

## Transition from Education to Employment in Malaysia: Situational Analysis of Youth with Disabilities



## Aims & Objectives

To further understand the current challenges and opportunities that persons with disabilities face in transition from education to employment.

### Key findings

#### Challenges

- High unemployment and negative outcomes for youth with disabilities in transition from school to work.
- Implementation, administration, and oversight of disability-inclusive rights, policies, and services need to be improved.
- Higher education and TVET remain challenging for youth with disabilities to access and find success within.
- Schools in Malaysia need to improve transition services and planning for youth with disabilities and offer a wide range of job-skill development options centred on the preferences of the individual youth with a disability.
- Bullying and discrimination in school and at the workplace.
- Limited opportunities for career advancement for a person with a disability.
- Negative parent and family attitudes, capacities; and lack of information.
- Lack of funding, facilities, and job training materials.
- Employers are not prepared for inclusive employment and the kind of flexible, creative, thinking that is required.

#### Opportunities

- There are existing good quality social enterprise and non-governmental organisations that support employment for youth with disabilities. Parents and teachers need to be made more aware of what is already available.
- Many corporations and businesses in Malaysia want to hire persons with disabilities but need more training and capacity-building in order to provide a better sense of inclusion and belonging.
- Schools do have integration and inclusion programmes that feature some transition planning and SKM certificate attainment but can do more to increase capacity and scope of services.
- While disability attitudes and expectations are improving in Malaysian society, more can be done to raise awareness and share success stories.

### Implications

Work to improve the transition and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities in Malaysia should be centred around two primary questions:

1. Is the person with a disability prepared for employment?
2. Is the employer ready to include a person with a disability?

Based on the situational analysis conducted, our future project activities will focus on the following:

- Provide training and resources for employers to better understand how to successfully include a person with a disability in the workforce.
- Support schools in providing person-centred planning and self-determination tools to youth with disabilities, so that youth may explore employment pathways of their own choosing based on preferences and interests.
- Provide training and resources for parents and families in understanding and *envisioning* the positive outcomes for their youth with a disability. This includes ensuring that parents and families know what options are available for their children as they transition from school.
- Support schools in developing community-based programming and further supporting community engagement for youth with disabilities within their transition plans.
- Provide training and resources to advance entrepreneurship and self-employment for youth with disabilities in Malaysia.
- Continue to support existing social enterprises and organisations with tools and resources on employment readiness assessment, job coaching and inclusive employment support, and employment skills development.

## Introduction

Malaysia has made much progress to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, but challenges persist and opportunities remain important to understand. Specifically, Malaysia is challenged to provide meaningful employment and social participation activities for young adults with disabilities and to ensure a smooth and productive transition from school to work. The aim of our project is to identify key challenges for the transition from school to post-secondary training and education opportunities to employment, as well as to provide resources such as toolkits and workshops for various stakeholders around these key issues and explore shared opportunities for improvement. In this situational analysis report, we will report on fieldwork consultation that was conducted in December 2023 as well as a synthesis of current literature.

## The Malaysian Context



Malaysia is an upper middle-income country composed of 13 states and 3 federal territories, located in Southeast Asia. Historically, portions of Malaysia were controlled by the Dutch, Portuguese, British, and Japanese at different periods. The modern, independent, country of Malaysia was formed in 1957. There are three major ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups in contemporary Malaysia: ethnic Muslim Malay (67%), ethnic Hokkien Chinese (25%), and ethnic Tamil Indian (7%). For now, this project is concentrated in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, and the state of Selangor, and

consultations and site visits took place primarily in Kuala Lumpur and Klang (Selangor), where approximately half the population of Malaysia lives and where many of the services for persons with disabilities are located.

The education system in Malaysia continues to be based on a British model of pre-primary, primary, secondary (Forms 1–5) and upper-secondary (Form 6) levels. High-stakes examinations are widespread to matriculate students to the next levels of education or to exit successfully, such as the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM, Malaysian Certificate of Education) at the end of Form 5. There are some accommodations provided for students with disabilities to take these high-stakes examinations, but these accommodations are mostly to do with alternative communication (i.e. Braille) and accessible technology.<sup>1</sup> The general school system is offered to all children, but there is also a separate optional school system for Chinese conducted in Mandarin Chinese and for Indians conducted in Tamil. There is also the presence of many international schools in Malaysia – particularly in Kuala Lumpur – that offer a wide variety of curriculums from around the world. In Malaysia, over 20% of the federal budget goes to the education system.<sup>2</sup>

Legally and legislatively, persons with disabilities in Malaysia are given rights to education and employment in the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008. The Malaysian government is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and has ratified the convention. In

<sup>1</sup> (Ong, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> (DoSM, 2024)

Malaysia, persons with disabilities are categorized and officially registered as *Orang Kurang Upaya* [Bahasa Malay: 'People with less ability']<sup>3</sup>, or OKU, and when they are registered with the government they are eligible to receive benefits including reduced transportation costs, special education and training services, financial aid for higher education, tax relief, access to assistive devices, employment support, and other social welfare services.

Students with disabilities in Malaysia are generally educated through three different means: special schools, *Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi* (PPKI, special classrooms and integration), and *Program Pendidikan Inklusif* (PPI, full inclusion in mainstream classrooms). There is an alternative curriculum that can be taught to students with disabilities – *Kurikulum Pendidikan Bermasalah Pembelajaran* [Special Education Curriculum for Learning Disabilities] – and all students that are registered as OKU receive an individualised education plan (IEP). Actual numbers of students in these programmes are hard to come by, but a news source reported that the Ministry of Education had registered a total of 87,574 students with disabilities as of June 2019. Of nearly 90,000 students, around 2,500 students are currently in Special Education Schools and nearly 70,000 students are in the Integrated PPKI program, and over 16,000 students are in the inclusive PPI program.<sup>4</sup> To put these numbers in context, in 2021 there were around 5.175 million students in Malaysian primary and secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> Thus, children receiving special education services are about 2% of the school population. Primary and secondary education is free to all Malaysian citizens, although according to UNICEF, 17% of pre-primary, 6% of primary, and 9% of secondary Malaysian children with disabilities are out of school. For non-Malaysian citizens residing in Malaysia, these numbers increase dramatically to 70% of pre-primary, 60% of primary, and 50% of secondary children with disabilities out of school.<sup>6</sup> Another UNICEF study in 2014 stated that “children with disabilities in Malaysia are often hidden, portrayed negatively and excluded from society,”<sup>7</sup> so the exact number of persons with disabilities and their participation in education and employment is unknown.



According to the *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025*,<sup>8</sup> there should be a 'zero-reject' policy where all schools must accept children with disabilities. However, schools in Malaysia have the autonomy to choose to implement PPI or PPKI. Mainstream schools that offer the integration-model PPKI choose which kinds of services they can offer, including the areas of job skills and technical skills development that they offer. This is important to note in terms of transition. There are also significant gaps between policy aspiration and actual practices in schools.<sup>9</sup> According to a report issued by the #OKU Rights Matter Project:

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<sup>3</sup> This is a controversial term for many disabled persons in Malaysia because it implies impairment and in-ability.

<sup>4</sup> (Loh & Joyce, 2022)

<sup>5</sup> (DoSM, 2024)

<sup>6</sup> (UNICEF, 2022)

<sup>7</sup> (UNICEF, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> (MoE, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> (Jelas & Ali, 2014; Nasir & Efendi, 2016)



*The zero-reject policy has led to an increase in the enrolment of OKU students. However, many schools are lagging behind in having neither accessible infrastructure nor the resources for teaching and learning required to support students with disabilities.<sup>10</sup>*



After children progress through education, or whether they drop-out or never entered school in the first place, they must inevitably encounter the Malaysian economy and employment as they approach adulthood. Malaysia is the fifth largest economy in Southeast Asia by output, and 55<sup>th</sup> in the world when ranked by Gross Domestic Product per capita.<sup>11</sup> Malaysia is natural resource and human-capital rich, and features a competitive, global, and private-market driven economy. The labour force participation rate is 70% and the unemployment rate is a mere 3.5% at the time of this report,<sup>12</sup> marking Malaysia as economically robust and healthy overall – particularly post-COVID-19 pandemic. For young adults with disabilities, there are inclusive employment protections written into the 2008 Persons with Disabilities Act, as well as some governmental support and employment schemes that are provided for those with OKU registration. The barriers and challenges to full and meaningful employment for a person with a disability in Malaysia are numerous and will be explored in the next section.

## Current Challenges in Education and Employment

**Implementation, administration, and oversight of disability rights and services is a confusing patchwork in Malaysia.** The Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (MoWFCD) is responsible for learning and skills training for youth with disabilities, but the Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for special education in special and regular schools. The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system has been called a “spaghetti-bowl of overlapping jurisdiction and standards”<sup>13</sup> and overseen by the MoE, Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Ministry of Human Resources (MoHR), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MoRRD), the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries (MoAFI), among nearly a dozen ministries and government bodies responsible for TVET in some capacity.

**The majority of adults with disabilities in Malaysia are unemployed.** Malaysia has policies in place that promote the right to employment for persons with disabilities, as well as the right to accessibility and non-discrimination. In 2008, a law was passed that established a quota system that dictated that at least 1% of the civil service must be persons with disabilities. The percentage of employees in the civil service with a disability is only 0.29%.<sup>14</sup> Of the 638,000 adults that are official registered as having a disability (OKU), only about 2% of adults with disabilities are fully employed.<sup>15</sup> This challenging statistic can be seen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the situation was not much better

<sup>10</sup> (Amar-Singh HSS et al., 2021, p. 46)

<sup>11</sup> (World Bank, 2024)

<sup>12</sup> (DoSM, 2024)

<sup>13</sup> (Aziz & Subramaniam, 2023, p. 2)

<sup>14</sup> (Noor, Madzen & Azzahari, 2022)

<sup>15</sup> (MEF, 2023)

before 2019. There are currently some government initiatives to help persons with disabilities that lost their jobs during the pandemic regain employment and these schemes have seen some success.<sup>16</sup> However, there are still major issues with government policy implementation when it comes to supporting inclusive employment for persons with disabilities.<sup>17</sup> Of the challenges that are faced by persons with disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment in Malaysia, it is reported that mobility, transportation, lack of suitable jobs, inaccessible work places, and lack of support were the most challenging.<sup>18</sup> Significant health setbacks were also difficult to manage while remaining employed, and resulted in a many having to resign in the face of inflexible employers.<sup>19</sup> Those persons with disabilities that did find meaningful work were able to do so because of supportive employers or professional networks of family and friends. In Malaysia, disability and poverty are strongly correlated.<sup>20</sup>

**Youth with disabilities have low participation rates in higher education.** While the number of students with disabilities in Malaysian higher education has been rising steadily, they still represent a very small proportion overall, and challenges persist regarding discrimination, lack of accessibility, resistance to curricular and pedagogical accommodations, modifications, and flexibility; and other barriers to participation.<sup>21</sup> One study conducted in Malaysia found correlation between the level of higher education attainment for persons with disabilities and a higher quality of life.<sup>22</sup>

**TVET institutions can do more to become inclusive and accessible for youth with disabilities.** For those youth with disabilities that do not want to attend universities, the next best option for meaningful and sustainable employment is to receive training and education through the TVET system. As reported above, the TVET system has many issues in terms of management and oversight and in Malaysia is generally underperforming.<sup>23</sup> Most high-profile TVET institutions are not inclusive and accessible. There are some TVET institutions that are specific to catering to persons with disabilities, although the quality of these institutions can vary widely. Once a student in Malaysia reaches the age of 15, they can enter a TVET institution instead of continuing secondary school.

**Schools in Malaysia are not preparing youth with disabilities to transition to employment.** Persons with disabilities in Malaysia voice that they did not receive adequate training and job skills preparation in schools, and were not able to access the necessary qualification programmes for the kinds of jobs that they wanted.<sup>24</sup> Schools still struggle to provide PPKI and PPI programmes in general, and there are not enough teachers and resources to effectively implement existing programmes.<sup>25</sup> Studies have also found that there are gaps in the collaboration between general and special education teachers in Malaysian schools, which further makes transition difficult when PPKI units are isolated from other school processes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> (Ha, 2024)

<sup>17</sup> (Jamil & Saidin, 2018)

<sup>18</sup> (Tiun & Khoo, 2013)

<sup>19</sup> (Ramakrishnan et al., 2011)

<sup>20</sup> (Mustaffa et al., 2020; Nasir, 2020)

<sup>21</sup> (Yusof et al., 2020)

<sup>22</sup> (Jani, Alias & Tumin, 2022)

<sup>23</sup> (Aziz & Subramaniam, 2023)

<sup>24</sup> (Harun et al., 2019)

<sup>25</sup> (Bailey, et al., 2015)

<sup>26</sup> (Khairuddin, et al., 2016)

**Many employers in Malaysia are open to hiring persons with disabilities but lack knowledge and capacity.** As cited above, there are challenges for schools to prepare young adults to enter the workforce. Many employers in Malaysia are open to hiring persons with disabilities, but view the costs associated with additional training and other accommodations as a barrier.<sup>27</sup> Studies have found that there is a low level of embeddedness of persons with disabilities in businesses, and persons with disabilities often feel a lack of inclusion and belonging even if they are employed.<sup>28</sup>

## Stakeholder-Identified Challenges and Opportunities



In December 2023, multiple agencies, schools, and NGOs were visited in the Kuala Lumpur-Selangor State area of Malaysia. In total, 8 schools and technical vocational centres and 8 organisations (social enterprises, NGOs, foundations, advocacy groups, businesses) were visited; with a total number of participants reaching around 80 that included adults, students, and persons with disabilities of all ages. The purpose of these visits and focus group discussions was to learn about current initiatives that support inclusive education and employment, what local stakeholders believed were the challenges, and where our project could best support existing practices and fill in gaps of supports and services. Site visits and focus group discussions were led by Dr. Matthew Schuelka of Fora Education, and also supported by staff from both the Hong Leong Foundation and the Malaysian Collective Impact Initiative.

The schools that we visited in Selangor state offer the PPKI programme and there is some transition support and services that are being offered. While students with disabilities are supported in the mainstream classroom as much as they can, and participate in common school activities, there is typically a separate 'PPKI Unit' on the school campus that is the place for students with the disabilities to go. This is not a full-inclusion model.

Secondary students with disabilities are prepared for transition by special education teachers and school counsellors. There is a skills curriculum within PPKI that has specific competencies and certificates in specific skills. However, this narrows what the school can offer to youth with disabilities in terms of career exploration. Of the schools we visited, the PPKI and SKM [*Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia*, or Malaysian Skills Certificate] modules we observed were baking, cooking, food & beverage preparation, sewing, gardening, cleaning, and laundry. The kinds of PPKI and SKM programmes that are on offer from the schools are generally based on the resources available to the school and the personnel available to teach specific skills.

Community-based curriculum and programming is not common in the Malaysian schools we visited, and nearly all of the transition-based services for youth with disabilities are done within the school itself. Internships, job placements, and job shadowing experiences were not common. While some field trips were mentioned – for example, taking students with disabilities to the grocery store as part of the curriculum – these did not seem to be a regular occurrence. Occasionally, a community member

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<sup>27</sup> (Tiun, Lee & Khoo, 2011)

<sup>28</sup> (Hasim et al., 2015)

will come into to the school to teach a certain skill or to help with specific programmes. Teachers told us that the corporate sector wants to hire youth that already have the skills necessary to perform the job. Businesses are not interested in providing training and support for new hires, especially persons with disabilities.

One private inclusive school did have a partnership with a large mall in Kuala Lumpur to offer internship placement opportunities. They supported this programme through both school staff and mall staff, which had its challenges at times but was generally successful.

Teachers also reported that they needed better linkages with TVET institutions and to better prepare their students for entering TVET. Students needed to have higher skills necessary for entry into the TVET system, as well as success through the TVET system.

According to a focus group of university students with disabilities, their universities offer some accommodations, but it often falls to individual lecturers and programmes to determine how accessible and accommodating they choose to be. There is a counselling disability services unit in most Malaysian universities, and they can work with lecturers to arrange accommodations. According to one participant, *“For me, all schools have to implement universal design. It’s not only for facilities, but system also.”* Transition from university to employment for youth with disabilities can be a challenge, as reported by focus group participants. One participant spoke to the general attitudinal challenges that are faced in Malaysian society:

*“We keep hearing the same things ... You have to understand the gap. The gap is society. They do not understand. They do not have this syllabus in school. They don’t know what to do. We have to tell them: Because of your discrimination we are like this. Because of your social barriers, we are stuck at home. When we go to a university, if lecturers knew about disabilities and how to deal with them, we have to make sure they realize that they are the barrier and they can change it.”*

There are some sheltered workshops that are set up in Malaysia for persons with disabilities. These are not very positive places, according to our participants. These ‘vocational training centres’, according to one participant, *“turn into a daycare centre ... parents kind of settle for whatever is there because they don’t have a choice.”*

There are a variety of social enterprises and organisations that support employment, training, and job-placement for youth with disabilities. The organisations that we visited were all quite effective in the kind of work that they did, from what we observed. For example, several social enterprises we visited both generated income through products that were made by persons with disabilities – baked goods, art works, stitched items, etc. – but also had job placement and job support programmes. For these social enterprises, the goal was to help persons with disabilities find the kind of work and independence that they wanted. All of the organisations we visited paid their clients with disabilities a meaningful wage, and the goal was *not* to keep them within the organisation. As one participant emphatically put it, *“We are NOT a day centre!”* We heard many stories of placing youth with disabilities in jobs in hotels, grocery stores, shops, and banks. Often, the parents and families were the



ones that were also reaching out and making connections within their networks to create opportunities for employment. States one of our participants:

“The window of opportunity has to be created for them.”

Youth with disabilities were supported in their employment through pre-job coaching and skills development, being connected with networks, and having job coaches that met and trained supervisors. One organisation offers a circle of support in the workplace for persons with disabilities and offers some employer training for inclusive employment. In some cases, job coaches themselves were not available, and parents needed to provide these on their own. Several organisations we spoke to have assessments that they conduct to determine abilities, talents, and preferences for work. While in some instances these assessments were used to determine that a youth with disabilities was not a suitable fit for their organisation, most often these assessments were used by the trainer or organisation as initial data to help guide their ‘client’.



It was also reported by the stakeholders that there is an increase in employers interested in hiring persons with disabilities and a heightened discourse around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives being led by large corporations – in Malaysia, most often global financial institutions, and other global industry groups. However, the challenge is that often these directives to hire persons with disabilities – as positive as this may be – are coming from the top of the corporation but the actual day-to-day inclusion and implementation of these inclusion policies fall to middle-managers and below whom do not have much training or understanding about persons with disabilities and how to accommodate them in the workplace.

Further, social enterprises and training organisations target more ‘high functioning’<sup>29</sup> youth with disabilities, and many do not train and provide job-placement coaching for those with more significant or severe needs. Therefore, there is a gap in services provided for youth with disabilities in that currently there is not much provision for youth with disabilities with more severe learning disabilities and behavioural challenges. In order to qualify for all of the training and employment organisations we visited, youth had to have a certain level of ability and function to be a part of that organisation.

There are a range of opportunities for training and inclusive employment support, but parents and teachers might not be aware of what is available. Referrals to organisations and social enterprise groups – private TVET, job coaching, inclusive employment support, businesses – are most often conducted via word-of-mouth. In other words, parents and teachers could benefit from a central hub of information that is provided for them in order to seek out the best options for their youth as they transition away from school. The government can also provide more information in linking up public-private opportunities for transition.

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<sup>29</sup> Not a preferred term, but one used frequently in Malaysia and in our conversations with stakeholders.



Schools do not offer a wide range of transition services that allow secondary students with disabilities the opportunity to learn employment skills that match their employment interests. There does not appear to be a wide-spread approach to self-determination and person-centred planning that supports youth with disabilities to explore job and career options and make connections in the community. Of the schools we visited, PPKI programmes were being offered for secondary students that included some job skills development, but only in select skills and industries. Primarily, the skills being taught were around food and beverage, cleaning, sewing, and laundry. General life skills were also taught under the PPKI transition programme. Secondary schools do offer SKM certificates in certain skills and employment competencies that are recognised by industries.

Employers in Malaysia are becoming more interested in hiring persons with disabilities, but do not necessarily have the skills and training to offer a fully inclusive workplace. To give all employees a better sense of inclusion and belonging, this needs to go beyond just physical accessibility – although important and often still a challenge – towards thinking about the inclusive culture within the workplace: is the language in the job advert inclusive? Is the interview process inclusive? Are non-disabled employees trained to be accommodating and inclusive? What is the level of flexibility that is needed for all employees to feel included and satisfied?

Below are other challenges and opportunities that arose in our focus groups with stakeholders.

### **Challenges to education and employment, as reported by stakeholders, are the following:**

- Bullying and discrimination in school and at the workplace.
- Limited opportunities for career advancement for a person with a disability.
- Parent and family attitudes, capacities, and lack of information.
- Lack of funding, facilities, and job training materials.
- Lack of teacher training and preparation to teach job skills.
- Policies and legal codes are not enforced that support persons with disabilities.
- Employers have been known to deduct money from a person with a disability's salary to pay for accessibility and inclusive accommodation that they provide.
- The government has a job coach programme, but it is very limited, under-resourced, and under-staffed.
- Care-giving services and in-home care for persons with disabilities is not common or not available.
- Employers are not prepared for inclusive employment and the kind of flexible, creative, thinking that is required.

### **When asking schools and organisations what resources they needed, they reported the following:**

- Increased collaboration between schools and the corporate sector.
- Increase collaboration and partnerships between companies and disability service providers.

- More resources and curriculum to support 'soft skills', self-advocacy, employment skills, employment-appropriate social skills,
- More job coaches, career counselling, and inclusive employment coordinators.
- More disability managers in companies / human resource departments.
- Teachers need to be taught the employment skills that they themselves are expected to teach to students. It was suggested that SKM certificates and training courses be given to the teachers.
- There is a significant need to raise more disability awareness in Malaysian society, and to normalize the presence of persons with disabilities in education and employment.
- More support for organisations and schools to work with trainees that have more significant mental health needs.
- More support for entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Malaysia.
- Increased access to all industries, not just ones that 'traditionally' serve persons with disabilities such as the service sector and manual labour.
- More assessment tools to help a organisations and schools guide a person with disability towards understanding their own strengths, areas of growth, job preferences, and skills development.
- Better streamlining of assessments and portfolios and ways to present portfolios to potential employers.
- Programmes and modules that better balance both academic *and* vocational skills. Often, students are forced to choose one or the other and this narrows their future opportunities.
- Offering more individualized and differentiated vocational training programmes.

## Recommendations and Paths Forward

Based on the literature and the findings of our own focus group discussions with stakeholders, it is recommended that the work of this and future projects be centred around two push and pull factor questions:

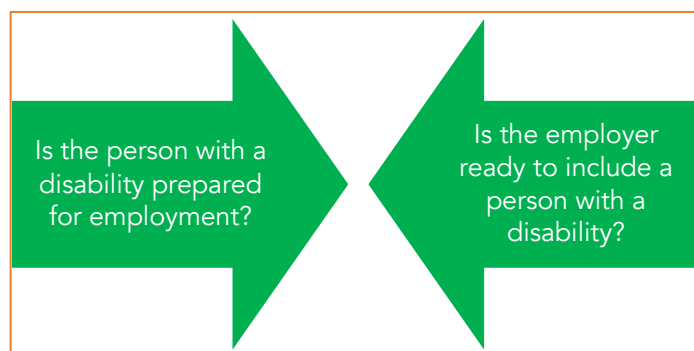


Figure 1. Push and pull factors for inclusive employment

The first question – Is the person with a disability prepared for employment? – encompasses issues of education and training, skills development, person-centred planning and self-determination, job exploration, and community engagement. The second question – Is the employer ready to include a person with a disability? – encompasses issues of employer training and capacity development,

disability awareness in broader Malaysian society, inclusive employment support and resource allocation, incentivization for businesses to hire and support a person with a disability, and effective enforcement of disability-inclusive rights and policies by the Malaysian government.

However, successful employment, meaningful social participation, and quality of life outcomes for youth with disabilities requires not just job skills development, but the creation of other factors that are both in and out of the youth's control. Often, dialogue around employment for youth and youth with disabilities centres around a human capital development argument, but there are other factors beyond skill investment that are important.<sup>30</sup> These factors can include the following:

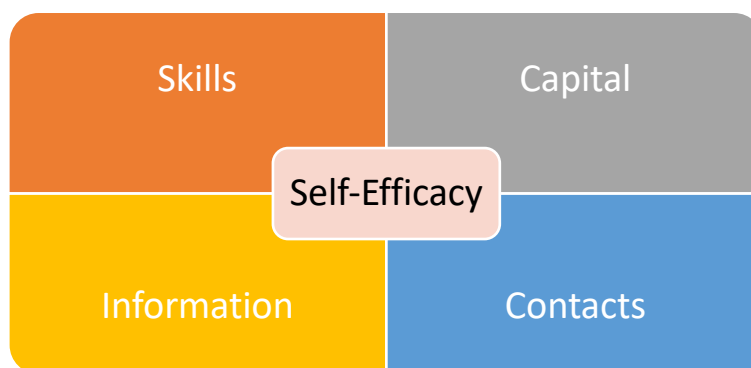


Figure 2. Factors Necessary for Meaningful Employment Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities<sup>31</sup>

Beyond **skills** for work and life – which are still very important – youth with disabilities need **information** about the labour market and what kinds of jobs and employment opportunities exist in their communities. Youth with disabilities need **contacts**, or connections and networks, that can help that youth find and gain opportunities with employers. In some sense, youth with disabilities need **capital**, which is particularly important in the entrepreneur and self-employment sector, but also some amount of resources and investment in general is needed to help support a youth with a disability to find and sustain employment. 'Capital' can also mean social and cultural capital, which relates to the means that a youth with disability can successfully navigate society and find quality outcomes. Finally, a youth with a disability needs **self-efficacy** to believe in themselves and to plan and execute their employment goals for the future. Self-efficacy is something that needs to be built up through the attitudes of those schools, organisations, and agencies that work with that youth with a disability, as well as a belief by that youth's parents and family that they can have meaningful employment and social participation.

In a previous project on employment and meaningful social participation for youth with disabilities in Bhutan, an international collaboration of Fora Education and universities in the USA, UK, and Bhutan led by Dr. Matthew Schuelka piloted several interventions to support inclusive employment and entrepreneurship to youth with disabilities.<sup>32</sup> The primary interventions that were piloted were the role of Community Inclusion Coordinator that acted like a job coach and employment coordinator, micro-

<sup>30</sup> (Johnstone & Schowengerdt, 2022)

<sup>31</sup> These were originally conceived by Dr. Christopher Johnstone (*University of Minnesota*) as the SCICS framework, developed for the project "Understanding, Developing, and Supporting Meaningful Work for Youth with Disabilities in Bhutan: Networks, Communities, and Transitions," funded through a Global Challenges Research Grant by UK Official Development Assistance (ESRC ES/S004319/1) and led by Dr. Matthew Schuelka.

<sup>32</sup> See above.

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grants that offered seed capital for investments in training and small business creation, and a pilot of an Employment Assessment Toolkit<sup>33</sup> that helped youth with disabilities and potential employers understand work readiness and skills development. As a result of that project, one of the take-aways was a 'Seven Cs' framework to help support inclusive employment and meaningful social engagement for youth with disabilities.<sup>34</sup> This framework is helpful to think about for Malaysia in terms of framing potential areas of focus, resources, and attention for this project, future projects, and to help guide agencies and organisations already doing this work.

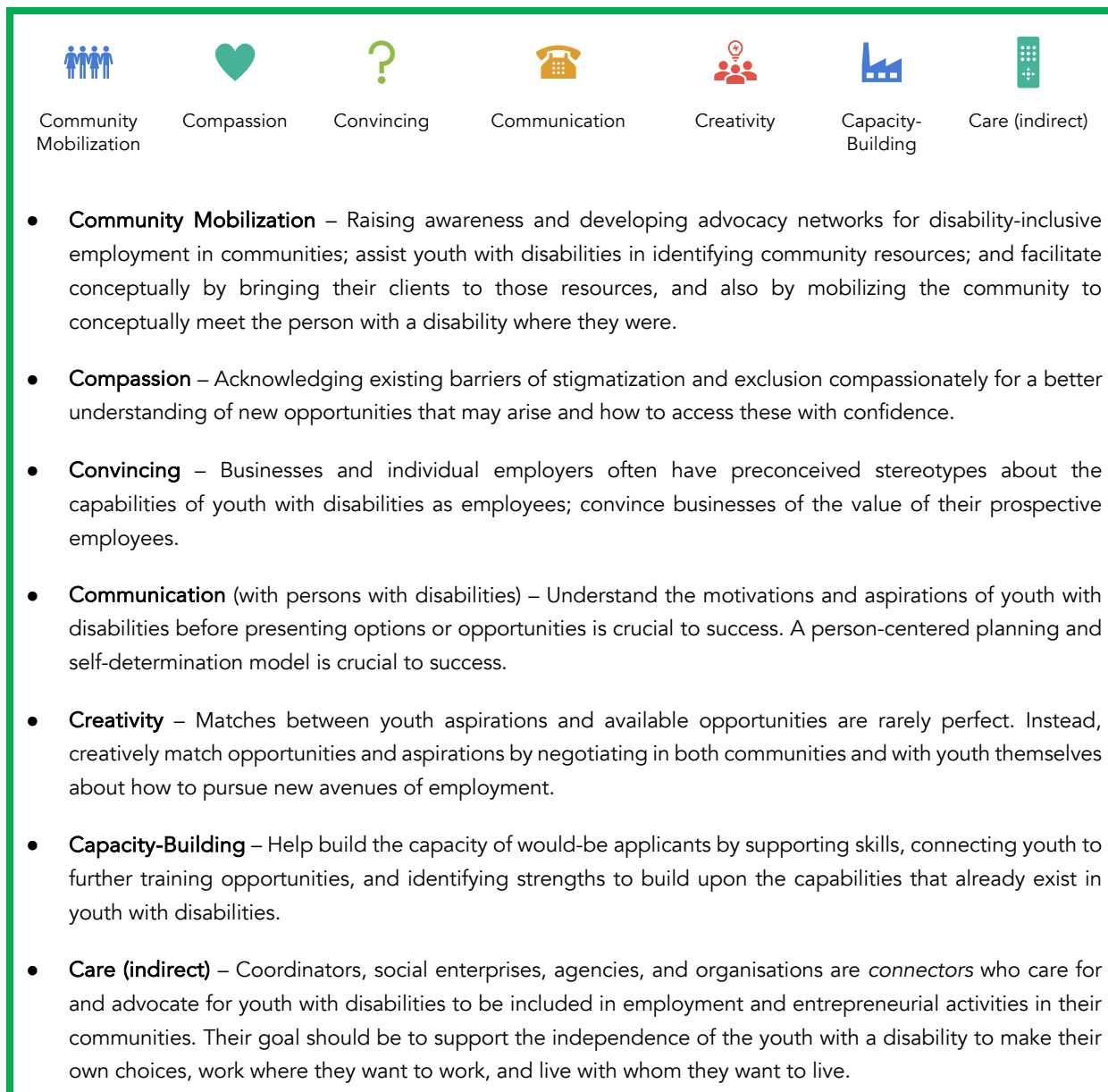


Figure 3. The 'Seven Cs' to supporting meaningful employment and social participation for youth with disabilities

<sup>33</sup> (Lynch, et al., 2023)

<sup>34</sup> (Johnstone & Schuelka, 2022)



Taking these frameworks into account, as well as the data from the literature and our own focus group discussions with stakeholders in Malaysia, this project will continue to work towards the recommendations below, in collaboration and support from our network of stakeholders.

### **Recommendations based on identified gaps and challenges highlighted in this situational analysis:**

- Provide training and resources for employers to better understand how to successfully include a person with a disability in the workforce.
- Support schools in providing person-centred planning and self-determination tools to youth with disabilities, so that youth may explore employment pathways of their own choosing based on preferences and interests.
- Provide training and resources for parents and families in understanding and *envisioning* the positive outcomes for their youth with a disability. This includes ensuring that parents and families know what options are available for their children as they transition from school.
- Support schools in developing community-based programming and further supporting community engagement for youth with disabilities within their transition plans.
- Provide training and resources to advance entrepreneurship and self-employment for youth with disabilities in Malaysia.
- Continue to support existing social enterprises and organisations with tools and resources on employment readiness assessment, job coaching and inclusive employment support, and employment skills development.

In conclusion, there are many opportunities and positive areas for growth to support meaningful employment for youth with disabilities in Malaysia. Existing organisations that we visited in the Kuala Lumpur-Selangor State area are doing good work, but there are areas for systemic improvement and gaps to fill in service provision. Fora Education, Hong Leong Foundation, and the Malaysian Collective Impact Initiative will continue to work on these issues where challenges still exist and to ensure that all Malaysian youth with disabilities are employed and meaningfully engaged in Malaysian society in the way that they want to be and have a right to be. Many challenges remain, but we are hopeful for the future.



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