) according to her disability characteristics, which she took advantage of to pass the exam and was eventually placed in the management department. At her current workplace, she is satisfied with the understanding of her supervisor, but at her previous workplace, there were issues with accessibility and reasonable accommodations, and facilities for the visually disabled were not in place. Currently, she also utilizes an application that provides real-time audio location and environmental information.

The library believes that having people with disabilities working in the library will help increase public awareness and understanding of disability. The library's efforts to improve accessibility for people with disabilities include literacy education, storytelling, and educational events that include people with disabilities. However, equal access to higher education is essential to increasing employment for people with disabilities, she says. She points out that in Indonesia, a university degree is a requirement to become a full-time employee, but it remains difficult for people with disabilities to complete higher education.

#### **5. Welfare Industry (Social Worker)**

We spoke with a blind man who works in a shelter as a social worker. He graduated from university in 2018 and passed the national exam for social workers in 2019 to obtain his current position. The exam had an extended testing time as a reasonable accommodation, as well as a lower minimum passing score than for candidates without disabilities. The shelter where he currently works accepts people with disabilities who have no relatives and offers programs to promote independence, and users receive these services free of charge. The work environment is also well maintained, and equipment has been installed to accommodate the visually disabled.

His promotion as a social worker was based on evaluation, and he was promoted to "Young Social Worker" through his own efforts. The workplace has an ingrained

culture of mutual admiration within the team, regardless of disability. However, there are some challenges in the work. In particular, home visitation work requires visual information in many situations, which is difficult for a visually disabled person to do alone, and he or she must always be accompanied by a colleague. Thus, team support is essential when ascertaining the actual situation. In addition, since visual materials are required for case meetings, it is difficult for him to prepare them alone, so he prepares visual materials such as PowerPoint with the help of his team. He noted that in Indonesia there is still not enough support for people with disabilities to work as social workers, and said that improving the employment environment for people with disabilities is an important issue for the future.

## **6. Welfare Industry (Psychologist)**

A man with low vision, a psychologist, discussed his career and the challenges, success factors, and recommendations in the welfare industry. He has been working in the field of educational psychology since receiving his master's degree in psychology from the University of Indonesia; after working with Mitra Netra and educational institutions, he has focused on helping children with disabilities, including setting up a consulting service in educational psychology.

In Indonesia, the social status of psychologists is intermediate compared to that of medical occupations, and to obtain a license, one must complete a national examination after completing graduate school. He started his career in a situation where reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities was inadequate, but with the support of Mitra Netra, he was given employment opportunities. At the same time, he faces many challenges, such as the current situation where low vision is not easily recognized as a disability and the difficulty of performing clerical work.

His own success factors include language and communication skills and independence. His parents' educational policies and strict guidance from his colleagues helped him grow. Another important factor is the efficiency of his work by hiring assistants.

He emphasizes his potential in the field of education as a psychologist for persons with disabilities, while stressing the need for companies and organizations to establish evaluation systems based on individual skills and competencies. He also suggests that in employment assistance, the provision of practical training opportunities is more important than financial assistance, and that people with disabilities themselves must strive for self-analysis and growth.

## **7. Consulting Industry**

A male (blind) freelance consultant spoke about his background and experience, the current situation and challenges of working as a consultant for people with disabilities, and his recommendations. He majored in communications at university and after graduation worked for international NGOs and foundations assisting people with disabilities. He then completed a master's degree in Australia and is currently

involved in government projects throughout Indonesia, advising on gender equality and social inclusion.

There are an increasing number of disabled people working as consultants in Indonesia, but the forms of employment are diverse and include freelance work and corporate work. No specific qualifications are required to become a consultant, but completion of a master's degree or experience in a specialized field is considered advantageous. Freelancers must search for and obtain projects on their own, and they obtain work through social networking sites and requests from clients. On the other hand, working for a company can lead to unequal treatment, including prejudice against people with disabilities and excessive requests for letters of recommendation, which is why he chose the freelance path.

Although performance is required for promotion and obtaining projects, it is currently difficult to obtain projects outside of the disability field. In addition, they sometimes faced a lack of understanding and discomfort from their colleagues in the workplace, but this has been improving in recent years as understanding of their disabilities has increased. However, there are some cases where it is difficult to obtain reasonable accommodations from clients, and the cost of companionship for the safe performance of work is not allowed.

Although the potential for people with disabilities to work as consultants is high, many people with disabilities do not envision their own potential. In order to improve this situation, he believes that it would be effective to expand their perspectives by disseminating successful case studies through publicity videos and other means. To address the problem of disabled university and graduate school graduates having difficulty finding employment, he recommends that the government strictly adhere to the legally mandated employment rate, and that companies must change their mindset.

## **8. Disabled People's Organizations**

The organization was established in 1966 to support the visually disabled, with branches in 34 provinces and 221 provinces and cities, and approximately 50,000 members. All board members are visually disabled, and some of the support staff are also visually disabled. Many staff members are university-educated. Activities are on a volunteer basis with no salary, and board members and staff work while holding down other jobs. The organization works with the government to improve the rights of people with disabilities and was involved in the establishment of the Disability Service Unit in 2020, which provides employment support for people with disabilities within the local government. On the other hand, there are many challenges. The biggest problem is the instability of funding sources, which continues to rely on foreign donors and private donations. In addition, since board members are also unpaid, it is difficult for them to maintain their livelihood only through employment with the organization. Furthermore, the organization itself is not attractive as a place of employment for people with disabilities who have university or graduate degrees. In addition, family support is important to promote education and employment for people with disabilities, but in Indonesia, there is a strong custom of shaming people

with disabilities, which sometimes hinders their education and further education. Therefore, it is necessary to first provide support to families and promote correct understanding of disabilities.

## Implications for Promoting Employment of People with Disabilities

Although some progress has been made in the employment situation of people with disabilities in Indonesia, many issues remain. Although there have been cases where people with disabilities have taken civil service examinations with reasonable accommodation and have been promoted, compared to non disabled people, the job hunting and working environment for people with disabilities who graduated from universities and graduate schools is more difficult. Many children with disabilities are unable to obtain educational opportunities due to challenges starting from primary education, and it is difficult for them to enter and complete higher education. In particular, visually disabled people face serious learning barriers due to lack of support for assistive devices.

In the employment environment, the legally mandated employment rates of 1% for private companies and 2% for government agencies have not actually been achieved, and penalties are not effective. Many people with disabilities use online platforms in their job search, but are often unsuccessful during interviews. There are job platforms for people with disabilities, such as Difalink, but they are mainly limited to people with mild physical disabilities. As companies seek work experience, students with disabilities seek experience through internships and "Kampus Merdeka," but are often rejected. As a result, they often gain social experience in familiar environments such as university-related facilities or special needs schools. Although employment and promotion rates are slowly increasing, understanding of disability on the part of employers remains lacking. The employment situation for women with disabilities is particularly severe, and challenges have been identified.

The recommended approach to resolving these issues is as follows

### **1. Strategic selection of scholarship areas and career development support programs**

In Indonesia, academic background is considered important and has a significant impact on employment and promotion. The Nippon Foundation continues to provide scholarships to students with disabilities, but will focus its support on fields in which students have a high likelihood of finding employment. Specifically, engineering, IT, psychology, education, literature, and political science will be targeted. Scholarship recipients will be provided with academic progress and psychological support through regular interviews, and follow-up surveys will be conducted after employment. In addition, the program will provide opportunities to gain practical work experience through internships and volunteer activities in collaboration with companies. In addition, mentorship programs, support tool workshops, entrepreneurship support, and international exchange programs will be

introduced to support the career development of students with disabilities. These measures will be integrated into the Indonesian curriculum to provide scholarship recipients with diverse employment preparation.

## **2. Technical Assistance to Indonesian Administrative Officers: Study Trips to Thailand and Malaysia**

In Indonesia, the statutory employment rate of persons with disabilities is set at 2% for government agencies and 1% for private companies, but since compliance is not thorough, government-led reforms are needed. The Nippon Foundation will conduct a study trip for Indonesian government administrators to learn about cases in Thailand and Malaysia. In Thailand, the operation of the legal employment rate and contribution system has shown a certain level of effectiveness, while in Malaysia, incentives for companies and actual activities of employment support specialists are being implemented. In the training, participants will hear lectures on the legal system, case studies of the introduction of reasonable accommodation at companies, visits to employment agencies, and activities of job coaches, and formulate a plan for improvement in line with the current situation in Indonesia. In addition, Japanese experts and external experts will provide support for drafting legislation and improving skills, and after the implementation of the model project, support for local administrative agency staff will be strengthened.

## **3. Raising workplace awareness through disability equality training**

In Indonesia, the biggest barrier faced by university and graduate graduates with disabilities in their job search and after entering the workforce is the lack of understanding of disability within companies and government agencies. When their disabilities are identified, they are often rejected for employment and excluded from certain tasks even after joining the company. To solve this problem, it is essential not only to improve the skills of people with disabilities, but also to change the awareness of companies and government agencies. Therefore, Indonesian Disability Equality Training (DET) facilitators will conduct DET for companies to which scholarship graduates apply for or internship. 2 DET facilitators are currently available, but to ensure the continued implementation of the training, the Asia-Pacific Disability Center for Persons with Disabilities in Thailand and The Government of Indonesia should cooperate to secure financial resources and increase the number of facilitators. This activity will be carried out in conjunction with Government Regulation No. 60/2020 (Establishment of Disability Service Units within Provincial Administrative Agencies) which came into effect in 2020, with the aim of extending DET training to rural areas and creating a foundation for disability understanding and employment promotion in the provinces.

## **4. Prospects for Future Research on Women with Disabilities in Indonesia**

In Indonesia, women with disabilities find it more difficult to find employment than men, and this is attributed to traditional gender roles and domestic roles that

limit women's employment opportunities, as well as the difficulty for women with disabilities to gain occupational skills due to lack of access to educational opportunities. However, the survey was based on a limited number of respondents, and the results are not statistically significant. Additional data are needed to determine if the situation is unique to Indonesia compared to other countries. One possible method would be to collect data from entrepreneurial training and vocational rehabilitation centers for people with disabilities by gender to determine the percentage of people who actually found employment. In addition, in-depth interviews with women with disabilities who have university or graduate degrees may provide clues to issues and solutions that are not apparent in statistical data. Furthermore, comparisons with other ASEAN countries, especially Thailand and Malaysia, would provide a deeper understanding of the situation in Indonesia. Based on the results of these surveys, more effective employment support measures for women with disabilities could be formulated and implemented.

These four support approaches, while independent efforts, function in a complementary manner and act as a comprehensive strategy to promote the employment of people with disabilities and expand their participation in society.



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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
CSSA	Camed Students Support Center	キャメッド学生支援センター
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	障害者の権利に関する条約
DAC	Disability Action Council	障害活動協議会
GDP	Gross Domestic Products	国内総生産
GPE	Global Partnership for Education	教育のためのグローバル・パートナーシップ
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
MBA	Master of Business Administration	経営学修士
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport	教育・青年・スポーツ省
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	非政府組織
NISE	National Institute for Special Education	国立特別支援教育総合研究所
OPD	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities	障害者団体
PPCIL	Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living	プノンペン自立生活センター
SNS	Social Networking Service	ソーシャル・ネットワーキング・サービス

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for people with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. This survey produces seven reports. This report only covers Cambodia and summarizes the findings of the survey in Cambodia. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university and graduate graduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university and postgraduate disabled persons by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and disabled people's organizations (OPD). The field research in Cambodia was conducted over a six-day period from December 9 to 14, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts in the field of employment for people with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online.

In this study, appropriate interviewees were selected mainly through referrals from the "Physical Rehabilitation Center of Kratie Province" and other subjects were confirmed, but the number of persons with disabilities working in general companies was limited, and most of the interviews were with government agencies and persons with disabilities who had started their own businesses. In particular, interviews with persons with disabilities working in the social welfare and IT industries were not realized. In the social welfare industry, we obtained information that there were many university students majoring in psychology and welfare, mainly visually disabled people, but their career paths after graduation were diverse; in the IT industry, the lack of accessibility of software seemed to prevent the advancement of people with disabilities. The types of disabilities of the interviewees were also limited to visual and physical disabilities, and it was not possible to identify appropriate subjects with hearing disabilities. Although these limitations limited inclusiveness and representativeness, secondary information was supplemented to the extent possible.

## Basic Country Indicators

As of 2023, Cambodia's GDP per capita is 2,429.7 USD and the total population is 17,423,880, of which the urban population accounts for 25% and the rural population

75%. In terms of education, the literacy rate for those aged 15 and over is 84% (by 2022), the gross enrollment rate for primary education is 111%, secondary education is 45%, and higher education is 16.2%. The number of years of compulsory education is 9, and the percentage of students going on to higher education institutions is 18%. The unemployment rate is low at 0.2%. The average household income is US\$361 nationwide and US\$663 in the Phnom Penh metropolitan area (April-June 2022). Major industries comprise 39.2% of industry, 36.4% of services, and 24.3% of agriculture (2021).

In relation to persons with disabilities, a survey conducted by the Cambodian government reported that the percentage of persons with disabilities was 4.9% as of 2019, but as of 2014 it was reported to be 9.5%, a significant difference. Due to the lack of data on the higher education and employment status of persons with disabilities, a national survey is required.

As a legal system, a government ordinance enacted in 2010 mandates that government agencies employing 50 or more employees must employ at least 2% of persons with disabilities, and private companies employing 100 or more employees must employ at least 1% of persons with disabilities. In addition, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009) aims to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their participation in society, and specifies the provision of employment opportunities, support for vocational training, and prohibition of employment discrimination. Through this legal framework, it is expected that persons with disabilities will be able to participate in society.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

Year-round hiring is common in Cambodia, and students tend to start job hunting around their junior year of university. Job fairs are actively held and many students participate, but there is no bias toward any particular grade. As for when job hunting activities end, it is common for students to receive a job offer upon graduation if they are not particular about the industry or type of work.

The most common method of job hunting is to search for companies via the Internet and SNS, and career centers at some universities introduce job openings. In addition, participation in job fairs and internship experiences are considered important, and in many cases, interns are hired directly by their employers. However, there are also some cases of employment through nepotism or bribery.

The hiring process in Cambodia is rapid, often involving finding a job posting, submitting a resume, and being accepted or rejected in a single interview. While online job searches have surged in recent years, the importance of face-to-face interviews has also been reaffirmed.

Internships may or may not be mandatory depending on the university or department, but in many cases they play an important role. The duration is usually three to six months and unpaid, but in some cases daily allowances and food

expenses are provided. Students must find their own internships, and support by university career centers is limited.

Looking at the employment situation, the youth unemployment rate is higher than the overall rate, but jobs for new graduates do exist. However, many companies are looking for people with immediate and specialized skills, and new graduates who do not meet these criteria may have a hard time finding a job. About 10% of students start their own businesses, often running small online stores. By department, IT majors have a high employment rate, and demand is increasing, especially in digital-related fields. On the other hand, students majoring in marketing and management tend to struggle. In terms of work location, employment is more prevalent in Phnom Penh than in rural areas, and is increasingly concentrated in urban areas in terms of salary levels and employment opportunities.

## **Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

### **Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions**

The situation of students with disabilities in higher education institutions in Cambodia is not officially known by the Ministry of Education due to the lack of official statistical data, but a field survey has revealed the actual situation. While a certain number of physically disabled students who are able to walk are enrolled in higher education, wheelchair users face difficulties due to lack of physical accessibility (steps, toilets, means of transportation), and visually disabled students face barriers to continuing their studies due to the lack of digital and Braille materials. Although there are few cases of hearing-disabled students entering university, 9-10% of upper secondary school graduates of special-needs schools under the jurisdiction of the National Institute of Special Education (NISE) have gone on to higher education, and 13 students passed the university entrance exam in FY2024. However, for those with moderate to severe disabilities, lack of social understanding and inadequate support systems have accumulated since the primary education stage, preventing them from reaching higher education.

### **Job Hunting**

As with the recommendations for institutions of higher education, physical and informational accessibility improvements have been identified as an urgent issue as well as recommendations for job placement. For example, it is reported that lack of physical accessibility to the workplace is a barrier to commuting to work, and employers are required to deepen their understanding of disability and provide reasonable accommodations within the company. In the area of support for the visually disabled, similar to the recommendations for higher education institutions, the report emphasizes that in addition to improving the accessibility of digital materials, the development of Khmer language-enabled assistive devices is necessary to support the employment of visually disabled people. Universities are required to establish departments to support students with disabilities, and providing

employment information and establishing individualized support systems in cooperation with companies are considered key to supporting the transition from education to employment.

### **Internship**

When internships are required at universities, they are a graduation requirement for all students regardless of disability. Even when internships are not required, having work experience, including internships, is considered important, as work experience is currently advantageous for employment. There is no major difference between students with and without disabilities in terms of the timing of implementation and how to find an internship site. However, it is difficult for students with disabilities to find internships, and there is a need to provide opportunities for work experience and skill improvement through the expansion of vocational training schools.

### **Employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

According to the director of the center of Independent Living, although there are no official statistics specifically for university graduates with disabilities, the employment situation is improving with the enactment of the legal employment rate for persons with disabilities. In particular, the employment rate at government agencies has increased significantly in recent years. On the other hand, due to a lack of understanding of disability in society as a whole, people with disabilities are often regarded as unskilled and still face difficulties in finding employment in the private sector.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Regarding the impact of gender, many interviewees stated that they did not perceive any particular gender differences, but they also observed that the civil war had affected the number of men with disabilities, and that the employment rate for men was higher than for women.

With regard to the employment rate by department, many people with disabilities work in industries that differ from their majors at university, and the majority of the respondents said that it is difficult to find a job no matter what department they graduate from, and that there is no department that makes it easy to find a job. On the other hand, there are cases where visually disabled students who majored in English teaching, for example, applied for employment at government agencies that use English rather than at special-needs schools.

As for industries where it is easy to find employment, government agencies are considered relatively promising. Especially since the Cambodian government introduced a method of hiring people with disabilities to comply with the legal employment rate, government agencies have become an easy field of employment for people with disabilities who have university or graduate degrees and are able to walk. Teaching positions in special-needs schools are also considered a promising

option. On the other hand, there is a widely shared perception that employment is generally difficult for people with disabilities in all industries.

## **1. Legal Profession (Lawyer)**

A person (male in his 40s/physical disability) working as a notary in the Ministry in Cambodia shared his background and the challenges and recommendations he is facing as a person with disabilities trying to enter the legal profession.

To become a lawyer or a notary in Cambodia, one must go through a lengthy training and examination process, and the entry of people with disabilities is extremely limited. In particular, it is almost impossible to be hired as a lawyer, and even public witnesses are not allowed to assume office if they are visually disabled or have color blindness. In exceptional cases, however, flexibility may be granted to an already experienced professional with an acquired disability. He himself was admitted as a notary public with special approval.

Inadequate physical accessibility is a major challenge in daily life, for example, restrictions on mobility and parking use affect work. Problems over parking space for motor bikes used for commuting to work have been experienced in the past and are still facing the same challenges, which have not been resolved.

He aspires to become a lawyer in the future and is seeking institutional reforms to allow people with disabilities to enter the legal profession. Through negotiations with the Cambodian Bar Association, he aims to promote the acceptance of people with disabilities and to help those in the same situation by becoming lawyers themselves. It also proposes the creation of a system that gives consideration to people with disabilities in terms of exam scores and other criteria, as well as preferential treatment for some minority groups. In addition, the project also intends to promote the disability sector in the future by utilizing JICA's technical assistance to the legal profession.

## **2. Government Agency**

A Blind civil servant (35 years old) working for the Ministry talks about the current situation and challenges of employing people with disabilities in government agencies through his own experience. He passed the civil service exam after completing an internship and is now working in a managerial position (deputy head of department).

In the Ministry he works, only three of the approximately 1,000 employees are disabled; two, including him, are visually disabled. On the other hand, the government as a whole employs more than 2% of the legally mandated employment rate of persons with disabilities, and the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities is positioned as a national strategy. He himself was hired through the normal examination process, not through a special quota, but was provided with a PC and a separate room as a reasonable accommodation during the examination.

One operational challenge is access to materials. Many materials are paper-only and not digitized, or are in Khmer, and assistive technologies such as screen readers

may not be compatible. This limits access to information and impacts capacity building and promotion opportunities.

Although the current government is proactive in hiring people with disabilities, it tends to hire people with mild physical disabilities rather than those with physical accessibility challenges. In his case, he receives transportation to and from work by his family and support from his co-workers. He emphasizes the urgent need to improve not only the physical environment but also the accessibility of information in order to promote the employment of the visually disabled.

### **3. Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD)**

The independent living center, established in 2009, is a Cambodian organization that supports people with disabilities and aims to enable people with severe disabilities to participate equally in society. According to the center's director (45 years old/wheelchair user), the center mainly provides assistance services and accessibility improvements, and currently has 10 staff members, 8 of whom are disabled. The organization is also active in advocating for revisions to the Disability Rights Act. For staff recruitment, the organization sends out job postings through social networking sites and universities, and conducts online interviews after screening resumes. Job candidates' work experience has a significant impact on acceptance or rejection. Promotion is evaluated on a merit basis, but accessibility issues remain for the visually and hearing disabled.

The main issue is the sustainability of funding, which is mostly dependent on foreign donors and voluntary assistance. Another challenge is that in Cambodia, people with disabilities tend to view disability as an individual issue and are reluctant to speak up for themselves. Furthermore, it is often difficult to overcome opposition from family members due to the family-first value system. Recommendations include the implementation of business training by the Nippon Foundation and programs for cooperation with companies, and the establishment of a model business jointly run by people with disabilities and non-disabled persons. In addition, support for implementation of existing systems, policy recommendations, and promotion of barrier-free environments to companies are also considered necessary. The report states that the promotion of employment of people with disabilities should be promoted by spreading best practices.

### **4. Consulting Industry**

Consultant in his 40s (estimated) with a physical disability, has been working as a freelance consultant since 2019 after years of experience in international NGOs, government agencies, and organizations supporting children with intellectual disabilities after graduating from university. In addition to an MBA and a Master's degree in Law and Political Science, in 2023 he received a PhD in the field of leadership. There are few examples of people with disabilities working as consultants in Cambodia, especially in the private sector, where accessibility and lack of understanding of disability are challenges. In order to break through this situation, he started his own consulting company and serves as a role model. Currently, he

works from home and utilizes shared office space, and has no problems with his work environment, but as a freelancer, he faces challenges with income stability.

Support from family and peers was an important factor in career building. Although his family environment was not economically privileged, the support he received for higher education enabled him to build his career. Even after marriage, he has received emotional support from his family and is able to live his life without being aware of his disability due to the lack of excessive support. In addition, in the past, receiving support from his supervisor to pay for his university education was a major turning point in her life.

One of the challenges in career development for people with disabilities is the lack of higher education and employment opportunities. In Cambodia in particular, the importance of education is not fully recognized, and many children with disabilities are deprived of schooling opportunities. To improve this situation, efforts have been made for more than 20 years to promote understanding of disabilities, but there are still many difficulties. Currently, the company is engaged in activities to promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) and in public relations activities to inform society about examples of people with disabilities playing active roles in higher education and in the professions. In order to achieve the legally mandated employment rate, donor support and the dissemination of good examples are necessary, and he himself is working to promote this as a role model. However, he feels that more colleagues are needed in this effort.

## **Implications for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

While the introduction of the legal employment rate system and the promotion of employment by government agencies are progressing, many issues remain regarding the employment situation of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities in Cambodia. In particular, the disparity in educational opportunities according to the degree of disability is particularly pronounced. While some people with mild disabilities may be able to enter university, those with moderate to severe disabilities have restricted access from the primary education stage. Even after entering university, learning is hindered by a lack of commuting, on-campus environment, and access to information.

In the job search process, people with disabilities also use the Internet and SNS to gather information, but finding employment in the private sector remains difficult, with special needs schools, government agencies, and organizations for people with disabilities being the main options. Internships are a graduation requirement at some universities, and although they play an important role in finding employment, physical and information accessibility issues exist even during this period. Progress has been made in employment in government agencies with the introduction of a recruitment method based on former prime ministers, but this too tends to be limited to people with mild physical disabilities, and challenges remain in dealing with people with severe disabilities and those with visual and hearing disabilities.



Social awareness is also a problem. The idea that "disability is an individual issue" and family-first values limit educational and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In addition, a lack of understanding on the part of companies also makes it difficult to hire people with disabilities. Furthermore, this survey focused on the physically and visually disabled, with little mention of hearing disabilities, mental disabilities, and autism spectrum disorders, for which support measures need to be considered in the future.

The recommended approach to resolving these issues is as follows. A plan is proposed to promote employment for people with disabilities in Cambodia, with a five-year period to lay the groundwork, followed by five years to develop specific support activities. The following are the main initiatives.

### **1. Comprehensive fact-finding survey and assistance in formulating a plan for the Cambodian government**

In order to understand the employment status and needs of persons with disabilities, a comprehensive survey will be conducted regardless of the type or degree of disability. The survey will collect detailed information on employment status, issues in the workplace, reasonable accommodation, etc., and formulate evidence-based employment support plans for persons with disabilities in cooperation with the government and organizations for persons with disabilities. Government officers and organizations of/for persons with disabilities will also participate in the survey from the initial stage, with the aim of creating a highly effective plan by systematically organizing the current situation and issues.

### **2. Improved physical accessibility**

Barrier-free accessibility of new buildings and public transportation facilities will be implemented in a phased manner. Standards based on international best practices will be introduced for new buildings, and model areas will be established for existing facilities and transportation systems to demonstrate the effectiveness of improvements. In addition, Japanese experts will conduct on-site monitoring and evaluation to measure the results of the initiatives while fostering a common understanding with the Cambodian government, and adjust strategies as necessary. In addition, the project will demonstrate that the benefits will extend to the elderly and families with children, and encourage the support and participation of society as a whole.

### **3. Improve accessibility of information**

Improvements in information accessibility will also be made in stages. In cooperation with the Cambodian government and organizations of people with disabilities, the development of digital books and library facilities for the visually disabled and the formulation of guidelines for improving website accessibility are possible. On the other hand, in terms of support for the hearing disabled, subtitles and sign language should be introduced to TV broadcasts, and in the event of a disaster, the provision of visual information should be strengthened in emergency

warning systems and evacuation centers. If training of sign language interpreters is identified by the hearing disabled as a priority issue, the government of Cambodia and local companies should strengthen cooperation and provide support from a long-term perspective in order to build a sustainable training program and dispatch system from the initial stage.

#### **4. Corporate awareness-raising activities through the media**

One of the challenges in promoting employment of persons with disabilities in Cambodia is to improve the effectiveness of the legally mandated employment rate system. As a solution to this issue, the project aims to improve the awareness of companies, society, and families of people with disabilities by strengthening corporate awareness-raising activities utilizing the media and widely disseminating successful examples of employment of people with disabilities. Specific examples will include companies that have created barrier-free environments, the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to employ visually disabled people, and the benefits to the local community of employment at libraries.

However, even if companies are interested in employing people with disabilities, they currently rely on their own efforts due to a lack of budgets, specialists, and other resources for reasonable accommodation. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with the government to develop incentives and support tools and to consider securing financial resources.

Through these measures, we aim to develop a foundation for the promotion of employment for people with disabilities in Cambodia and open the way for various support activities.



Survey on Employment of University  
Graduates and Postgraduates with and without  
Disabilities in ASEAN Countries  
Kingdom of Thailand

Final Report

February 2025

The Nippon Foundation

Koei Research & Consulting Inc.

Foreign Exchange Rates

1 USD = 153.93 JPY

1 THB=4.51234 JPY

(December 27, 2024 OANDA rate)

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
APCD	Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability	アジア太平洋障害者センター
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
BOI	The Board of Investment, Thailand	タイ国投資委員会
DEP	Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities	障害者エンパワメント局
DPO	Disabled People's Organization	障害者団体
DSS	Disability Support Services	障害学生支援サービス
GDP	Gross Domestic Products	国内総生産
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
MSDHS	Ministry of Social Development and Human Security	社会開発人間安全保障省
NECTEC	National Electronics and Computer Technology Center	タイ国立電子コンピューター技術研究センター
NESDC	Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council	タイ国家経済社会開発委員会
NSO	National Statistical Office of Thailand	国家統計局
OHEC	The Office of the Higher Education Commission	高等教育委員会
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	国連開発計画
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund	国連児童基金
UNV	United Nations Volunteers	国連ボランティア計画
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas	海外ボランティア活動

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for people with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. This survey produces seven reports. This report only covers Thailand and summarizes the findings of the survey in Thailand. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities by industry and organization, such as the legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and disabled peoples' organizations. The field research in Thailand was conducted for 6 days from November 23 to November 28, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts in the field of employment for people with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online after researchers returned to Japan.

However, several limitations exist in this study. First, interviews with persons with disabilities working in the social welfare industry, particularly social workers and counselors, were not feasible. In addition, although we were able to obtain information about the consulting industry from consultants who had started their own businesses, we were not able to gather specific information about persons with disabilities working in the general corporate sector. Although many students major in social welfare because it is of interest to university students with disabilities and relatively easy to graduate, there are few cases of students working in the social welfare industry after graduation. On the other hand, since it is believed that people with disabilities have made a certain amount of progress in society in Thailand, there is a possibility that information sources exist outside of the organizations and networks of people with disabilities. However, time constraints made it difficult to approach people outside of the concerned parties, and we were limited to collecting secondary information.

## Basic Country Indicators

Key indicators for Thailand's economy, population, and education are as follows: per capita GDP in 2023 was 7,171.8 USD, and the total population was 71,801,279, with urban and rural populations accounting for 54% and 46% of the total population, respectively. In terms of education, the country has a high adult literacy rate of 94% (2021), a gross enrollment rate of 99% for primary education, 109% for secondary education, and 48.7% for higher education (2019). The unemployment rate is low at 0.9% (2023), and the average monthly income is 27,352 baht (about 120,000 JPY) nationwide and 40,200 THB (about 170,000 JPY) in Bangkok (2020). As for major industries, manufacturing accounts for about 30% of GDP, and tourism income is also an important part of the economy.

With regard to persons with disabilities, as of 2019, the population of persons with disabilities in Thailand is 2,015,385 (2.9% of the total population), of which 1,051,878 are men and 963,507 are women.

Regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, the legal foundation is the Persons with Disability Empowerment Act enacted in 2007. Article 33 of this law requires companies with 100 or more employees to employ 1% of persons with disabilities, and Article 34 requires companies that do not meet the standard to pay contributions to the National Disability Empowerment Fund. In addition, Article 35 introduces the concept of "social employment," in which companies provide jobs to persons with disabilities in public service institutions such as hospitals, schools, and foundations and pay wages to them, which is considered as employment of persons with disabilities by the company. In addition, about 100 Disability Career Promotion Centers have been established throughout Thailand, where people with disabilities can access job information free of charge.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

Internet-based company searches, job search sites, and social networking services are the mainstay of job hunting activities for university and graduate students in Thailand. Recruitment agencies and job fairs organized by universities are also utilized. Word of mouth and information from friends also play an important role. The hiring process is quick, with a small number of interviews, and sometimes a hire is made in a single interview. Probationary periods are not common, and in many cases, employment is permanent from the start.

Internships are a required course at many universities, and there are two types: General Internships and Co-operative Education. A general internship lasts about one to two months and is intended to earn credits, while Co-operative Education requires full-time work for four months or more and a proposal to the company. Interns are rarely paid during the internship period, but transportation may be provided.

Although the job market is expanding in Thailand as a whole, the employment rate of new graduates is declining. While the employment rate is higher for graduates with

science-related backgrounds, there are no marked differences among liberal arts majors. Demand for foreign language skills is no longer as high as before. The digital, agriculture, and food processing industries have seen an increase in the number of new graduates being hired. Workplaces are mainly located in Bangkok, where convenience and climatic conditions are important.

## **Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

### **Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions and trends**

From 2004 to 2010, the number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education institutions in Thailand was on the rise. However, since 2011, the number has either leveled off or shown a downward trend. This trend is the same for non-disabled students, and may reflect changes in higher education as a whole. The number of students with disabilities has varied from university to university, with a particular trend toward students with visual and physical disabilities.

Some university faculties have introduced a quota system for students with disabilities (quotas are allocated to a portion of the admission quota for students with disabilities, and reasonable consideration and exam exemptions are provided in examinations), but this is not a legal obligation, but a voluntary initiative of each university. Therefore, there are significant differences among universities in support systems and the content of considerations.

### **Disabled Student Services (DSS)**

A total of 48 Disabled Student Services (DSS) centers have been established at universities in Thailand, providing Braille translation and assistive technology. Thammasat University is working with a career center to provide employment assistance such as resume writing guidance and internship placement, and plans to launch an individual career planning project in 2025 and beyond. On the other hand, Chulalongkorn University does not have a DSS or quota system, and it has been pointed out that individualized support and consideration is insufficient.

### **Job hunting**

Job hunting for university/graduate students with disabilities often takes place at the same time as non-disabled student population. Although social understanding of the employment of persons with disabilities has progressed over the past two decades, many companies remain reluctant to hire persons with disabilities and often end up paying less for employing persons with disabilities. Cultural attitudes such as "we don't want to demand too much from persons with disabilities," lack of physical facilities, and safety concerns continue to make it difficult for persons with disabilities to enter a wide variety of occupations.

In addition, many persons with disabilities face challenges in resume writing and self-presentation skills, and there is a need to improve these skills. The students



with visual disabilities face information accessibility issues in the hiring process, and there have been reports of cases in the IT and other industries where they have been excluded from initial selection due to tests requiring vision.

## **Internship**

In Thailand, internships are not merely work experience, but are important opportunities that lead to independence, growth, and actual employment. Since part-time job culture is rare in Thailand, internships play a valuable role as a place for persons with disabilities to gain work experience. Many believe that experiencing life on the job and commuting through a long-term internship is useful in preparing for subsequent employment.

## **Employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

While Thailand has made progress in employing persons with disabilities through the legal employment quota system and other measures, substantial improvements in the workplace environment in many companies and government agencies remain insufficient. While it is relatively easy to find employment in certain fields (e.g., IT and education), in many cases, the jobs that persons with disabilities are engaged in tend to be limited to those that do not lead to skill development and career advancement.

In some cases, increased enrollment opportunities through the university quota system have been observed to have resulted in a decrease in the willingness of students with disabilities to learn, and as a result, they are unable to acquire the necessary skills.

## **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Although there are no marked differences by gender, it has been pointed out that cultural factors such as domestic caregiving may hinder career development for women with disabilities. By department, IT-related and teaching fields tend to have relatively high employment rates, while architecture and engineering fields are often shunned due to the burden of tuition and long working hours. In the legal field, the success stories of a Blind lawyer have led to an increase in applicants, but the high academic burden remains a major challenge.

### **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

Although lawyers with disabilities are a minority, they play an important role in society. Taking the example of lawyers who are wheelchair users, they are actively involved in promoting universal design and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. Their main areas of practice include dealing with problems faced by persons with disabilities and their families, inheritance issues, and assisting in abuse cases related to autistic children, as well as defending the rights of persons with disabilities. The organization is also involved in activities aimed at revising laws related to the employment of persons with disabilities, contributing to the reform of the legal system to create an environment in which persons with disabilities can work comfortably.

However, challenges such as lack of accessibility when traveling and social prejudice remain. Despite these barriers, they have been able to establish their operations by earning the trust of their clients, and have been recognized for their commitment to their social mission in the process.

## **2. IT Industry**

In Thailand's IT industry, persons with visual and physical disabilities are active in a wide range of fields, including AI-related positions, and competency-based evaluations are expanding the possibilities for promotion. On the other hand, persons with visual disabilities experience difficulties when using some applications and lack of information accessibility as a challenge. In addition, the status of physical accessibility (e.g., ramps and wheelchair-accessible restrooms) varies from company to company, so there is a need to create a comfortable working environment for persons with disabilities.

Regarding promotions, performance-based evaluation criteria are common, but flexible evaluation criteria that take into account the unique limitations of persons with disabilities are also needed. In addition, strengthening support at the time of university and graduate school admission (expansion of the quota system) and improving the environment to accommodate persons with disabilities in IT-related faculties are pointed out as important issues to be addressed in the future.

## **3. International Organization**

There is an employee with visual disability working on disability inclusion at the United Nations in Thailand. Although she does not have any physical accessibility issues within the UN, she feels that she has challenges adapting to the fast pace of work and results-oriented culture. She also points to a lack of confidence and hesitancy to request assistance from colleagues in an environment where there are few persons with disabilities. In addition, she cites the fact that the recruitment system is difficult for persons with visual disabilities to understand as a challenge. Regarding promotion, while attention to the field of persons with disabilities is increasing within the UN, the future prospects are considered uncertain due to the current lack of managers for persons with disabilities. In the future, it will be necessary to ensure opportunities for feedback with superiors and provide training to deepen understanding of disabilities internally, and awareness-raising activities led by persons with disabilities as lecturers are considered to be particularly effective. She also points out that in order for persons with disabilities to be active in the UN, education that fosters self-confidence and opportunities to improve self-promotion skills are also important.

## **4. Government Agency**

Interviews were conducted with Thai government officials in charge of employment of persons with disabilities. As a result, employment of persons with disabilities is not mandatory in government agencies, and although approximately 16% of agencies employ persons with disabilities, in many cases, persons with disabilities who have university degrees are also assigned to general clerical positions, which prevents

them from obtaining challenging jobs. The attitudes of co-workers and lack of accessibility were also cited as challenges, particularly with regard to the staffs with visual disabilities, and the need to spread the perception that they can work was noted.

The Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security are actively promoting the employment of persons with disabilities, and the obligation to hire in the regional offices of those ministries has also produced some results. On the other hand, although skills and relationship building are more important than academic background for promotion, there are very few persons with disabilities in management positions. Deaf in particular often face communication challenges. In addition, the low job readiness of people with disabilities and the burdens of completing extensive paperwork and attending training courses required for promotion within government agencies are also cited as factors that prevent them from being promoted.

## **5. Organization of Persons with Disabilities/Consulting Industry**

A consultant with physical disabilities is active in Thailand's disabled people's organization and in the consulting industry. The interviewee, a woman (wheelchair user), has established a consulting company in Thailand and is using her many years of affiliation to provide support to disabled people's organization and sell their products.

In Thailand, she said, it is relatively easy to get a job with a disability organization, but the hiring process is not standardized, and relationships tend to be more important. In addition, university graduates tend to avoid working for these organizations because much of the work is project-based and unsustainable. In addition, funding is a major challenge; accreditation is required to obtain government grants, but the process is complex and time-consuming.

On the other hand, there are also challenges for persons with disabilities working as consultants. Although the introduction of a quota system for university admissions has increased opportunities for students with disabilities, there are qualitative differences between them and non-disabled fresh graduates on the job. For example, new graduates with disabilities often have issues with time management skills and cannot meet work deadlines. This is an important factor in consulting work and is recognized as an issue in the field.

## **6. Others (Employment cases of persons with mental and hearing disabilities)**

In the employment of persons with mental disabilities, interviews were conducted separately with one woman in her twenties who works in the private sector and her supervisor. This employee has an educational background with a major in English and has worked in social enterprises and international organizations. She is currently responsible for social media posts and article writing and receives support from her supervisor and colleagues at work.

In the work environment, efforts have been made to subdivide the work process to address concentration issues. A "buddy system" has also been introduced whereby senior staff accompany the worker when necessary, and colleagues are committed to careful communication. However, there is a tendency for the individual to take pointers personally, and this remains an issue. In addition, she is not good at multitasking, which makes it difficult for her to identify the scope of her work and formulate plans to improve her skills, and her path to management is difficult because promotion is based on a meritocracy. In order to improve this situation, advice from outside experts and better training in understanding disabilities throughout the workplace are required. In addition, in terms of overall employment for person with mental disability, issues such as lack of understanding on the part of companies and anxiety about contract renewal have also been pointed out, and the importance of self-care and stress management has been emphasized.

Information was gathered from a man in his 40s (hard of hearing) who works as a Community Development Specialist regarding the employment of persons with hearing disabilities. He has a bachelor's degree in painting and visual arts and a master's degree in disability development and accessibility. He has worked as a contract teacher and in the information accessibility field, and currently works as a community development specialist (management position) in occupational therapy with children with disabilities.

Although Thailand has made progress in employing persons with hearing disabilities through the development of legislation, the lack of access to information and the shortage of sign language interpreters and subtitles remain major challenges. In addition, social barriers and daily stresses undermine the motivation of persons with hearing disabilities, and they often find themselves in jobs they are unwilling to take on, he says. With the right supportive environment, he says, persons with hearing disabilities can be motivated to work and grow in their careers. The presence of supportive co-workers and supervisors in the workplace improves their sense of well-being, which in turn promotes long-term employment continuity.

Companies and organizations are required to have a deep understanding of the characteristics of the hearing disabled, whose first language is sign language, and to ensure accessibility such as subtitles and sign language interpretation. It is also important to provide jobs that allow people to utilize their visual skills and to assign psychologists and interpreters to facilitate smooth communication. Through these efforts, the employment environment for persons with hearing disabilities will be improved and a society in which they can maximize their abilities will be realized.

## **Implications for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

Interviews on the employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities in Thailand revealed that while remarkable progress has been made

over the past two decades, many challenges remain. The legal employment rate system to promote employment of persons with disabilities provides a certain incentive for companies, and support organizations for persons with disabilities and university DSSs provide employment support. However, a lack of understanding on the part of companies and accessibility issues have become barriers, and specific challenges have been identified, such as people with visual disabilities being at a disadvantage in online registration systems and examinations.

Long-term internships play an important role in preparing students with disabilities for employment, contributing to their work experience and improving their independence.

However, companies in many fields are reluctant to hire persons with disabilities, and their employment tends to be limited to certain occupations such as IT and AI fields. In addition, after finding employment, there are problems of inappropriate allocation of work due to lack of understanding or excessive consideration on the part of companies, which prevents persons with disabilities who have received higher education from fully utilizing their skills. In addition, limited opportunities for promotion to management positions, lack of skills and lack of self-confidence on the part of persons with disabilities themselves are also cited as challenges.

The recommended approach to solving these issues is as follows

### **1. Innovative internship program**

The Nippon Foundation is working with employment support agencies, universities, companies, and government agencies to expand and develop internship programs for students with disabilities in Thailand. Under this program, universities and employment support organizations will provide career counseling, skill development, and support for independence in daily life, while companies and government agencies will provide work experience. By adopting a comprehensive approach that involves government agencies to ensure institutional support, as well as mobility independence and psychological support, participants will develop independence and confidence not only in their job skills but also in their social lives in general. Furthermore, after this model is established in Thailand, it will be considered expanding it to other ASEAN countries.

### **2. Professional development**

In Thailand, in addition to persons with physical disabilities, visual and hearing disabilities, persons with developmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders and mental disabilities are increasingly working in companies. To address this current situation, there is a need to develop external specialists who can help companies and employed persons with disabilities solve the challenges they face. Specifically, in addition to physical and information accessibility support, there is a need to train professionals who can provide job restructuring and specific instructions for the workplace. Since a lack of resources is a challenge in Thailand, Japanese experts will work together to establish a program in collaboration with local partner organizations that understand Thai culture and social backgrounds.

In order to make this professional development program sustainable, the active involvement of the Thai government is essential. If the government secures a budget and implements a long-term human resource development plan, it will be possible to provide not only temporary support but also ongoing support for the employment of persons with disabilities. In addition, by promoting networking among trained professionals, good practices can be shared and cooperative relationships built to resolve issues. This includes holding case study presentations and information exchange meetings on a regular basis. After this model is established in Thailand, it will be considered to expand it to other ASEAN countries.

### **3. Corporate awareness activities**

In Thailand, although a legal framework for the employment of persons with disabilities has been established to some extent, many companies still do not fulfill their obligations to employ persons with disabilities, and in many cases, they only pay levies. As a result, there continue to be problems such as limited opportunities for persons with disabilities to work. In order to improve this situation, continuous awareness-raising activities are required to help companies understand the significance and rights of employing persons with disabilities, and it has been pointed out that awareness-raising and training for companies conducted by persons with disabilities themselves are particularly effective. An awareness-raising team will be formed in cooperation with existing organizations and individuals, led by the Asia Pacific Center on Disability (APCD) in Thailand, to conduct awareness-raising activities for companies and basic awareness-raising before the intervention of the professionals mentioned above. This initiative will serve to build a foundation for project promotion and to prepare the corporate side for acceptance of the project. In addition, this activity needs to be implemented on a long-term basis, and close collaboration with the Thai government will be important. Financial resources will be coordinated, including the use of contributions, to secure an ongoing budget and ensure that the awareness-raising activities are developed in a sustainable manner.

### **4. Policy improvement discussion group**

Establish a discussion group of diverse stakeholders (government agencies, business representatives, lawyers, disabled people's organization, academic experts in Japan and Thailand, etc.) to analyze the current status and challenges of the current system (e.g., Articles 33 and 35 of the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act), and develop new policy recommendations and model projects to resolve issues in the employment system for persons with disabilities. and make new policy recommendations and develop model projects. Specifically, the group will consider measures to promote general employment by expanding tax incentives and developing support programs for companies, clarifying contractual relationships in social employment, and introducing skill improvement programs.

These four support approaches, while independent efforts, function in a complementary manner and act as a comprehensive strategy to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and expand their participation in society.



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Graduates and Postgraduates with and without  
Disabilities in ASEAN Countries  
Republic of the Philippines

Final Report

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The Nippon Foundation

Koei Research & Consulting Inc.

Foreign Exchange Rates

1 USD = 153.2 JPY

1 PHP = 2.62656 JPY

(October 29, 2024 OANDA rate)



## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
ATRIEVE	Adaptive Technology for Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Disabled	視覚障害者のリハビリテーション・統合・エンパワメントのための適応技術
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing	ビジネス・プロセス・アウトソーシング
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	障害者の権利に関する条約
CX	Customer Experience	顧客体験
DepEd	Department of Education, Culture and Sports	教育文化スポーツ省
DPO	Disabled People's Organization	障害者団体
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	国内総生産
IT	Information Technology	情報技術
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement	協定覚書
NCDA	National Council on Disability Affairs	国家障害者協議会
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	非政府組織
OJT	On-the-Job Training	職場内訓練
PESO	Public Employment System Office	公共雇用システムオフィス
PKII	Philkoei International Inc.	フィルコーエイ・インターナショナル株式会社
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority	フィリピン統計局
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training	技術教育及び職業教育と訓練
WOWLEAP	Women with Disability Leap to Social and Economic Progress	障害のある女性の社会的・経済的進歩を飛躍する

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for persons with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. The survey produces seven reports. This report only covers the Philippines and summarizes the findings of the survey in the Philippines. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university and graduate graduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and organizations of persons with disabilities. The field research in the Philippines was conducted over a seven-day period from November 18 to 24, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 17 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts in the field of employment for persons with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online after we returned to Japan.

However, several limitations exist in this study. Although interviews were conducted with persons with disabilities who work for consulting firms, it was not possible to identify persons with disabilities who work as consultants. Although the possibility was noted that persons with disabilities may be working in the back office, it is believed that only a small number of them work in consulting positions where they interact directly with clients. Regarding the hearing disability, the Philippine Federation of the Deaf did not reply to the survey, making it difficult to obtain information during the period of this study. It is necessary to continue to gather information on the employment status of people with hearing disabilities.

## Basic Country Indicators

In 2023, the Philippines' GDP per capita is 3,725.6 USD. The main industries are services, which account for about 60% of GDP, mining, which accounts for about 30%, and agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, which accounts for about 10%. The population is 117,337,368, with urban population accounting for 47% and rural population 53%. In terms of education, the adult literacy rate is 98%, and the total enrollment rate for primary, secondary, and higher education is 93%, 93.7%, and 35.5%, respectively. The

number of years of compulsory education is 13 years, university 2-6 years, and master's degree 2-3 years. Bachelor's degree holders represent 18.1% of the population over 25 years old, master's degree holders 0.7%, and doctoral degree holders 0.1%, a minority. The unemployment rate is 4.0% as of 2024, and the average monthly income is 18,918 PHP nationwide and 25,000 PHP in Manila.

With regard to persons with disabilities, 1,442,586 or 1.57% of the total population are persons with disabilities. It is mandatory that at least 1% of the posts in government agencies be reserved for persons with disabilities. While government agencies are required to comply with this legal employment rate, it is an effort target for private companies and NGOs. Companies with more than 100 employees are required to reserve at least 1% of their quota for persons with disabilities, but there are no penalties for failure to achieve this goal. In addition, companies that employ persons with disabilities are entitled to tax benefits, with 25% of salaries paid to persons with disabilities deducted from gross profit, and an amount equivalent to 50% of the cost of improving the workplace environment deducted from net income.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

Graduation dates for undergraduate and graduate students in the Philippines vary depending on the university's semester system, generally graduating in the spring or fall. Most students begin their job search either during their senior year or after graduation, utilizing online job sites and government websites. Some universities have career offices, but their use is not fully recognized. The employment process in the Philippines is increasingly online, and the "One-Day Hiring Process" is widespread as a rapid hiring process. In this method, applicants take an employment test immediately at a job fair attended by multiple companies, and are notified of the results within a short period of time. Furthermore, the government has introduced a system to support transportation and other expenses to assist job-hunting activities.

Internships are incorporated as a graduation requirement in Philippine universities and are considered by law to be a place where students can learn practical skills. The timing and length of internships depend on the university system, but they are usually unpaid, and only some companies offer remuneration. The most common way to find an internship is through social networking sites, but as partnerships between universities and companies progress, more and more job openings are being offered through career offices. If an internship is highly regarded, it may lead directly to employment.

Job hunting for university graduates in the Philippines is tough, and unemployment is particularly high among young people. Although university graduates may find employment in foreign companies or in the BPO industry, they are often engaged in the service industry, often working part-time for a limited period of time. The government has introduced a system to help new graduates find employment by exempting them from paying for related procedures. Science students tend to be more employable, especially in the computer science and technology fields, where demand is high, while female science students have fewer opportunities to work in technical fields. Many firms in the Philippines are small and medium-sized

enterprises (SMEs), and many new graduates seek employment in Manila, while few seek employment in the provinces. Salary is often the main focus of new graduates' job searches, and skills mismatches are often a problem.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities

### Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions and trends

Although no official statistics exist on the number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education institutions in the Philippines, 877 students with visual disabilities have entered university since 2006, of which more than 50 have completed bachelor's programs and are confirmed to be employed in special needs schools. Opportunities for persons with disabilities to enter higher education are increasing, and the development of assistive tools using PCs and digital devices has been attributed to this trend. In addition, laws and measures have been taken to support persons with disabilities to enter universities, but many issues still remain. The rate of students entering higher education remains low, and discriminatory attitudes and the perception that completion of higher education by persons with disabilities does not lead to economic benefits prevent them from pursuing higher education. In addition, there are cases of students with visual disabilities dropping out of school due to lack of appropriate support during their studies, indicating the importance of not only institutional development but also practical support at educational institutions.

### Job Hunting

Job hunting for persons with disabilities is generally conducted in the same way as non-disabled students, using the Internet and SNS to gather information, but these methods have a low success rate. Therefore, it is important to accumulate experience through spontaneous actions and early social activities at organizations and NGOs for persons with disabilities. It is also useful to look for jobs through networks and acquaintances in organizations for persons with disabilities. It has been pointed out that government-sponsored job fairs are mainly for simple jobs by small companies and are inadequate for persons with disabilities with university degrees.

### Internship

Like non-disabled undergraduate and graduate students, students with disabilities are required to have an internship, and they must find one on their own, often struggling through the process. To cope with this situation, many students with disabilities often look for internships with the help of disability organizations and support groups. While this makes it possible to find an internship itself, it often means that the industry or company of their choice will not accept them, and they are less likely than non-disabled students to be able to fulfill their internship preferences. In addition, internships may encounter discriminatory attitudes from supervisors and coworkers at their internship sites and are often limited in the tasks

they can be assigned. Although government subsidies exist to encourage companies to make reasonable accommodations for hiring persons with disabilities, internships are not covered by such subsidies, and accessibility is not ensured, which limits opportunities to demonstrate one's abilities during the internship period.

### **Employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

Although there is no official data on the employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities, through interviews, participants shared the opinion that although the employment rate has increased compared to the past, companies still lack understanding of disabilities and there are many challenges in hiring persons with disabilities. In terms of types of disabilities, cancer and polio survivors and those with mild physical disabilities are relatively easy to employ, but other disabilities remain difficult to find employment. When companies hire persons with disabilities, they are also affected by the prejudice that persons with disabilities are not capable. It is reported that the most common employment opportunities are in the BPO industry and educational institutions. In the BPO industry in particular, examples include call centers, data entry, and HR. In addition, in the Philippines, companies' own policies on employment of persons with disabilities have a greater impact than the national employment rate, and some companies actively promote employment. For example, SM Supermarkets and JP Morgan promote the employment of persons with disabilities, and PKII (a consulting company) provides car services for persons with disabilities to ensure their safety during commuting. However, there are reported problems with government support measures, such as the complexity of the application process, which prevents companies from using these services.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Regarding the impact of gender, the responses of interviewees were inconsistent and did not show clear differences. While personal skills and disability were considered more important than gender, it was noted that it is difficult for women to find engineering jobs. Some respondents noted that it is relatively easy for women with disabilities to find employment, and this is thought to be due to the progress in women's empowerment. It was also noted that women are more prevalent in the education sector and that men sometimes have more difficulty accepting their disabilities, but these views are merely personal impressions, and further data collection is needed to accurately determine the impact of gender.

With regard to employment rates by department, there were no clear statements regarding which departments are particularly likely to find employment, but computer science and technology-related departments are considered to be the best places to find employment. These faculties facilitate the acquisition of practical skills and are chosen by many students. In addition, students with visual disabilities are more likely to go into education faculties, while students with hearing disabilities are more likely to major in digital arts.

Regarding industries in which it is easy to find employment, the BPO industry and the teaching profession were mentioned, and jobs that allow office work are

considered to be easy to find due to the lack of travel. Conversely, many respondents stated that they "can't think of any particular industry" in which it is difficult to find a job, but social working is considered difficult because of the high difficulty of the exam and limited job opportunities. However, some respondents suggested that NGOs could increase the number of jobs by hiring more social workers. Construction and engineering jobs were also considered difficult because they require field work, and pharmacist positions were also noted as difficult for persons with visual disabilities. In terms of work location, many tended to seek employment in Metro Manila because there are more job opportunities there than in the provinces.

## **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

She is a 59 years old lawyer. She has been disabled since birth and uses a wheelchair. She studied law in the Philippines, and after passing the bar exam, she found employment at her current place of employment (a private law firm). Lawyers in the Philippines have a high status in society, and to become licensed as a lawyer, one must study law at university, further study in law school, and pass an examination. She became a lawyer through the same process as non-disabled people, but faced many difficulties due to discrimination caused by her disability and lack of accessibility of facilities. She was promoted later than her peers and was only assigned to small cases at first, but she was gradually promoted based on her work performance. During the employment examination as a person with disabilities, she was asked discriminatory questions, and prejudice against persons with disabilities was observed in the workplace, but this attitude gradually decreased as she achieved results in her work. The work environment was also inadequate, and she sought improvements, which led to the installation of a ramp and elevator. To be active as a person with disabilities, she says, it is important for persons with disabilities themselves to promote their skills with confidence and for the legal system to be strengthened to promote employment of persons with disabilities.

## **2. IT Industry**

A 31 years old engineer with visual disability founded a company that develops assistive technology (e.g., reading software) for persons with disabilities. While in university, he lost his sight in a shooting incident. After treatment, he used distance learning to continue his studies and successfully graduated. At its peak, his company employed 140 people and provided employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Today, the company still employs people with visual disabilities and physical disabilities, who work remotely. The main challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the IT industry are the lack of software compatible with assistive devices and the high cost of working for a company, which is why it is common for them to start their own businesses or work as freelancers. Opportunities for advancement in the IT industry are based on skills, but vary depending on each company's disability inclusion policy. Success factors include the ability to identify social needs, support from family and friends, and networking with organizations for persons with disabilities. Improving accessibility of information and work environments and providing training opportunities for persons with disabilities are important to promote employment of persons with disabilities in the IT industry,

especially as persons with disabilities learn how to use AI and other technologies. In particular, the report recommends that persons with disabilities be able to perform a greater variety of tasks by learning how to use AI and other technologies.

### **3. Government Agencies**

We interviewed managers of the National Council on Disability (NCDA). In the Philippines, the employment rate of persons with disabilities in government agencies is low and has not reached the legally mandated 1%. Behind the lack of progress in the employment of persons with disabilities are the difficulty of employment examinations and insufficient reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. The agency most actively promoting the employment of persons with disabilities is the organization specializing in disability issues (NCDA), whose employment rate is more than 20%. In terms of promotion, multiple factors, such as education and training history, play a role, with a master's degree or doctorate in addition to a bachelor's degree being advantageous. While flexible work arrangements and comprehensive support can be found in the private sector, support is limited in government agencies and focuses on basic considerations for persons with physical disabilities. In order to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, it is proposed that universities establish offices to support students with disabilities and strengthen cooperation with government agencies. This will reportedly enable more individualized support for students with disabilities and enhanced employment assistance. However, the method of procuring financial resources needs to be considered.

### **4. Social Welfare Industry (Social Workers in NGOs)**

The high level of difficulty required to pass a professional licensing exam to work as a social worker in the Philippines has limited the opportunities for persons with disabilities to work as social workers. The license must be renewed every three years, and people are required to attend training for this renewal, another factor that hinders their entry into the workforce. With regard to promotion, although there are no specific disability-based restrictions at the NGO to which they belong, they are often selected for positions of responsibility due to lack of experience, and there is often a lack of clarity in evaluation criteria. Information exchange and support from others with the same disability is important for success, and interaction among persons with disabilities has a significant impact on their careers. It is also important to maintain personal competence and a willingness to tackle difficult tasks. In addition, providing training opportunities for persons with disabilities to prepare for examinations and improve their skills is necessary for their career advancement.

### **5. Consulting Industry**

Through interviews with several non-consultants with disabilities who work in back-office positions, we obtained their opinions on the employment status, promotions, and reasonable accommodations with respect to hiring persons with disabilities in the consulting industry. One consulting firm has a higher than legally mandated employment rate of persons with disabilities and provides reasonable accommodations based on its own diversity and inclusion policy. Employees with disabilities are also generally satisfied with their work environment, receiving support

such as mobility assistance and permission to work from home. However, with regard to promotions, although evaluations based on ability and work attitude are emphasized, it was noted that there are barriers to promotion due to a lack of opportunities for persons with disabilities to accumulate work experience. In order to be promoted to managerial positions, persons with disabilities are required to have specialized skills and the ability to market their abilities to others, thus limiting their promotion to managerial positions. It was also noted that when persons with disabilities find employment, they are often hired through referrals from friends and acquaintances, rather than through the normal hiring process.

## **6. Disabled People's Organizations**

ATRIEV, an organization that caters to persons with visual disabilities, is an NGO that aims to support the employment of persons with visual disabilities and promote their participation in society, especially providing IT education. ATRIEV provides vocational training and computer training for persons with visual disabilities, especially programs to become system engineers. COVID-19 also provided training for unemployed young people to support entrepreneurship. The hiring process includes the opportunity for recruits to be selected from among those who have completed the training, and evaluation is made through the submission of resumes, interviews, and demonstrations. An important factor in the promotion of an organization is the individual's motivation and work ethic, and financial resources and budget are cited as major issues. Individual ability, family cooperation, and awareness are also important factors in the success of persons with disabilities.

## **Implications for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

The job search for persons with disabilities with university and graduate degrees in the Philippines remains challenging. Challenges in advancing to higher education exist at the secondary education level, which is affected by the persistent discriminatory attitudes that persist in society. Even after graduating from university, persons with disabilities face many barriers and are often excluded from selection if their disability is listed on their resume, putting them at a disadvantage in the general job search process. Job fairs for persons with disabilities often offer jobs for simple tasks, and there are currently not enough appropriate employment opportunities available. Internships are also limited in terms of opportunities for persons with disabilities to demonstrate their abilities due to a lack of accepting companies, discriminatory attitudes, and a lack of reasonable consideration.

Although the employment rate has increased compared to the past, there is still a lack of understanding of disabilities on the part of companies, and there is a tendency for persons with specific disabilities to be given priority in employment. Furthermore, government agencies have a poor track record in employing persons with disabilities, and issues such as the difficulty of employment exams and the lack of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities also exist. Discrimination also persists in promotions, often resulting in discriminatory treatment based on disability rather



than ability. This situation is a major factor hindering the career development of persons with disabilities.

The recommended approach to solving these issues is as follows.

### **1. Strategic selection and enhancement of scholarship programs**

In the Philippines, academic credentials affect promotions, so it is important for persons with disabilities to obtain degrees in fields that will assist them in finding employment. The Nippon Foundation will strategically select scholarship programs to target fields that are job-oriented. Specifically, these fields include IT, technology, education, digital arts, and law, and the Foundation will provide specialized assistance in these fields. Scholarship recipients will be supported in their academic progress and psychological support through interviews, and internship opportunities will be provided to create an environment for gaining work experience. In addition, to help companies accept persons with disabilities, the program will lobby the government to expand the scope of companies offering internships.

### **2. Selection of model universities to support students with disabilities and development of support systems**

Select "Model Universities for Supporting Students with Disabilities" to establish a comprehensive support system that includes reasonable accommodations, career guidance, and soft skills instruction. This effort will include training Filipino staff in collaboration with experts from Japan, Europe, the U.S., Thailand, and other countries. In addition, information and consultation support will be provided to high school students, and efforts will be made to connect high schools and universities by creating an environment where students with disabilities can independently choose their academic and career paths from an early stage.

### **3. Seminar to share best practices from pioneering Philippine companies**

Although discrimination against persons with disabilities still exists in the Philippines, some private companies are actively promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. The Nippon Foundation will share best practices of these companies at seminars to promote their spread to other companies. The seminars will be held approximately six times a year, both online and in person, and will provide an environment that facilitates participation by corporate personnel. Specific initiatives and workplace accessibility improvements will be explained in detail, and time will be set aside for a question-and-answer session to resolve any questions that companies may have. After the seminar, materials summarizing practical accessibility improvement measures and support services will be distributed to deepen understanding of employment of persons with disabilities.

### **4. Implementation of a model project to promote employment of persons with disabilities in Philippine government agencies**

Employment of persons with disabilities in the Philippine government is low and the support system is not fully utilized. The Nippon Foundation aims to improve the system through training by inviting persons in charge of promoting employment

of persons with disabilities in the Philippine government to Japan. In this training, the participants will learn about examples and policies of employment of persons with disabilities in Japan, and provide the Philippine government agencies with knowledge to implement model projects. After the project implementation, recommendations will be made based on the monitoring results, and external experts will check the local employment situation of persons with disabilities and help improve the skills of Philippine government officials. Ultimately, it is expected that the project will improve the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities in government agencies and the utilization of support systems.

These four support approaches, while independent efforts, function in a complementary manner and act as a comprehensive strategy to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and expand their participation in society.



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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	障害者の権利に関する条約
DPO	Disabled People's Organization	障害者団体
DRD	Disability Research and Capacity Development	障害者人材育成センター
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	国内総生産
GSO	General Statistics Office of Vietnam	ベトナム統計総局
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training	教育訓練省
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs	労働・戦争障害者・社会問題省
NCD	National Council on Disability	国家障害委員会
SPI	Synthetic Personality Inventory	総合適性検査
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	国連開発計画
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund	国連人口基金
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund	国連児童基金
UNV	United Nations Volunteers	国連ボランティア計画
WHO	World Health Organization	世界保健機関

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

This survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for persons with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. The survey produces seven reports. This report covers Vietnam and summarizes the findings of the survey in Vietnam. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university and postgraduate persons with disabilities by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and Disabled People's Organizations. The field research in Vietnam was conducted over a six-day period from November 8 to 13, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts who are familiar with employment for persons with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online after we returned to Japan.

However, several limitations exist in this study. Direct interviews with persons with disabilities working in government agencies and in the social welfare industry were not feasible. In the government agency, barriers included the small number of persons with disabilities employed, especially the rarity of persons with disabilities in key positions, and their reluctance to cooperate with the survey. In the social welfare industry, although there are a certain number of persons with visual disabilities majoring in psychology and social work, there were few examples of them working in the welfare industry, making it difficult to obtain direct information about their experiences. As a result, we were limited to indirect information gathering.

## Basic Country Indicator

In 2023, Vietnam's GDP per capita is 4,346.8 USD, with the main industries being agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (11.96% of GDP), mining and construction (37.12%), and services (42.54%). The population is 98,858,950, with an urban population ratio of 39% and a rural population ratio of 61%. The literacy rate (15-24

years) is 99%, the gross enrollment rate for primary education is 122%, and 97% for secondary education. The rate of students entering higher education is 42.2%, with a minority of 0.71% having a master's degree and 0.07% having a doctorate degree. The period of compulsory education is 10 years, university programs are 4 years (6 years for medical schools), and master's programs are 2 years. The unemployment rate is low at 1.6%, and the national average monthly income is approximately 45,000 JPY (55,000 JPY in urban areas and 39,000 JPY in rural areas).

Regarding persons with disabilities, as of 2016, 6,225,519 people, or 6.6% of the total population, fall under this category, of which 5,553,860 are over 18 years old. Vietnam established the National Committee on Disability in 2015 to promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The legal system for employment of persons with disabilities used to have a statutory employment rate, but this has been abolished since 2012. Currently, subsidies and corporate tax exemptions are available to companies in which 30% or more of the employees are persons with disabilities. In addition, restrictions on working hours for persons with disabilities have been abolished.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

Unlike Japan, which hires new graduates at one time, employment in Vietnam is generally year-round. The graduation period for undergraduate and graduate students varies from university to university, mainly during the summer (May to August), but also during the winter (December) in some cases. Students at top universities begin their job search in their final year, while students at other universities tend to start after graduation. In addition, the corporate hiring process is rapid, with many companies making job offers within a week of application.

The most common method of job hunting is for students to search for companies through social networking services or dedicated university websites, or to participate in university-sponsored job fairs. On the other hand, employment portals and recruiting agencies like those in Japan are barely functioning for new graduates. Because new graduates face challenges such as lack of skills and low wages, many students often gain experience through part-time jobs or internships. Of these, internships are especially important, with many students spending two to three months in an internship before graduation. This not only makes them more competitive in the job market, but also helps them network with companies. A wide variety of paid and unpaid internship forms exist.

Looking at the employment situation, unemployment is high among young people, and new graduates generally find employment in fields different from their majors. Science fields are easier to find employment than liberal arts fields, and the IT industry is particularly active in hiring new graduates. On the other hand, the sewing and accounting industries are considered difficult for new graduates. Regarding work locations, there is a marked concentration in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and there is a tendency for fewer job applicants to go to the countryside.

Overall, Vietnamese new graduates face challenges while remaining flexible, and it is important for them to accumulate experience and adapt to growing industries from an early stage.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities

### Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions

No official statistics exist on the number of students with disabilities in Vietnamese higher education institutions, as the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) does not collect specific data from universities and colleges. On the other hand, according to WHO information, only 0.1% of the total population of persons with disabilities in Vietnam has a bachelor's degree. During the field survey, interviews were conducted with university graduates and postgraduates with physical, visual, and hearing disabilities. The results revealed that there are a small number of persons with disabilities who have completed higher education, and that technological advances (e.g., text-to-speech software) have increased the percentage of persons with visual disabilities in particular going on to university. In addition, 55 persons with hearing disabilities have graduated from university in the past 10 years, most of them from Dong Nai University, which is supported by the Nippon Foundation.

The first issue related to university access is the lack of reasonable accommodations. Accessibility of on-campus facilities is inadequate for the persons with physical disabilities, and wheelchair users are often unable to use restrooms or upper floors. In addition, students with hearing disabilities lack support during entrance exams and classes, and there are inconsistencies in the examination system, which requires English language proficiency. Furthermore, there is little or no support section for students with disabilities within the university, and the need for such a section has been identified.

Another issue is the lack of awareness of the need for higher education by persons with disabilities themselves and their families. There are many cases in which persons with disabilities give up on higher education due to accessibility and difficulty in finding employment, or their families do not understand the necessity of higher education. In response to this situation, the importance of awareness-raising activities by organizations of persons with disabilities and related organizations has been proposed.

### Job Hunting

Job hunting for persons with disabilities is generally conducted in the same way as non-disabled students, using the Internet and SNS to gather information, but these methods have a low success rate. Therefore, it is important to accumulate experience through spontaneous actions and early social activities at organizations and NGOs of/for persons with disabilities. It is also effective to look for jobs through networks



and acquaintances in organizations for persons with disabilities. It has been pointed out that government-sponsored job fairs are insufficient for persons with disabilities with university degrees, as they mainly offer simple jobs at small companies.

Speaking from experience, one employee of disabled people's organization (DPO), a wheelchair user, shared her experience of being involved in social activities at an NGO as a student and building a network of contacts, which helped her to find a job before graduation. She emphasizes the importance of networking and points out that it is often difficult to just apply online and it is necessary to check if they are willing to hire persons with disabilities or not. Similarly, a manager (blind) at a center that provides employment assistance to persons with visual disabilities also described the importance of checking whether an employer is willing to accept university graduates with visual disabilities, and the significance of gathering information from companies that already employ persons with visual disabilities.

The recommendations call for more understanding and proactive efforts on the part of companies regarding the employment of persons with disabilities. Students with hearing disabilities have expressed a desire for sign language interpreters during interviews and the provision of written communication means. In addition, it would be effective to set up a support section for students with disabilities within the university to collaborate with companies and provide information on employment support.

### **Internship**

Internships are often required for university students with disabilities to earn credits, but due to a lack of understanding by companies and the students' own lack of social experience, they often fail to gain a meaningful experience. While one successful example is Deloitte Vietnam, where a wheelchair user was hired after completing an internship, many students with disabilities feel isolated and difficult, and in some cases spend their time only to obtain credits. Therefore, the need for companies to deepen their understanding of persons with disabilities and take internships seriously as a learning experience, as well as the importance of cooperation between universities and support organizations to improve the environment, are pointed out.

### **Employment status of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities**

Regarding the employment situation of persons with disabilities with university graduates and postgraduates in Vietnam, officials from an NGO that provides employment assistance to persons with disabilities, noted that there are no official statistics specifically for persons with disabilities with university degrees, but cited data from the General Department of Statistics (GSO) of Vietnam. Citing data from the GSO, the official noted that the overall employment rate for persons with disabilities has declined from 31.7% to 23.5%. It was noted that this trend is also seen in the country as a whole, and that the employment rate of persons with disabilities with university graduates and postgraduates has not increased or may even have decreased. Other interviewees do not believe that the employment of university

graduates and postgraduates with disabilities has improved significantly over the past decade, citing as specific examples the case of graduates with visual disabilities who could not adapt to the workplace after graduation and switched to the massage industry, and the increase in new jobs in the IT industry that allow telecommuting, but many are still freelance or working in informal jobs. Many respondents stated that the number of persons with disabilities who are able to engage in sustainable and stable decent work in general companies is still in the minority.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Opinions are divided on the impact of gender on the employment of persons with disabilities, with some believing that male persons with physical disabilities are more likely to find employment than female persons, while female persons with visual disabilities may have an advantage in certain industries. Further data collection is needed to accurately determine the relationship between gender and employment rates.

With regard to the employment rate by department, the majority of students with disabilities say that no matter which department they graduate from, it is difficult for them to find a job. In addition, as with non-disabled students, there are many cases where students are engaged in industries that differ from their majors, and there is no tendency for a particular department to have an advantage in employment. For example, there are cases of German majors who are unable to make use of their specialty and work in other fields, and students with visual disabilities who are interested in the fields of psychology and social welfare but have limited options. On the other hand, some respondents said that it is relatively easy for students with hearing disabilities to find employment in teacher training and the design field. In consideration of market needs, it is also pointed out that improving English language skills may pave the way for entry into foreign-affiliated companies.

By industry, the IT industry is considered a relatively easy field of employment for persons with disabilities, and employment opportunities in new technology fields are increasing. Employment in start-up companies and stable employment in large and foreign-affiliated companies are also reported. However, many believe that individual ability and motivation are the keys to success in finding employment. Furthermore, the importance of initial support and follow-up after employment is also emphasized in the employment of persons with disabilities.

#### **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

It is very rare for persons with disabilities to practice law in Vietnam. The interviewee with physical disability is committed to defending the rights of persons with disabilities, advising on disability pensions and entrepreneurship support programs, as well as working on tuition exemption programs and legal support for ethnic minorities. She also contributes to social awareness by disseminating legal knowledge through the media. On the other hand, she has experienced great hardship in the hiring process, as her disability became a barrier and she finally obtained a job after many interviews. Even after joining the company, she continues to work hard in the face of prejudice and discrimination. She attributes her success

to her extraordinary efforts and the fact that she went through a regular education program. In order to expand the employability of lawyers with disabilities, their confidence and motivation are important, as are institutional improvements and employment promotion measures by the government and companies. In particular, she recommends fee waivers for graduate school and certification training, and increased incentives for companies.

## **2. IT Industry**

The IT industry is a field where employment possibilities are relatively high, regardless of education or work history. Because many jobs require little physical strain or mobility, they are often suitable positions for persons with disabilities. In addition, as the shortage of human resources becomes more serious, companies are increasingly showing a flexible attitude toward hiring persons with disabilities. On the other hand, opportunities for promotion are limited for persons with disabilities, and in the majority of cases, they are engaged in fixed jobs. As a result, it is not uncommon for persons with disabilities who wish to advance their careers to choose to start their own businesses.

An organization that provides IT vocational training for persons with disabilities has seen many of its graduates find employment in IT companies. However, in many cases, the company's facility environment lacks accessibility, and support is needed to create a comfortable working environment for graduates. On the other hand, one private company is actively promoting the employment of persons with disabilities, with approximately 30% of its employees, including the CEO, being persons with disabilities. The company accepts a diverse workforce through flexible work arrangements and a hiring policy that emphasizes practical skills. However, the lack of customer service and communication skills of the disabled themselves has been pointed out as a factor hindering their advancement. In addition, government incentives (e.g., tax breaks for companies that employ 30% or more people with disabilities) and awareness-raising on the part of companies are also important issues.

## **3. International Organization**

In the United Nations in Vietnam, a blind staff is in charge of a wide variety of projects, such as promoting participation in disability policy, reflecting their opinions in local administration, and promoting monitoring of the CRPD. There are a total of six UN staff with disabilities in Vietnam, and while physical accessibility of facilities is in place, challenges remain regarding internal online systems. In addition, these staff members are often employed on a project basis or as volunteers, rather than on a regular basis.

The main challenges of working at the UN are the difficulty of working with governments and diverse stakeholders and the lack of information accessibility. On the other hand, support from superiors and self-motivation are keys to success. The interviewee feels the need to broaden her knowledge and skills outside of the disability field in order to advance her career, and suggests the need for collaboration between government and business, strengthening internship programs with

universities, and a change in awareness throughout society in order to promote employment of people with disabilities at the UN and society at large.

#### **4. Government Agencies**

Since interviews with persons with disabilities working in government agencies were not feasible during this field survey, we summarized the status of employment of persons with disabilities in government agencies based on information obtained from persons involved in cooperation with government agencies.

It was pointed out that although there are a small number of people with disabilities working in government agencies, some tend to hide their disabilities and are in a different situation from those who promote the disabled people's movement. A small number of people with disabilities work in the tax department, but employment of people with disabilities is extremely limited in administrative agencies as a whole, and only a few people with mild physical disabilities hold low-level positions in local administrations.

The need has been cited for organizations of persons with disabilities on their side to become more powerful and conduct activities to lobby the government, promote the CRPD, make policy proposals, and propose the revival of the employment rate system and the payment system. In order to effectively promote such activities, it is necessary to improve evidence-based reporting and policy paper writing skills on the part of disability organizations, but the current lack of learning opportunities for this is a challenge. Another problem is the lack of human resource development to influence domestic policies and to represent the voices of persons with disabilities as legislators, underscoring the need for persons and organizations with disabilities to deliver their united voices to the government. As for the hearing disabilities and Deaf, there is no nationwide organization, and moves are underway to establish a new association, for which support is being sought.

#### **5. Consulting Industry**

We interviewed a woman who is a wheelchair user working for a consulting firm in Vietnam about her background and how she got involved in the company and into management. She graduated at the top of her class from university and became involved with the company through a scholarship. After an internship, she was hired in the secretarial department and transferred to the audit department. She is currently working as an audit and assurance manager. She is the only disabled person working as a consultant in Vietnam who has direct contact with clients, and she has been evaluated on the same terms as nondisabled people in recruitment and promotion.

One of the challenges she has faced is the lack of physical accessibility. In many cases, the client's buildings do not have elevators, and she had to overcome this by climbing the stairs on her own. On the other hand, she had no major problems with the work environment, as the company's buildings are maintained in accordance with international standards.

The family environment and education from her mother played an important role in her success. From an early age, she was not treated specially and nurtured to work harder than others, which formed her sense of independence and responsibility. The understanding and support of her supervisors was also an essential factor in her career development. Finally, she mentions the possibility that for people with disabilities, English language skills and study abroad experience can be useful in career development.

## **6. Other (Employment cases of persons with hearing disabilities)**

The interviewees were a Deaf couple who had graduated from university and were working in Vietnam, and their opinions were shared with a sign language interpreter.

In the past 10 years, 55 students with hearing disabilities have graduated from the university, mainly in the fields of teacher training, psychology, and fine arts. However, due to the lack of sign language interpreters in classes, it is common for them to ask friends to provide note taking. Many are graduates of a teacher training university, and while there are many cases of them working at schools, there are also cases of them working in general companies or outside their field of study. Support for higher education is inadequate, and in particular the lack of information on English language skills and certification exams is a factor in the declining rate of students going on to higher education.

Information from friends and family plays an important role in the job search. As for promotions, there are few examples of people taking management positions in general companies, and self-employment and entrepreneurship are seen in some cases. Examples include the establishment of a sign language interpretation company and a leadership training center.

In terms of recommendations to companies, preparation of sign language interpreters during interviews, covering the cost of such interpreters, and the use of visual aids. They also need to increase opportunities for dialogue with the government and the Ministry of Education and Training, and support the establishment of associations of persons with hearing disabilities.

## **Implications for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

Compared to nondisabled graduates, the job hunting and employment situation for university and postgraduate graduates with disabilities in Vietnam remains severe. Although people with disabilities also use the internet and SNS to gather information, the success rate of finding employment is low. Therefore, accumulating experience and building networks through social activities at NGOs and organizations for people with disabilities are considered important. However, government-sponsored job fairs for people with disabilities do not meet their needs, and a lack of understanding of people with disabilities on the part of companies is also a major barrier. Interviews often require detailed explanations of disabilities. Internships are also often required, but students with disabilities face a lack of social experience and difficulty

communicating their needs to companies. In addition, there is a lack of understanding on the part of companies, and in many cases, internships do not function adequately. Regarding the employment situation, although the IT industry is considered to be relatively easy to find a job, university and graduate school graduates with disabilities are often forced to work in industries outside their majors and face physical and informational barriers even after employment. Domestic companies lack institutional support, and the lack of an employment rate system or incentive system for companies is a problem. Furthermore, the appointment of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities to management positions is extremely rare, and there are few examples of promotions.

The recommended approach to solving these issues is as follows

### **1. Strategic selection and enhancement of scholarship programs**

The Nippon Foundation will design scholarship programs in fields where people with disabilities have high employment potential (e.g., IT, English, law, teacher training, etc.). Recipients will be supported in their academic progress through regular interviews and will be encouraged to acquire practical skills through employment seminars and workshops based on common issues. In addition, an internship program with the Nippon Foundation and partner companies will be established to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to gain work experience, and a follow-up survey of their employment status will be conducted to verify and improve the effectiveness of the program.

### **2. Selection of model universities to support students with disabilities and development of support systems**

Select "Model Universities for Supporting Students with Disabilities" to establish a comprehensive support system that includes reasonable accommodations, career guidance, and soft skills instruction. This effort will include training Vietnamese staff in cooperation with experts from Japan, Europe, the U.S., Thailand, and other countries. In addition, information and consultation support will be provided to high school students, and efforts will be made to connect high schools and universities by creating an environment where students with disabilities can independently choose their academic and career paths from an early stage.

### **3. Strengthen policy advocacy**

The Nippon Foundation will establish a policy dialogue working group with the Vietnamese government and organizations of people with disabilities to strengthen its advocacy activities for policies to promote employment of people with disabilities. In the first year, a training program will be conducted in Japan to build a cooperative framework between the Vietnamese government and organizations of people with disabilities through on-site observation of employment of people with disabilities and policy lectures. After that, a small-scale model project will be developed, and based on the results, specific policy recommendations will be made.

While also supporting the improvement of the skills of local government officials, the project aims to establish a sustainable policy management system.

#### **4. Improve the policy advocacy capacity of organizations of persons with disabilities**

Leadership training will be provided to leaders of DPOs throughout Vietnam to strengthen their data analysis, advocacy, and presentation skills. The program will also support the formation of nationwide federations of organizations of people with disabilities and organizations of people with hearing disabilities, with the aim of promoting constructive dialogue and improving policy advocacy. The training will be conducted annually by theme with appropriate instructors and formats (in-person and online), and is expected to provide effective support that meets local needs.

#### **5. Awareness-raising activities through the media**

Successful cases of employment of people with disabilities and corporate initiatives will be disseminated in cooperation with major media outlets to improve the perception of society and their families. Specific case studies and solutions to problems at foreign companies will also be introduced to contribute to better understanding on the part of companies. In addition, by providing detailed information on the job-hunting process and support systems, we will show hope and concrete paths for disabled students and their families, and contribute to creating an environment in which more people can take positive action.

These five support approaches, while independent efforts, function in a complementary manner and act as a comprehensive strategy to promote the employment of people with disabilities and expand their participation in society.



Survey on Employment of University  
Graduates and Postgraduates with and without  
Disabilities in ASEAN Countries  
Malaysia

Final Report

February 2025

The Nippon Foundation

Koei Research & Consulting Inc.



Foreign Exchange Rates

1 USD = 158.0455 JPY

1 MYR = 35.0573 JPY

(January 10, 2025 OANDA rate)

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	注意欠陥多動性障害
AIDA	Autism Inclusive Direct Action Group	自閉症インクルーシブダイレクトアクショングループ
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance	環境・社会・ガバナンス
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	国内総生産
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
LD	Learning Disability	学習障害
MAB	Malaysian Association for the Blind	マレーシア盲人協会
NCBM	National Council for the Blind, Malaysia	マレーシア盲人協議会
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	非政府組織
SOCISO	Social Security Organization	社会保障機構
UIAM	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia	マレーシア国際イスラム大学
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	マレーシア国民大学
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia	マレーシアプトラ大学

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Lao PDR) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for people with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. The survey produces seven reports. This report covers Malaysia and summarizes the findings of the survey in Malaysia. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university and graduate graduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with students without disabilities.

The focus was on collecting information on university and postgraduate disabled persons by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and disabled persons' organizations. The field research in Malaysia was conducted over a six-day period from January 6 to 11, 2025, using a combination of desk research and field research.

A total of 17 interviews were conducted in the field, with introductions from local experts in the field of employment for people with disabilities. Interviews were mainly conducted individually, but some interviews were conducted in the form of focus groups with multiple participants. For those who were unable to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online before and after their return to their home countries.

Several limitations exist in this study. In the social work industry, information could not be obtained directly from the counselors themselves, but was limited to secondary information. In the consulting industry, we were able to obtain information from a freelancer, but were unable to gather specific information on disabled persons working in general companies. As for the Deaf, interview with the Deaf Association was realized, but the YMCA did not reply, making it impossible to conduct a survey of young Deaf persons. As for lawyers with disabilities, only a simple response was obtained via "WhatsApp". Although these limitations limited comprehensiveness and representativeness, secondary information was supplemented where possible.

## Basic Country Indicator

Malaysia's GDP as of 2023 is 11,379.1 USD per capita, with a total population of approximately 35.12 million. The urban population ratio is 79%, and the rural population ratio is 21%. In terms of education, the adult literacy rate is 96% (2022), primary education enrollment rate is 98.8%, and secondary education enrollment rate is 85.5%, but only 14.5% have a bachelor's degree, 1.57% have a master's degree, and 0.1% have a Ph.D. The median monthly wage is 2,600 MYR (about 91,000 JPY)

nationwide and 3,927 MYR (about 137,000 JPY) in the capital. Major industries include manufacturing (electrical equipment), agriculture and forestry (natural rubber, palm oil), and mining (tin, crude oil, LNG).

With regard to persons with disabilities, as of 2018 the population of persons with disabilities was approximately 489,000, accounting for 1.5% of the total population; the National Council for Persons with Disabilities oversees policy formulation and implementation in accordance with the Law on Persons with Disabilities enacted in 2008. Employment assistance involves the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Social Security Organization (SOCISO), and the Labor Department of the Ministry of Human Resources, which provides job placement and rehabilitation assistance. However, although public institutions are obligated to achieve a 1% employment rate for persons with disabilities, the actual achievement rate is as low as 0.3%, and there is no mandate for private enterprises to do so. Therefore, it has been pointed out that public organizations need to take the lead in improving the employment rate.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

Universities in Malaysia are either three-year or four-year institutions, with classes ending in June and graduation ceremonies held in September or October. Many students do an internship during their final semester, and during this time they are looking for employment. Students from top universities are sometimes hired directly at their internship sites.

“My Future Jobs” conducted by public agencies, private recruitment services, and university job fairs are used in job searches, and “LinkedIn” is also becoming popular. While a staged hiring process is common among large companies, small and medium-sized companies tend to hire in a relatively short period of time.

Internships are offered as a required course at many universities and last from 3 to 6 months. Through cooperation with companies, students choose their internship sites, and about 10% of them go on to find employment. In recent years, by conducting internships at the end of each semester, companies are able to hire talented students immediately.

While the unemployment rate for new graduates is improving to 3.7% in 2022, the percentage of graduates in full-time jobs is decreasing, with an increasing shift to contract, part-time, and self-employment. Graduates in the sciences, particularly in IT and engineering, have higher employment rates, and technological innovations in the agricultural sector are creating new employment opportunities. In contrast, other factors, such as soft skills, affect employment in the humanities.

The Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area is the most popular work location, but some are seeking flexible work arrangements and telecommuting. In addition, an increasing number of new graduates are opting for self-employment.

# Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities

## Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions

Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education keeps track of the number of students with disabilities in public universities, and according to interviews with university faculty and students with disabilities, the number is on the rise. For example, Universiti Putra Malaysia now has 63 students with disabilities, up from 39 in 2019. This trend is also observed at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Malaya, and other universities with large numbers of students in the country.

## Support Unit for Students with Disabilities

All 20 public universities in Malaysia have units to support students with disabilities, and in addition to academic support, they also provide job placement assistance. Specific employment support includes resume preparation, interview preparation, holding job fairs in cooperation with "My Future Jobs," and providing information. On the other hand, private universities may have their own support units if they are affiliated with overseas universities, but such units are rarely found at private universities in Malaysia.

The most committed to supporting students with disabilities in the country is the Universiti Teknologi MARA, which has the largest number of students. This university launched a Disabled Students Support Unit in 2019, which has been promoted to a department directly under the Vice Chancellor from 2024 onward. Only three universities in all of Malaysia have such a department, and one of its features is that it includes not only students with disabilities but also faculty members and their families in its support. For example, developmental support by speech-language pathologists is also provided to the families of faculty and staff. Approximately 1,000 people receive support, of which 610 are students with disabilities.

The university also provides internships and job placement services to students with disabilities through MOUs with companies, as well as communication and skills training. Training is also provided to companies, especially for supervisors and colleagues, prior to accepting students with disabilities. As a result, about 90% of students with disabilities have decided to continue their education or find employment.

## Job Hunting

In the job search for students with disabilities, there are examples of university units working with companies to match and train students with disabilities. Soft skills training with external lecturers is also provided. On the other hand, there are differences among universities in the support provided, and in particular, marked differences exist in the generosity of employment support. For example, officials from the Malaysian Association of the Blind noted that while units provide academic support, job placement support is inadequate.

In addition, organizations or/for people with disabilities also provide a wide range of support, including networking with companies, resume writing assistance, interview practice, and confidence-building training. These are aimed at improving time management and communication skills, providing multifaceted support for students with disabilities.

However, one of the major challenges is the lack of understanding and prejudice toward people with disabilities on the part of employers. For example, there have been reports of visually disabled students who received job offers based on their backgrounds, but were denied employment as soon as their disabilities were discovered during interviews. This situation indicates that the abilities of people with disabilities are not properly evaluated, and highlights the urgent need for companies to change their mindset.

### **Internship**

Students with disabilities have a variety of options for selecting an internship site, either on their own or from a list provided by a university or support organization. In some cases, university support units and organizations for people with disabilities work together to find internships. For example, a major Malaysian bank actively employs people with disabilities and is known as a successful internship provider. In some cases, if no internship placements can be found, students may perform related work within the university and have it recognized as an internship.

On the other hand, students with physical or visual disabilities tend to choose nearby internship sites due to mobility difficulties, and their supporters also give priority to companies with good accessibility and job coaches. In addition, some students with visual or hearing disabilities may choose organizations for people with disabilities or companies that work with organizations for people with disabilities due to their anxiety about jumping into a new environment.

### **Employment status of university and graduate school graduates with disabilities**

Although there is no legal requirement for private companies to employ persons with disabilities in Malaysia with university or graduate degrees, companies' ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) requirements and government incentive policies have gradually increased the employment of persons with disabilities. The government offers tax credits and incentives to companies that hire people with disabilities, and the cost of reasonable accommodation is also exempt from taxation. This is creating an environment in which companies can promote employment of persons with disabilities while reducing their financial burden.

Specific examples of employment include university faculty members with visual or physical disabilities, lawyers, and graduates working in state-run companies, who are active in a variety of fields. On the other hand, many people with disabilities, especially those with severe physical or visual disabilities, experience difficulties in finding employment. It has been noted that in some cases they are considered "overqualified" despite their excellent educational backgrounds, and that there is a

tendency for people with mild disabilities to be given preferential treatment. As a result, many choose to work in occupations that are not commensurate with their university degree level or to pursue further education.

For people with developmental and mental disabilities, access to public support is limited, and post-employment retention support is a particular challenge. Support adapted to conventional work arrangements is not sufficient, and support measures based on diverse work styles are required.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

Regarding the impact of gender, interviews with several Malaysian universities and organizations did not indicate that gender has a specific impact.

The number of departments that enroll students with disabilities tends to vary from university to university. Social science majors are generally popular, but at the Universiti Teknologi MARA, students with disabilities are enrolled in a wide variety of majors, including IT, architecture, languages, accounting, law, and engineering. On the other hand, the Faculty of Medicine does not accept students with disabilities. At Universiti Putra Malaysia, in addition to social sciences, anthropology and language majors are common, and a small number of students are enrolled in food science and architecture. However, the engineering faculty tends to be reluctant to accept students with disabilities. IT and psychology majors are common at the Universiti Malaya, and students who want to become self-employed often choose business majors. These trends highlight certain limitations and challenges in the career choices of students with disabilities.

The most likely industries to find employment include the IT industry, the education industry (special needs school teachers), the service industry (e.g., hotel operations), and translation and customer service operators. However, for new graduates with disabilities, soft skills, the ability to promote oneself, time management, and self-confidence are more important than industry selection. Difficulties participating in interviews and nervousness-related absences were also cited as challenges, pointing to the impact of diverse factors on their job search.

#### **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

The interviewee, a blind lawyer, received his law degree from university in 2000 and has been practicing law since 2002. He currently focuses on land and real estate transactions, but is also involved in support and advocacy activities for people with disabilities, and is a leader of an organization of people with disabilities. There are a small number of lawyers with disabilities in Malaysia. In the course of his work, he states that it is necessary for those around him to understand how his disability affects his work and how he can overcome it. He believes that it is important to view disability not as a "problem" but as a "challenge," and that technology, especially PC-related technology, has been a big help in this process.

## **2. Social Welfare Industry (Counselors)/ Disabled People's Organisations**

A 28 year old woman with a physical disability is majoring in Psychology and is working to become a counselor. She has had a physical disability since childhood and uses a power wheelchair. She initially applied to medical school, but after experiencing setbacks due to prejudice, she changed her career path to psychology. She is currently studying psychology at a master's program at the Universiti Malaya and is also active as the vice president of an organization for people with disabilities. According to her, Malaysia has a certain number of counselors with disabilities, who are active in government agencies and NGOs. However, there are many challenges for people with disabilities in finding employment, such as physical accessibility issues and lack of understanding and stigma in companies. She herself has given up applying to companies after completing her bachelor's degree and has made a living through self-employment businesses. She is currently pursuing a counselor position with a government agency after completing her master's degree, but is also considering opening a clinic if this is not feasible.

In addition, the organization for people with disabilities, of which she is vice president, faces the challenge of insufficient budget, and recruitment is done informally. She hopes to use her experience and knowledge to improve these current conditions and to support people with disabilities. In the future, she hopes that stigma within companies and hospitals will be reduced and the demand for counselors with disabilities will increase.

## **3. IT Industry**

A 36-year-old autistic man and his job coach discussed the challenges and opportunities he has faced throughout his career in the IT industry. He studied computer science in university and after graduation worked for an IT company as a test engineer, script writer, and automation engineer, but is currently unemployed due to challenges with the work environment and staying motivated. He was supported by a job coach from the Enabling Academy.

Although there are few examples of autistic individuals employed in the IT industry, there are some cases of autistic individuals working in specific technical positions. They may experience emotional and communication challenges with co-workers and often require assistance from job coach. It has also been noted that the IT industry tends to favor experienced workers, quick paperwork, and positive outspokenness, which can be hurdles for people with disabilities. Clear instructions and scope of responsibility are important for people with diverse characteristics, including autistic individuals, and unstable health and stress management are also major challenges.

It is pointed out that the support system related to neurodiversity is not yet fully established in Malaysia, and the current situation relies on individualized support by some companies and job coaches. He himself hopes to re-enter the IT industry and believes that he will have a better chance of adapting to an environment where the scope of his responsibilities is clear. He is also considering pursuing further



education with a scholarship. Job coaches emphasize the need for more support in this area, as well as corporate efforts to make the most of diverse human resources and the need for stronger support systems at universities.

#### **4. Social Welfare Industry (Social Workers)**

A 47-year-old social worker with physical disabilities tells the story of her 16-year career. She majored in linguistics at university but was unable to find a job, so she worked at various jobs for 6 years after graduation. She then passed the civil service exam and joined the Ministry. Initially, she worked as a social worker in the field, but her supervisor decided to transfer her to the disability division of the social welfare department, where she worked for six years. She was then promoted after working in different departments and became a manager in the division for the elderly in September 2024; she also obtained a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Welfare in 2020.

As for social workers with disabilities, a certain number exist and are active in hospitals and NGOs, but university social welfare departments are not popular with people with disabilities. This is due to mobility difficulties during fieldwork and limited undergraduate support. It is also influenced by the fact that practical experience is important, although qualifications are not required to work as a social worker.

One of the challenges is difficulty in mobility, but she herself has never complained about it. She believes that understanding of market needs and acquiring AI and language skills are necessary to show that people with disabilities can work as well as other people. In addition, understanding from supervisors and co-workers is important for promotion, and an assistive device and stress tolerance are also required. In addition, counseling is effective, she says, and support from professionals with an understanding of disabilities is desirable.

Her experience also suggests that positive attitudes and communication skills are essential for career development.

#### **5. Government Agencies**

The Interview was conducted with the official in charge of employment of persons with disabilities in Malaysian government administrative agencies.

Malaysian government agencies are required by law to employ at least 1% of all employees with disabilities. However, the actual published employment rate is 0.3%, and it is estimated to be only 0.6% including undisclosed employees with disabilities. The Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of National Integration are particularly active in employing persons with disabilities, and although the Ministry of Education has more than 1,000 employees with disabilities, the percentage is low due to the large population.

The hiring process exempts the civil service examination for persons with disabilities. However, educational requirements, such as a university degree, are maintained. On the other hand, many applicants with disabilities do not show up for

interviews. The reasons for this are unknown, but will be investigated in the future, as mobility difficulties and lack of confidence may be contributing factors.

A satisfaction survey conducted in 2024 among people with disabilities working in government agencies identified a lack of accessibility and lack of equipment in older office facilities as a problem. In addition, many Deaf people work with the assistance of colleagues who can do sign languages but may feel isolated when those colleagues move on. While performance is more important than education in promotions, the willingness and consent of superiors is also an important factor.

Awareness-raising activities for people with disabilities have also been conducted, encouraging them to take advantage of the civil service examination exemption program. However, there are challenges such as the psychological burden of working as a public servant and the limited availability of new positions. On the other hand, regarding the option of self-employment, it is believed that success can sometimes be achieved due to the lack of dependence on workplace environments or relationships with superiors and colleagues.

## **6. Consulting Industry**

A blind private consultant working in Malaysia is a researcher specializing in disability issues with a background in anthropology and sociology. He has been working as a private consultant since 2016, mainly on behalf of the National Council for the Blind Malaysia (NCBM), as a trainer for Disability Equality Training (DET) and as a speaker at events.

Regarding the employment situation of people with disabilities, he says that very few private companies, including those in the consulting industry, employ people with disabilities, and most of them are hired only as a formality. Because companies do not consider people with disabilities to be advantageous in marketing, they tend not to fully utilize their abilities. In addition, there is little expectation that they will be promoted to higher positions in government agencies, and competition is intensifying.

In Malaysia, there are few suitable occupations for highly educated persons with disabilities, and the path to higher positions is particularly difficult. Supports such as mobility assistance and assistive technology are essential, but understanding of these and institutional arrangements for them are insufficient. In addition, although a job coach system exists, there are many issues regarding its expertise and follow-up system. Many people with disabilities are engaged in short-term employment or gig work, and there is a lack of employment data in the private sector.

To improve this situation, institutional improvements are needed, such as tax incentives for businesses and mandatory employment. Direct support measures are also needed, including access to the latest technology for the visually disabled. He himself hopes to work in the future as a co consultant analyzing disability policies and providing assistance and employment opportunities tailored to the interests and needs of people with respective disabilities.

## **7. Others (Employment status of persons with visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, and autism)**

We interviewed officials of the Malaysian Society for the Blind regarding the employment situation of the visually disabled. The visually disabled face many challenges in terms of educational and career opportunities. In particular, the blind have limited options for employment and further education, which is a major problem. In terms of further education for the visually disabled, while low vision students can study fields such as science and mathematics, blind students tend to go into specific fields such as history, languages, and psychology. Therefore, after graduation, they face a situation where they are competing with non-disabled students in humanities fields. Although some blind students have majored in computer science, most graduates are engaged in professions such as teaching or massage therapy.

In terms of employment, some with visual disabilities work as public school teachers or bank operators, but opportunities for higher-level jobs are limited. For the blind in particular, occupational options are even more limited, with many choosing to work as massage therapists. Reasons for choosing this profession include ease of entry and the ability to learn skills from friends.

Meanwhile, new options such as skills training to work within companies, handicraft production, self-employment, and entrepreneurship are gradually increasing. However, behind these trends, there is a lack of understanding of the visually disabilities on the part of companies and inadequate support systems. There is a need to create an environment in which visually disabled people can demonstrate their abilities, and strengthening support systems in educational settings and in companies is an important issue.

We conducted an interview with the president of the Malaysian Association of the Deaf regarding the employment situation of the hearing disabled. The association provides multifaceted employment support for people with hearing disabilities. The association has job coaches who accompany hearing-disabled persons to interviews at companies and provide support, and has also established a consultation service for sexual harassment. In addition, at the request of companies, the company provides education on Deaf culture and sign language, as well as sign language training for personnel in charge of human resources. When necessary, the company also works with the Malaysian Employers Federation and other organizations to coordinate support for the needs of the people with hearing disabilities.

Grants from the Malaysian government play an important role, and students with hearing disabilities are provided with hearing aids and other device assistance. In the past, the chairman himself had experience with sign language interpreters and transcribers in his master's program with the support of the Nippon Foundation, which also helped to raise awareness of sign language interpreting within the university. Through these efforts, he is committed to helping the hearing disabled obtain a better environment in education and employment.

On Autism, an autistic entrepreneur, spoke about the challenges and solutions to hiring people with disabilities based on her own experiences. She was diagnosed

with autism at the age of 35 and has since been active in advocacy for the autism community.

With regard to employment of persons with disabilities, obtaining a disability card (OKU card) is a condition for accessing welfare services in Malaysia. However, many people with mental disabilities and autism avoid obtaining the card due to social stigma. As a result, their occupational choices are restricted and some repeatedly change jobs. In addition, she points out that existing job coaches are not sufficiently effective due to a lack of understanding of mental disabilities and autism.

Solutions to these challenges include promoting an environment that makes it easier for people with sensory characteristics, including autism, to study at universities. She also says that short-term training programs that each person with disabilities can choose from and workplace retention support through fellowship programs for those who have completed their master's degree will be effective.

## Implications for Promoting Employment of People with Disabilities

Although some progress has been made in providing employment support for university and graduate graduates with disabilities in Malaysia, many challenges still remain. Although support units for students with disabilities have been established in 20 public universities across the country to provide assistance in skill development, job preparation, and job fairs, it has been pointed out that there are differences in the quality of support among universities.

In the job search process, companies tend to give preference to applicants with minor disabilities, often limiting them to short-term employment or gig work. For internships, although students with disabilities can choose from university-provided lists, they tend to choose nearby companies due to mobility constraints and lack of confidence.

Although the IT, education, and service industries are relatively common as employment opportunities, even students with excellent grades may be forced to work in jobs that are below the level of a university graduate. Another problem is that in some cases, even after being hired, they are not given substantive work. In terms of promotion, while there are some cases of people being promoted to managerial positions in government agencies, promotion opportunities in the private sector remain limited, especially for people with visual and hearing disabilities.

In addition, support for people with autism spectrum disorders and learning disabilities has emerged as a new challenge, with difficulties in accessing public support and a shortage of job coaches.

The recommended approach to resolving these issues is as follows

## **1. Internship Program for Students with Disabilities**

Internships are emphasized as a compulsory subject in Malaysian higher education, and an increasing number of companies are accepting students with disabilities. However, due to factors such as mobility difficulties, commuting burdens, and lack of confidence, many students are currently earning credits at nearby or known organizations. To address this issue, the Nippon Foundation is working with Japanese experts to develop an internship program for disabled students with mobility challenges. The program will create a system that allows students to experience a variety of industries, and aims to foster a global perspective through interaction with domestic and international companies and professionals. The program will also provide mentoring by Japanese social entrepreneurs to aspiring entrepreneurs. In implementing the program, legal support will be secured with the cooperation of government agencies, and reasonable accommodations will be made. The model is also proposed to be developed in Thailand, and based on the results of verification in both countries, the program will be considered for expansion to the entire ASEAN region.

## **2. Establishment of a professional development program and sustainable support system**

In Malaysia, a shortage of human resources with specialized support skills is an issue in employment support for people with diverse disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities. In cooperation with Japanese experts and in collaboration with local organizations of people with disabilities and employment support groups, a follow-up training program will be established for existing job coaches and in-house personnel, focusing on understanding disability characteristics, workplace environment adjustment, stress management, and other topics. This initiative requires the active involvement of the Malaysian government and could be expanded to include people with visual disabilities, hearing disabilities and other groups that lack support. The program also aims to share good practices among job coaches and through networking with Thailand, and to develop the knowledge gained into a standard methodology that can be applied throughout the ASEAN region.

## **3. Disability equality training dissemination and support for making it mandatory in companies**

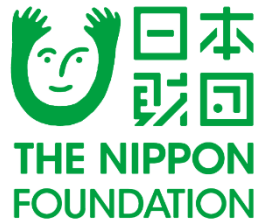
In Malaysia, although there are tax incentives for hiring people with disabilities, discrimination and awareness barriers persist. Cases of visually disabled people being denied employment and the current situation where hiring people with disabilities in upper-level positions is rare are examples of this. In addition, many people do not disclose their disabilities, resulting in formal employment, underutilization of their abilities, and lack of consideration for higher positions in public institutions. These factors limit employment opportunities for persons with disabilities with higher education.

Several Disability Equality Training (DET) facilitators are currently active in Malaysia, informing companies about the significance and rights of employing people with disabilities. This training contributes to the elimination of discriminatory feelings. In the future, in cooperation with the Malaysian government, the project aims to make DET mandatory starting from industries with many new graduates (IT, food, agriculture) and companies where scholarship recipients work. Furthermore, the awareness-raising activities will continue through budget adjustments and securing financial resources.

#### **4. Institutional Improvement through Policy Discussion Groups**

A policy discussion group will be established to improve Malaysia's employment policy for persons with disabilities. Currently, there is no statutory employment rate in the private sector, and although there is a 1% guideline in the public sector, the obligation to implement it is unclear and the actual employment rate is only 0.3%. The group will include government, business, disability organizations, educational institutions, and legal experts to evaluate current policies. The group will compare Thailand's statutory employment quota system with Malaysia's incentive system and propose a new system that is culturally and economically appropriate. For example, setting employment quotas for the private sector and public procurement incentives for companies that promote the employment of people with disabilities will be considered. A review of subsidy systems and an awareness survey will also be conducted, with the aim of formulating flexible policies. This initiative will also serve as a reference for other ASEAN countries.

These four support approaches, while independent efforts, function in a complementary manner and act as a comprehensive strategy to promote the employment of people with disabilities and expand their participation in society.



Survey on Employment of University  
Graduates and Postgraduates with and without  
Disabilities in ASEAN Countries  
Lao People's Democratic Republic

Final Report

February 2025

The Nippon Foundation

Koei Research & Consulting Inc.

Foreign Exchange Rates

1 USD = 153.225 JPY

1 LAK = 0.00707 JPY

(January 21, 2025 OANDA rate)



## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	English	Japanese
ADDP	Asian Development with the Disabled Persons	アジアの障害者活動を支援する会
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	東南アジア諸国連合
COPE	Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise	共同装具・義肢組織 (義手義足の製作、リハビリテーションを行うローカル NGO)
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	障害者の権利に関する条約
DMAS	Disability Mainstreaming Advisory Service	障害主流化アドバイザーサービス (障害者団体)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	国内総生産
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency	国際協力機構
LDPA	Lao Disabled People's Association	ラオス障害者協会
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports	教育スポーツ省
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	労働社会福祉省
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disability	障害者団体
PLC	Programmable Logic Controller	プログラマブルロジックコントローラ
SNS	Social Networking Service	ソーシャル・ネットワーキング・サービス
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	国連開発計画
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund	国連児童基金

# Executive Summary

## Survey Objectives and Methods

The survey was conducted by the Nippon Foundation in seven countries within ASEAN (Lao PDR, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam) with the aim of obtaining suggestions regarding employment support programs for persons with disabilities who have received higher education degrees. The survey produces seven reports. This report only covers Lao PDR and summarizes the findings of the survey in Lao PDR. The purpose of the survey was to identify the employment status and challenges of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities, and to explore future possibilities through comparisons with non-disabled students.

The focus was on collecting information on university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities by industry and organization: legal profession (lawyers), IT industry (engineers and other professionals), social welfare industry (counselors, social workers, and other professionals), government agencies (civil servants), and organization of persons with disabilities. The field research in Lao PDR was conducted over seven days from December 14 to 20, 2024, using a combination of desk research and field research.

In the field, we were introduced to a local expert on employment for persons with disabilities, and conducted interviews with a total of 28 persons. Since it was assumed that the number of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities was limited in Lao PDR, we expanded our target to include persons with disabilities who are not university graduates but are employed, and collected secondary information related to higher education and employment.

Interviews were conducted mainly in an individual format, but some incorporated a focus group format with multiple participants. For those who were not able to make scheduling arrangements during the field survey period, the interviews were conducted online before and after our return to our home countries.

Several limitations exist in this study. It was expected from the outset that there would be a limited number of persons with disabilities in Lao PDR with university or graduate degrees working in specific industries. In fact, it was not possible to identify persons with disabilities in industries other than lawyers, government employees, and employees of organizations of persons with disabilities (IT industry, social welfare industry, consulting industry), and interviews with the subjects. Therefore, we were not able to conduct interviews. Thus, information on the current situation and issues related to higher education and employment was collected from people working in organizations of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities working as clerks at support cafes, including those with hearing disabilities.

In the IT industry, although the existence of students studying in IT-related faculties at some universities, mainly those with physical disabilities, and one person with physical disability working as a manager at an IT company was confirmed, the

number of people employed was very small and the interviewees could not be identified. In the social welfare industry, no useful information could be obtained, including the presence or absence of students studying in related faculties.

## Basic Country Indicators

Lao PDR has a per capita GDP of 2,066.9 USD in 2023 and a population of 7,664,993. The urban population ratio is 38%, and the rural population ratio is 62%. In terms of education, the literacy rate for those aged 15 and over is 88% (2022), and the total enrollment rate for primary education is 97% (2023), while the total enrollment rate for higher education is low at 15% (2023). The number of years of compulsory education is 9 years. The main industries are services (about 37% of GDP), industry (about 34%), and agriculture (about 18%), and the unemployment rate is low at 1.2% (2023).

In relation to persons with disabilities, as of 2015, there were 160,881 persons with disabilities (2.8% of the total population). By gender, there were 80,766 males and 80,115 females. The Lao government ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 and enacted Law No. 57 on Persons with Disabilities in 2018. This law was enacted in response to UN recommendations, but it does not adequately reflect the opinions of parties concerned, including organizations of persons with disabilities, and it has been pointed out that there is a discrepancy with the actual situation. In addition, specific systems related to the legally mandated employment rate for persons with disabilities are not yet in place. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare plays a central role in managing and monitoring matters related to persons with disabilities, and coordinates with other departments and the private sector.

## Employment of university graduates and postgraduates

In Lao PDR, university students graduate mainly during the summer (June-August), and many students begin their job search after graduation. However, some students may find employment directly at their internship companies while still in university, but this is not common. While many students decide on a job within six months of graduation, there are many cases where students are unable to find a regular job for several years due to the recent employment difficulties. For this reason, students tend not to be considered "late" in finding a job even if more than one year has passed since graduation.

Common methods for new graduates to find jobs include searching for companies through social networking sites and job sites, introductions from friends and family, and participation in job fairs sponsored by universities. In particular, the "108 jobs" job site is also used. The hiring process often takes one to three months from the submission of a resume, written test, and interview to a job offer. In addition, since COVID-19, an increasing number of companies have introduced online or hybrid interviewing.

In Lao PDR, companies are concentrated in the capital city of Vientiane, and students from rural areas generally leave their hometowns to find employment. One challenge is that many students are unfamiliar with resume writing and interview preparation, and do not receive adequate support from universities.

Internships are often recommended and considered important as an opportunity to gain work experience, although whether or not they are required depends on the university or department. The duration is usually two to three months and is often unpaid, although some companies may offer a daily stipend. Internships are usually found through the Internet, connections, or introductions from professors, and in most cases, students experience only one company.

In the employment situation of university graduates, the unemployment rate increased due to the impact of COVID-19, which is particularly serious among the youth population. Domestic employment opportunities have decreased due to the deteriorating employment environment in the service sector, especially in the tourism industry, and the return of migrant workers. On the other hand, many university graduates are forced to do double work due to the low salary level, and some are also doing side jobs utilizing social networking services.

Among science majors, engineering majors tend to have an easier time finding jobs, while liberal arts majors often struggle because their expertise is not easily evaluated. In recent years, the IT industry, especially PLC and IoT-related companies, have been actively recruiting new graduates, and this field is considered a growth industry. In addition, the popularity of international NGOs is increasing due to their high salary levels, while the popularity of government agencies is declining due in part to their low salary levels.

In terms of work location, most new graduates are employed in the capital city of Vientiane, and while some have the option of working abroad, few are employed in the provinces.

## **Employment of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

### **Number of students with disabilities in higher education institutions**

The interviews revealed that the National University of Lao PDR is the only university in the country that accepts persons with disabilities, mainly persons with physical and visual disabilities. 26 students with visual disabilities have been accepted since 2015, and 26 have graduated so far. Six of them are employed in the private sector and the rest are working as blind massage therapists. However, the overall university enrollment rate for persons with disabilities is low, and opportunities are limited to a select few who have received donor support and family support. In addition, there are many challenges in the educational environment, as accessibility is inadequate at all levels of education and teachers lack knowledge about accommodating persons with disabilities.

In addition, vocational training schools have been established for persons with disabilities who have difficulty going on to higher education, but these are mainly for persons with physical disabilities and do not cater to people with other types of disabilities. Economic factors have also had an impact, with the number of university graduates and postgraduates are on the decline due to the current lack of sufficient income and the small salary difference between university and high school graduates.

The 2018 Law on the Persons with Disabilities guarantees all disability types the right to be admitted to educational institutions and to seek reasonable accommodation. In reality, however, the National University of Lao PDR only accepts students with physical and visual disabilities, and people with other types of disabilities, such as hearing and intellectual disabilities, continue to be denied admission.

### **Job Hunting**

Students with disabilities use the Internet and social networking services to gather information in the same way as non-disabled students, but because they often fail in the application screening process, it is important for them to be proactive with the support of their network of family, friends, and organizations of persons with disabilities. For persons with visual disabilities in particular, it is difficult to find a job in the private sector or government agencies, and the most common options are OPDs, NGOs, self-employment, or as a blind masseuse. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that there is no evidence that persons with hearing disabilities have been able to enter institutions of higher education.

As a specific example of job placement, a university graduate with physical disabilities started her career at OPD or NGO, and later moved to an international organization by expanding her network. This case points out the importance of network expansion in career development. The report also suggests that persons with disabilities need to strengthen their skills, as they may not be able to effectively promote their skills, and in some cases, they may not have reached the skill level required by employers.

On the other hand, low vision teacher training college faculty members are isolated in the workplace due to their disability and face a situation in which they are not given substantive work and have no prospects for promotion. In this environment, networking is difficult and there is no one to consult with, making it difficult to overcome the situation.

### **Internship**

Undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities, as well as non-disabled students, will participate in internships if they are required to do so for university credit. There are no special differences in the timing or application process. One university graduate with low vision, in order to complete the internship as a graduation requirement, used his network of friends to get acquainted with the café operator and applied directly. In such cases, the internship can lead directly to a part-time job or employment after the internship, and internships are considered an important opportunity for students with disabilities to find employment. However, it

should be noted that the number of students with disabilities who have experienced internships is limited and there is a lack of information.

### **Employment status of university graduates and postgraduates with disabilities**

No official statistical data exist on the employment status of persons with disabilities with university or graduate degrees in Lao PDR. However, there is a view that the number of employed persons may be increasing compared to the past due to the influence of advocacy activities by organizations of persons with disabilities to the government. On the other hand, there are different views that the weakening of the Lao currency in recent years has made the employment environment for persons with disabilities just as difficult as for non-disabled people. In response to this situation, the Lao Disabled Women's Center has been promoting efforts to support entrepreneurship rather than providing assistance in finding employment in companies. Specifically, the center provides training, equipment for independent living, and tools necessary for starting a business. For those who have completed the training and started their own businesses, the center also provides ongoing support through online follow-ups every three months.

### **Trends in Employment Rates by Gender, Faculty, and Industry**

In Lao PDR, women with disabilities are viewed by some as having more difficulty finding employment than men with disabilities. This is due to the cultural practice of women marrying at a young age and become housewife after marriage.

There are difficulties for persons with disabilities in finding employment regardless of their undergraduate degree, and there is no view that a particular department has an advantage in finding employment. In fact, many persons with disabilities work in industries that differ from the field in which they majored in university.

It is also noted that while it is difficult for university graduates with disabilities to find employment in any industry, it is relatively easy for them to find work in organizations of persons with disabilities and related groups and NGOs. In addition, some persons with disabilities have started their own businesses, most notably sewing and food sales. These entrepreneurial activities are generally conducted within the community with the support of family members.

#### **1. Legal Profession (Lawyers)**

The following is a summary of interviews with two lawyers with disabilities working in Lao PDR: The first is a 49-year-old man who uses a cane. He studied law at the National University of Lao PDR and Kyushu University in Japan, and qualified as a lawyer after returning to Japan. The second is a 31-year-old man with visual disability (low vision) who received legal training after graduating from the National University of Lao PDR and was admitted to the bar in 2024. He currently works in the same office as the first man and has him as a mentor.

There are very few lawyers with disabilities in Lao PDR, only three as far as they have been able to ascertain. The profession of lawyer is highly respected with a high social status, but this is due to the difficulty of the bar exam. To become a lawyer,

one must pass the bar exam after completing a law course, judicial training, and an internship. However, the qualification must be renewed every five years, and there are fees involved.

The process of qualifying as a lawyer as a person with disabilities is the same as for other people, but it is only recently that reasonable accommodations have begun to be made, and previously there were no barrier-free examination rooms, which entailed many difficulties. In addition, society is still prejudiced against persons with disabilities, and it is difficult to get a job outside of disability-related cases even after obtaining a license.

Accessibility of public facilities such as courthouses is inadequate, and there are challenges in terms of facilities and working patterns. Although consideration through advance requests has recently been made, fundamental improvements have yet to be made.

Promotion is based on the number of "credits" earned for each project, but because of the limited number of projects available to persons with disabilities, promotion is difficult. There is also a perception that society as a whole does not favor the promotion of people with disabilities.

They believe that there is ample potential for persons with disabilities to become active as lawyers. For this to happen, it is essential to promote social understanding of disability. In addition, there are many parts of the current legal system that are not feasible to enter, and legal reforms are required that are in line with the current situation.

## **2. International Organization (UNDP)**

A woman with a physical disability shares her background and how she built her career in an international organization. After graduating from the National University of Lao PDR, she worked for LDPA, an organization of persons with disabilities, on a project to promote the implementation of the CRPD. She then spent 11 years with an international NGO specializing in disability and inclusive education, working on a wide range of projects from the local to the international level. Through the contacts she gained through her past collaborative experiences, she was introduced to a post at UNDP and applied and was hired for the post to advance her career. Currently, as a Disability Inclusion Officer at UNDP, she is in charge of promoting inclusion in government agencies, climate change projects, and projects to promote employment for people with disabilities.

Other international organizations in Lao PDR have other employees with disabilities besides her, but the specific number and details are unknown. However, some UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF) have inclusive employment goals and may be making progress in hiring persons with disabilities. On the other hand, international organizations in Lao PDR are less willing to actively recruit persons with disabilities, so effectively promoting one's skills is the key to employment. In addition, although it is necessary to apply for higher positions in order to be promoted, there are no persons with disabilities in management positions.

In Lao PDR, the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for persons with physical disabilities to attend school, but thanks to the support of their families, they were able to receive an education. In addition, in Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR, which is small in size, there is a strong network of persons with disabilities, and their personal connections contribute greatly to their career development and ease of working.

Finally, she recommends the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities not only in UN agencies but also in all industries. She states that it is important to conduct a nationwide survey on the employment situation and make recommendations to the government and companies based on the results, as well as to revise the law to introduce a statutory employment rate (quota system) with reference to neighboring countries.

### **3. Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)**

Five persons with disabilities who are active in management positions in organizations of persons with disabilities in Lao PDR were interviewed individually regarding their activities, challenges, and potential for support.

OPDs work to defend the rights and support the independence of persons with disabilities, and each takes a different approach to improving their lives. For example, one organization provides policy advocacy, inclusive education, and vocational training to help persons with disabilities live with dignity in their communities. Another focuses specifically on women with disabilities, promoting their independence through vocational and life skills training, such as sewing and handicrafts. Still other organizations create an environment in which persons with disabilities can participate in society through the promotion of barrier-free access and education and training programs.

Several challenges exist in these activities. The first is the lack of understanding of disability in society as a whole, which highlights the current situation where persons with disabilities tend to be isolated. For example, one survey showed that none of the non-disabled university students or teachers responded that they had friends with disabilities. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of this issue from the educational stage. The second is sustainability in terms of funding. Many projects depend on support from international donors, and it has been pointed out that long-term planning is difficult because these funds are dependent on international and economic conditions.

Recommendations have also been made to address these issues. For example, it is suggested that vocational training centers be converted into technical schools to provide more advanced skills training, and that English classes, which are considered advantageous for job hunting, be developed to expand employment opportunities. Barrier-free training for architecture students and events that allow direct interaction between persons with disabilities and employers are also considered important. Furthermore, the need to strengthen support for children with disabilities from the elementary school entry stage and to achieve inclusive education through training for teachers is also mentioned.



In general, while these disability organizations provide an important base of support for persons with disabilities, they also face many challenges, such as raising public awareness and improving funding methods. The report suggests that cooperation with governments and society at large is essential to solving these problems.

#### **4. Government Agency**

Although the field survey did not result in interviews with persons with disabilities working at the ministries, the information obtained from a civil servant (with low vision) who works at a teacher training college operated by the Ministry of Education was used to receive secondary information. He has low vision and attended a special-needs school until the early grades of elementary school, then studied at a regular school and completed a teacher training college to obtain a teaching license for elementary education. After graduation, he worked as a volunteer at a special-needs school before moving to his current position. His reason for changing jobs was that he thought he could use his skills in a project related to inclusive education.

However, in his current workplace, there is a lack of understanding of persons with disabilities, and his coworkers continue to view him as unskilled. As a result, he is not assigned any duties and have no opportunities for promotion. In addition, the accessibility of the building is inadequate, and slopes and Braille blocks are not provided, making it difficult for them to move around.

He further states that the employment situation in Lao PDR as a whole continues to be difficult to find a job while there are many job seekers. Since private companies cannot afford to hire new employees, he suggests that donors develop a paid internship program. If persons with disabilities can demonstrate their skills through this program, it could lead directly to employment. Persons with disabilities are seeking opportunities to demonstrate their skills to employers.

#### **5. Employment status of people with diverse disabilities, regardless of educational background**

Issues related to higher education and employment for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR were organized through interviews with nine people with hearing disabilities, physical disabilities, and short stature people who are not university graduates but who work (or have worked in the past) in cafes where persons with disabilities work.

In Lao PDR, persons with disabilities have very limited access to education. For example, schools for persons with hearing disabilities are only available up to junior high school, and educational institutions beyond high school do not have teachers who can use sign language, making it difficult for them to continue their education. For persons with physical disabilities, the distance to school and the lack of infrastructure are also factors that hinder their access to higher education. In many cases, especially in rural areas, high schools and universities are geographically distant, making commuting impossible. While the understanding and support of family members may encourage them to pursue higher education, it is not uncommon for them to oppose it out of concern.

Regarding employment, many persons with disabilities find it difficult to work in the private sector. Reasons for this include a lack of understanding of disability in society as a whole and inadequacies in the legal system. In addition, there are cases where persons with disabilities themselves lack confidence and are unable to take the first step toward employment. On the other hand, some persons with disabilities have successfully acquired skills and obtained employment or started their own businesses by utilizing vocational training schools and donor support programs. However, such programs are not well developed and are not available to many people.

In the case of persons with hearing disabilities, many of them work in limited occupations, such as cafes, from the educational stage. As for persons with physical disabilities, lack of transportation and infrastructure hinders their access to higher education and employment, causing some to spend extended periods of time at home. In addition, institutions of higher education and vocational training schools also face challenges such as lack of facilities and closures due to pandemics, limiting opportunities to hone skills in a variety of fields.

Overall, the support system for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR is inadequate in both education and employment, and there is a need to expand support by the government and donors at each stage. In particular, in the field of education, there is an urgent need to improve access to educational institutions beyond high school and to promote inclusive education. In the area of employment, it is pointed out that it is important to open the way for persons with disabilities to enter diverse occupations and to deepen social understanding by serving as role models themselves.

## **Implications for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

Many challenges exist in higher education and employment for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR. The rate of students entering higher education is very low, with only the National University of Lao PDR accepting persons with disabilities, mainly those with physical disabilities and visual disabilities. Acceptance of persons with visual disabilities began after 2015, and although 26 students have graduated so far, opportunities for further education are limited to a few persons with disabilities who can receive support from donor projects and family members.

Job hunting for university graduates with disabilities is also fraught with difficulties, and in many cases they are not hired after the application screening process. Therefore, it is important for them to utilize networks of family, friends, and organizations of persons with disabilities. The internship system plays an important role, as students can participate in it for the purpose of earning credits in the same way as non-disabled people, and it may lead to part-time jobs or employment after completion. However, there are no specific statistics on the employment situation, and although the number of employees is increasing in some areas, the weakening of the Lao currency has made the employment environment more difficult. For persons with visual disabilities in particular, it is difficult to find employment in the

private sector or government agencies even with a university degree, and many work as blind massage therapists, OPDs, NGOs, or are self-employed.

Furthermore, the legal system for higher education and employment is ineffective, and the barrier-free environment in educational institutions and workplaces is inadequate. Discrimination and prejudice also persist, and opportunities for promotion are limited. In the legal profession, for example, there are few opportunities for persons with disabilities to take on non-disability-related cases, making it difficult for them to fulfill promotion requirements.

In order to solve these issues, a wide range of support measures from primary education to employment and a change in awareness throughout society are required. However, this proposal is limited to higher education and employment and proposes the following support approaches.

### **1. Establishment of a support system for students with disabilities through collaboration between the Nippon Foundation and the Lao government**

The Nippon Foundation, the Lao government, and the National University of Lao PDR will cooperate to build a system that enables students with disabilities to receive continuous support in education and employment. Experts from Japan, Thailand, and other countries have been invited to improve the expertise of Laotian support staff and promote the development of new support programs. In addition to the training of support staff, a system for providing reasonable accommodation will be developed, including the use of Braille for teaching materials and barrier-free facilities. In addition, training will be provided for staff capable of supporting the use of ICT, and support through On-Net will also be utilized. Career counseling will be provided to support students in career guidance and job hunting activities, and offer assistance in improving self appeal, resume writing, and interview preparation. In addition, the Nippon Foundation will collaborate with IT and manufacturing companies to provide internship opportunities for students to gain practical work experience, and will also hold career counseling sessions for high school students to support their transition from high school to university.

### **2. Eliminating prejudice in the workplace and educational settings through disability equality training**

Disability Equality Training (DET) will be used to eliminate prejudice in the workplace and educational settings. In Lao PDR, there are problems with negative responses by teachers and the rejection of persons with disabilities in the application screening process, and raising awareness is an urgent issue. Laotian DET facilitators will conduct training at companies and educational institutions, and in the first year, the target will be expanded to include administrative agencies and schools. This initiative will be expanded to the private sector in stages to promote understanding of persons with disabilities throughout society. Workshops and "Disability Week" events will also be held, and training content will be improved based on participant surveys. Awareness-raising activities should be developed from a long-term perspective, and securing financial resources in

cooperation with the Laotian government is a priority. The number of DET facilitators will be increased with the support and cooperation of the Nippon Foundation and the APCD of Thailand, and technical assistance will be provided to enable the Lao government to manage the program on its own in the future.

### **3. Support to promote employment of persons with disabilities and improve the effectiveness of legal system operation**

Japanese experts will consult with the Lao government and related organizations to analyze the current status and issues of the legal system related to persons with disabilities. Focusing particularly on the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities, the experts will advise on proposals and improvement measures for the introduction of an employment quota system and incentive programs for employers (tax incentives and subsidies). These will be carried out while considering consistency with current laws and regulations and feasibility of implementation. In addition, a policy model that is compatible with Lao PDR' unique social culture is required, and administrative officials will be dispatched to Thailand and Malaysia for site visits and discussions, while referring to international examples from Japan and other countries. In addition, we will advise on the establishment of a system to monitor the proper implementation of relevant laws and the introduction of corrective measures for inappropriate implementation.

By implementing the above proposals, the foundation will be established to promote employment for people with disabilities in Lao PDR.