

# CRPD PARALLEL REPORT

SINGAPORE

**12 Pre-Sessional Working Group  
23 - 27 September 2019**

**Convention on the Rights of Persons with  
Disabilities (CRPD)**

**Prepared by:**

DISABLED PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION (DPA)  
ON BEHALF OF  
CRPD PARALLEL REPORT WORKING GROUP

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## Introduction

In this first report by the Disabled People's Association (DPA) Parallel Report Working Group, we believe that while the various articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) play an important role in the lives of people with disabilities, employment is particularly critical in increasing the independence of people with disabilities. In this way employment is a gateway to accessing other important resources such as healthcare, transport, housing and engagement in social and recreational activities. Beyond that, the independence that employment affords many persons with disabilities can help to overturn assumptions about those with disabilities being dependent on their families, caregivers or the state.

In a recent article by the Straits Times, a popular national newspaper in Singapore, the estimated employment rate of people with disabilities was at 4.9%. Given Singapore's international standing as a fairly industrialised city state, this low rate of employment does not seem reasonable. In comparison, the labour force participation rate stood at 67.7%<sup>1</sup> in 2018. The employment rate of persons with disabilities is especially disheartening given the healthy number of subsidies and incentives that the Government offers employers.

While low employment rates tend to hinge on attitudes of employers who may have made assumptions about what a person with a disability can and cannot do, other systemic barriers also make it difficult for people with disabilities to find and maintain stable employment. In DPA's study on "Discrimination in The Workplace" (2018), it was shown how some people with disabilities had experiences where they were directly told that they would not be employed due to their disability.

This report aims to look at the systemic challenges that may contribute to the low employment rate of persons with disabilities in relation to the various articles of the Convention. The report offers some solutions that could be adopted by the Singapore Government because this is an issue that should involve disability voices.

## Background

The Singapore Government has developed the Enabling Masterplans (5-year roadmaps) that include a CRPD Implementation plan, and recommendations that act as suggestions to the various Government ministries to adopt and implement.

This report recognises the successes of the Singapore Government in making Singapore more accessible, especially with physical accessibility in the built environment, as well as transport infrastructure. However, there still remains work to be done in terms of employment of persons with disabilities, social and educational integration, as well as mainstreaming disability in recreational and community spaces.

The following are the aims of the Working Group in putting together this report:

- Highlight the fact that whilst there are no outright laws in Singapore that specifically exclude people with disabilities, there are gaps in current policies that tend to leave people with disabilities marginalised,
- Show that a lack of Anti-Discrimination or Equal Opportunities legislation results in persons with disabilities (as well as other marginalised groups) facing unfair work practices, and an environment of social segregation.
- Show that there is a wealth of knowledge and capability within the disability community and that it is keen to engage and work with the relevant authorities to build a truly inclusive society,

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Manpower. "Summary Table: Labour Force" (*Mom.gov.sg*) <<https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-Summary-Table.aspx>> accessed 30 June 2019

- Generate interest from the disability community in the CRPD and ownership of the need to monitor the progress of CRPD implementation in Singapore,
- Recognise that the implementation of the CRPD and its monitoring is not the purview of the Government alone but also that of the disability community.

### **Working Group Demographic**

This report is presented by the DPA Parallel Report Working Group,, an ad hoc group which comprised twenty-one people (male = 62%, female = 38%) representing a cross-section of Singaporeans with disabilities, including persons with physical disabilities, and wheelchair users, persons who are culturally Deaf, deaf and Hard of Hearing, persons with vision disabilities, and persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Additional inputs were sourced from the persons with disabilities in DPA’s Board of Management. Seven of the ten members of the Board have a range of disabilities, including those who identify as autistic, Deaf or have a physical disability. The three remaining members of the Board include two parents of persons with disabilities and one ally.

This report aims to provide information to the Committee on the implementation of the CRPD in Singapore for the purposes of compiling the List of Issues. We have also suggested questions for the List of Issues (LOIs).

### **Methodology**

The Working Group has been meeting regularly since May 2018 in order to review and consider mechanisms for the preparation of a Parallel Report and LOIs to the CRPD Committee. The DPA acted as Secretariat for the Working Group, arranged for CRPD training workshops with an independent expert and arranged all logistical matters to ensure that meetings were run effectively.

The DPA also engaged with student researchers (both with and without disabilities) to write and draft the report. The final draft was completed in July 2019 and was circulated amongst other Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) in Singapore so that they may lend support to the issues raised in the report. The names of these DPOs are listed below. The Secretariat then worked with DPOs to compile this report.

The recommendations made in this report have been raised and approved entirely by people with disabilities.

Following are the names of the Social Service Agencies (SSAs) that DPA has shared this report with, and sought comments:

1. Handicaps Welfare Association (HWA)
2. SUNDAC
3. Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE)
4. ExtraOrdinary Horizons

A number of DPOs that DPA shared the report with chose to give feedback but remain anonymous.

## **About DPA**

Disabled People's Association (DPA) is Singapore's only cross-disability non-profit organisation. **We represent the disability community, working to build a fairer society where everyone can participate in all aspects of life** from education to employment and access to social integration.

*A Voice of Our Own:* We are an organisation for people with disabilities run by people with disabilities. We listen to the needs of all persons with disabilities in Singapore, their allies, carers and other social service organisations that provide essential services and we ensure their needs are represented at a national level. **We provide a platform for all people with disabilities to speak up and ensure their voices are heard**, and we represent those less able or comfortable to speak for themselves.

We help the disability community have a voice in society by working with decision-makers in political, commercial and educational institutions so that no decision that impacts us is made without us. We also provide training for both people with disabilities and the public, **so we can work together to create an inclusive, accessible society we are all proud of.**

To find out more about DPA's work and take part in the conversation, please visit DPA's website ([www.dpa.org.sg](http://www.dpa.org.sg)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DisabledPeoplesAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/DisabledPeoplesAssociation)).

## **Section 1: Participation in the labour market**

While Article 27 of the CRPD discusses implementation of inclusive employment practices by Government, private companies and civil service organisations (which in Singapore are referred to as Social Service Agencies (SSAs)) to ensure that people with disabilities are gainfully employed, a number of other articles also play an important role in developing an effective labour force. The Working Group has highlighted the following articles as critical in ensuring that people with disabilities have the right capabilities, and skills so that they can be part of the labour force.

- Article 27: Work and Employment
- Article 24: Education
- Article 25: Health
- Article 26: Habilitation and Rehabilitation
- Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination

### **What has been done**

The Working Group commends the Government's efforts in increasing the employment of persons with disabilities between 2015 and 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Through SG Enable, an agency set up by the Government to provide support to persons with disabilities, the Government has also worked closely with other SSAs to assist persons with disabilities in seeking employment.

*Related Article: Art 27 (1h)*

Initiatives such as the Special Employment Credit (SEC) and the Open Door Programme (ODP) have helped to promote the employment of persons with disabilities by providing financial incentives and encouraging employers to hire, train and integrate persons with disabilities. The ODP provides assistance with job redesign, assistive technology purchases of equipment, workplace modification as well as recruitment and job placement services. Yet, persons with psychosocial disabilities are not eligible for the ODP. The SGenable website states that *"The definition of disability varies across different countries because of the individual context of the countries. Singapore's Enabling Masterplan helps to define disability as "those whose prospects of securing, retaining places and advancing in education and training institutions, employment and recreation as equal members of the community are substantially reduced as a result of physical, sensory, intellectual and developmental impairments"*.

Indeed, the exclusion of those with psychosocial disabilities from the Government definition of disability as well as the lack of consistency in the eligibility requirements of various disability support schemes has been a topic of discussion for some time and recently come up in parliamentary questions. On 8 July 2019, Nominated Member of Parliament Ms Anthea Ong asked Mr Desmond Lee, the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what is the official definition of "disability" used in our social policies; (b) how does this definition compare to the definition under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments); (c) when was our definition stipulated, and whether it is time for a review; and (d) what is the reason for mental disorders to be excluded from this definition of disability for social support and employment schemes.

Minister Desmond Lee replied that "The Enabling Masterplans define "persons with disability" as those with substantially reduced prospects of securing, retaining places and advancing in education and training institutions, employment and recreation, due to physical, intellectual, and sensory

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development. "Employment Rate Of Persons With Disabilities" (*Msf.gov.sg*) <<https://www.msf.gov.sg/media-room/Pages/Employment-rate-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.aspx>> accessed 8 June 2019.

impairments, as well as developmental needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder. This definition was endorsed in 2004 by the first Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the disability sector, the private sector and the public sector. Our disability schemes and services are guided by this definition.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities does not explicitly define which conditions constitute a disability, but notes that persons with disability include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

In line with the Convention, disability schemes and services in Singapore are designed to facilitate the participation of individuals with hearing impairment and visual impairment conditions, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder — a type of mental disorder, as well as children with developmental needs, in areas such as education, transport, employment, training, recreation and care, such that they are recognised, empowered and given every opportunity to be integral and contributing members of society.

Disability schemes and services do not comprehensively target individuals with mental health conditions as the Government's support for this group is focused on their recovery and reintegration into society. The Government has adopted a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach in this regard. Through the National Mental Health Blueprint and the Community Mental Health Masterplan, the Ministry of Health has enhanced mental health promotion and upstream prevention; improved early detection, intervention, and disease management; and adopted a collective front to better integrate health, social and community support.

Jobseekers with mental health conditions who require employment assistance can approach the Job Club under the Institute of Mental Health, as well as the Singapore Anglican Community Services' Employment Support Services. They can also tap on the employment support programmes under Workforce Singapore's Adapt and Grow initiative. The Institute of Mental Health and NCSS have also developed a Peer Support Specialist programme where persons in recovery can be trained and employed as Peer Support Specialists to provide support to other persons with mental health conditions. In addition, the Health Promotion Board provides management training workshops that equip managers and HR personnel with the skills to foster a supportive workplace environment, recognise common mental health issues, and encourage help-seeking behaviour.

While our current policies and definitions have served us well thus far, the Government will continue to review the reach and efficacy of our policies and services as we work with the disability sector to strengthen support for persons with disability under the Enabling Masterplan."<sup>3</sup>

While we commend the Government for having various job support schemes to support those with various disabilities and psychiatric conditions, it is not clear if there are justifiable reasons for excluding those with psychosocial disabilities from disability schemes. In fact the Government supported job schemes for persons with psychiatric conditions are not as comprehensive or as financially incentivised as the ODP and neither are they as well known about.

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<sup>3</sup> Medium.com. "Singapore's Definition of 'Disability' for Social Policies" (*Medium.com, 2019*) <<https://medium.com/@antheaindiraong/singapores-definition-of-disability-for-social-policies-b1ca821c66e4>> accessed 23 July 2019

The Government has, through the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), published guidelines on fair employment practices for potential employers.<sup>4</sup> According to the Initial Report, TAFEP intends to provide advice and assistance to persons with disabilities who have encountered employment-related discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

*Related Article: Art 27 (1b)*

However, the low employment rate of persons with disabilities in Singapore remains troubling. Due to a lack of detailed statistics and disaggregated data on people with disabilities in Singapore, it is difficult to understand the prevalence of people with disabilities who make up the labour force. A recent estimate by The Straits Times newspaper found that an approximate 4.9% of persons with disabilities are employed.<sup>6</sup> However, a 2017 report notes that persons with disabilities make up 0.55% of the resident labour force, although 3.4% of residents aged 18 to 49 have a disability.<sup>7</sup> And a 2015 study on persons with physical disabilities found that among respondents who did manage to secure employment, most worked in sheltered facilities operated by SSAs.<sup>8</sup> There is no publicly accessible information on the salary earned by persons with disabilities who work in sheltered facilities.

*Related Article: Art 31 (2)*

The Working Group urges the Government to continue to work closely with SSAs through SG Enable to address this issue. However, it is recognised that this issue cannot be resolved merely by direct measures to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities. Instead, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to address the underlying factors that impede the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. This section therefore firstly discusses the direct measures to increase the employability and employment of persons with disabilities before examining other issues relating to education, health and habilitation and rehabilitation.

## **Article 27 Work and employment**

Though the Working Group is heartened by recent amendments to the Employment Act (EA) and the tripartite guidelines on wrongful dismissal,<sup>9</sup> more can be done to safeguard persons with disabilities from discriminatory employment practices in other areas such as hiring, remuneration and promotion.

*Related Article: Art 27(1a)*

### **The Working Group recommends that the Government:**

#### **(1) Should expand and update its definition of disability to be inclusive of the entire disability population in Singapore and be better aligned with the social model of disability put forth in the**

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<sup>4</sup> TAFEP. "Fair Employment Practices | Tripartite Alliance For Fair And Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP)" <<https://www.tafep.sg/fair-employment-practices>> Accessed 4 June 2019

<sup>5</sup> Para 22.2 of Initial Report.

<sup>6</sup> Janice Tai, "Just 5 in 100 people here with disabilities have jobs", *The Straits Times*, 11 February 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Kok Xing Hui, "People with disabilities a focus for 2017 Budget: Indraneel Rajah", *The Straits Times*, 7 February 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ranjana Raghunathan, Balambigai Balakrishnan, Catherine J Smith and Md Kadir Mumtaz, "People with Physical Disabilities in Singapore: Understanding Disabling Factors in Caregiving, Education, Employment and Finances" (2015) SMU Change Lab, Lien Centre for Social Innovation: Research.

<sup>9</sup> Josephine Teo, "Speech at Second Reading of the Employment (Amendment) Bill", *Ministry of Manpower*, 20 November 2018 <<https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/speeches/2018/1120-employment-amendment-bill-second-reading-speech-by-minister-for-manpower-mrs-josephine-teo>>; "Tripartite partners release guidelines on what constitutes wrongful dismissal", *Ministry of Manpower*, 1 April 2019 <<https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2019/0401-tripartite-partners-release-guidelines-on-what-constitutes-wrongful-dismissal>>.

**Convention.** The Enabling Masterplan and SGenable definition of disability cite impairments as the reason for persons with disabilities facing challenges in gaining access to employment. The social model of disability is clear that the barriers are caused by society being designed for those without disabilities and that we have collective responsibility to remove those barriers. Applied to the issue of employment, an updated and more inclusive definition of disability would allow more people to gain access to the comprehensive support schemes that are being offered. It may also better prepare employers to have a mindset of collective responsibility to remove barriers rather than seeing a person's disability as the cause of the barriers.

**(2) Strengthen anti-discrimination protections for persons with disabilities at work.** As the following excerpt from a 2017 report on discrimination faced by persons with disabilities at the workplace illustrates the non-binding guidelines produced by TAFEP should be complemented with legislative measures that explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.

*“Having worked in the Human Resource (HR) department, Respondent 14 shared that HR staff would know how to discriminate, without being exposed, during the hiring process by exploiting loopholes in the TAFEP guidelines: “We can explain 101 things as to why we cannot hire you...I’ll just say you don’t fit the culture, [and] you can’t fine\* me.” On those who acquired their disability while in employment, she added, “There are no policies on how to help someone [with a disability]...The policy is ‘Let’s get rid of them’... for both private and public companies.”*

(\*a sum of money exacted as a penalty by a court of law or other authority)

Furthermore, the Employment Claims Tribunal (ECT) should be empowered to hear a wider range of grievances beyond salary-related and wrongful dismissal claims. In particular, as the following two case studies demonstrate, the abuse of well-intentioned government initiatives by employers should be seriously addressed.

Case 1: *“The respondent’s company had retrofitted a toilet, using a government grant, to be wheelchair accessible. It broke down one day and repairs took longer than expected. He was told by the management that he would be on leave for the duration of the repairs, but discovered, to his dismay, that his salary had been deducted as he was deemed to have been on unpaid leave.”*

Case 2: *“[A male respondent] recounted his experience with a job at a restaurant which was facilitated by a SSA providing employment matching and support services. The SSA had proposed paying an allowance of \$4 per hour and requested the restaurant to match that. But the boss of the restaurant offered to pay only his Central Provident Fund (CPF)<sup>10</sup> and provide free meals because, as the respondent explained: ‘Firstly, I’m a Singaporean, so by paying my CPF, he gets to employ foreign workers.’ He also suspected the restaurant would have benefited from the Special Employment Credit scheme, and to his demerit.”*

*Related Article: Art 27 (1b)*

**(2) Take steps to increase awareness of employment schemes among employers and persons with disabilities.** Despite Government funding, support and training programmes for employers and job applicants with disabilities, many remain unaware of their existence. Further, amongst employers, misconceptions about how to make reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities remain, which make it more difficult for persons with disabilities to be integrated into the labour market. For example, there is the misconception that employees with disabilities are ineligible for insurance coverage during their term and that costs to accommodate them are high.

*Related Article: Art 27(1e)*

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<sup>10</sup> The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is a mandatory Government pension scheme funded by contributions from employers and employees.



**(3) Collect additional employment-related data from persons with disabilities, such as persons with disabilities’ job satisfaction levels, duration of job stints, professional and emotional wellbeing, and acquisition of new skills and knowledge.** This information would not only assist job applicants with disabilities but also highlight any recurring or systemic problems that may need to be addressed with more robust regulation, policy and/or legislation.

These changes would allow SSAs to design their services and actions to meet the needs of job applicants with disabilities more comprehensively; for example, SSAs could then work with employers on an action plan to accommodate the needs of employees on a sustainable and long-term basis, and collaborate with a more diverse range of employers.

*Related Article: Art 24 (1b)*

**(4) Improve the effectiveness of existing job-matching programmes.** As the body funding the ODP, the Government could consider using a more holistic evaluation mechanism to measure the effectiveness of SSAs in matching persons with disabilities to jobs. Many SSAs currently report job matches in terms of number of persons with disabilities matched to jobs and employed, but it is unclear whether job applicants were successful in obtaining a long-term position, or if there is a high turnover rate.

Job applicants with disabilities have, for example, reported problems with the type and quality of support provided by SSAs. In the 2017 study, a respondent shared that the employment placement and support services run by government agencies and SSAs had too low expectations of persons with disabilities and set low targets for job seekers with disabilities. She opined:

*“I’m sorry to say this, they recommend jobs that truly required no passion. Minimum wage. Like, any job is good, as long as you have one.”*

### **Article 24 Education**

An inclusive work environment is built upon an education system which promotes, from a young age, integration and respect, rather than segregation and marginalisation. Such an education system must not disadvantage students with disabilities in comparison with their peers and must extend the accessibility of education programs to all persons with disabilities.

**To cultivate such an education system, the Working Group calls upon the Government to:**

**(1) Foster inclusion and respect within the education system.** The Working Group calls upon the Government to commit to a truly inclusive education system designed to promote integration, even if this is realised in stages over a longer period of time. In Singapore, children who are assessed as having mild-to-moderate disabilities may be admitted to mainstream schools, whereas those with moderate-to-severe disabilities may remain segregated in Special Education (SPED) schools. Unlike mainstream schools, SPED schools are not under the sole purview of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Instead, they are funded and overseen by both MOE and various SSAs that come under the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). Yet, Article 24 refers to free access to the general education system and not a segregated one.

*Related Article: Art 24 (1c), (2a) and (2b)*

The disparities between mainstream education and SPED schools are numerous. In addition to having long waiting lists, SPED school fees are generally more expensive than their mainstream counterparts'. Singaporean children in mainstream schools receive education with minimal school fees amounting to approximately Singapore Dollar (SGD)13 per month for Primary education, and SGD25 per month for Secondary education<sup>11</sup>. SPED school fees, on the other hand, could amount to SGD350 a month<sup>12</sup>. Low-income families can apply for these fees to be waived but the fee disparity is unfair to families which are ineligible for financial aid. Furthermore, children in SPED schools may not have opportunities to interact with children in mainstream schools. There are some programmes that encourage joint activities between mainstream and SPED schools that are located near each other, but the programme is limited to schools that are co-located and not all students in the schools are involved in the initiative<sup>13</sup>. The gap between the two cohorts is widened without the daily ability to learn and play together, resulting in a lack of awareness, understanding, acceptance, accommodation, and adaptation of persons with disabilities in everyday social contexts.

While the Working Group welcomes the expansion of the Compulsory Education Act (CE Act) to include children with disabilities (including those with moderate-to-severe disabilities who are above six years old), these measures could be strengthened with further measures to fully integrate them into mainstream schools. And where full integration is not possible, measures to increase and integrate activities and interactions between the two systems, and two student groups should be adopted.

*Related Article: Art 24 (2d)*

**These Working Group recommends that these measures include:**

**2(a) Implementing a more robust framework for Allied Educators<sup>14</sup> in mainstream schools in terms of manpower, job scope, salary, skills training and overall professional development.** Not all mainstream public schools have sufficient facilities and/or programmes to support students who have invisible or less visible disabilities. Anecdotes, both shared by Working Group members and reflected in the DPA's 2016 report on *Achieving Inclusion in Education*<sup>15</sup>, suggested a dearth of Allied Educators in Singapore's mainstream schools, which has increased the workload of mainstream school teachers who find it difficult to cope with students' special education needs, in addition to their daily teaching and administrative duties.

*Related Article: Art 24 (4)*

**2(b) Ensuring that all pre-schools are inclusive and can support both children with and without disabilities in the same environment.** The Working Group is heartened that the Government is taking the first step in working towards this by developing a working group comprising of partners from the public and private sector.

*Related Article: Art 24 (5)*

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education. 'General Information on Studying in Singapore' (*moe.gov.sg*, 2019)

<<https://www.moe.gov.sg/admissions/international-students/general-info#monthly-school-fees>> accessed 30 June 2019

<sup>12</sup> Pathlight School. 'Fees and Subsidies - Pathlight School' (*Pathlight.org.sg*, 2019) <<https://www.pathlight.org.sg/admissions/fees-and-subsidies>> accessed 30 June 2019

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Education. 'Provisions and Support in SPED Schools' (*Moe.gov.sg*, 2019)

<<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/special-education/special-education-schools/provisions-support-in-sped-schools>> accessed 30 June 2019

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education. 'Allied Educators (Learning and Behavioural Support)' (*Moe.gov.sg*, 2019)

<<https://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/allied-educators/learning-behavioural-support>> accessed 30 June 2019

<sup>15</sup> Disabled People's Association (DPA) 'Achieving Inclusion in Education' (*Dpa.org.sg*, 2016)

<<https://www.dpa.org.sg/resources/dpas-disability-reports/>> accessed 30 June 2019

**2(c) Allocating more resources towards development and recognition of Braille and Singapore Sign Language (SgSL) as official languages in Singapore, so as to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for those who use them.**

*Related Article: Art 24 (3a)*

**(3) Increase accessibility to post-education skills upgrading**

The Working Group commends the Government for providing opportunities for students with disabilities entering the workforce<sup>16</sup>. However, there may not be sufficient higher-skill job training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities who have already completed their basic education.

**In light of this gap, the Working Group requests that the Government:**

**4(a) Strengthen the transition between education and employment through the structured opening of more higher-skill employment and job training opportunities for persons with disabilities at all stages in life.** These stages include persons completing their education and entering the workforce, as well as persons looking for skills-upgrading and new employment opportunities.

*Related Article: Art 24 (3)*

**4(b) Increases the range of jobs for persons with disabilities.**<sup>17</sup> During Feedback Sessions and meetings organised by DPA, members of the disability community expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction with the range of jobs currently available to persons with disabilities, which largely comprised low-skill, non-executive jobs, mainly in the hospitality and food & beverage industries.

*Related Article: Art 27 (1d)*

**5) Ensure that government-supported skills upgrading courses are accessible to persons with disabilities.** It is not always easy or possible for a person with disabilities to enrol in a government-supported skill upgrading course. As a blind member of the Working Group recounts:

*“I tried applying for an educational module with the Lifelong Learning Institute who is one of the main providers of our government’s skills future initiative. The immediate answer I received was: ‘There is no compatibility for the JAWS<sup>18</sup> software. All readings and assessments are on the Learning Management System (LMS). There are also webinars conducted for certain modules that the JAWS software will not work well in delivering its intent.’”*

*Related Article: Art 24(2d)*

**6) Increase the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) subsidy under the Enhanced Pilot for Private Intervention Providers (PPIP) scheme for families in the lowest income group.** The Government could consider further enhancing affordability for private intervention providers.

*Related Article: Art 9(2b)*

The Working Group strongly commends the Government for its efforts to enhance affordability for the PPIP by broadening the income criteria for means-tested subsidies. The Enhanced Pilot for Private Intervention Providers (Enhanced PPIP) is a subsidy scheme that offers more choices of early

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<sup>16</sup> These include SG Enable’s School-to-Work Transition Programme, RISE Mentorship Programme and IHL Internship programme.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to CRPD Parallel Report Article 27: Work & Employment

<sup>18</sup> Job Access With Speech, a screen reader developed for computer users whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or navigating with a mouse.

intervention programmes for children who have been referred for the EIPIC. Parents who choose to enroll their children in selected Private Intervention Centres (PICs) will receive subsidies that will help defray the enrolment costs.<sup>19</sup> However, an analysis of the 8 tiers of subsidies reveals that the lowest fee is between SGD80 and SGD263 for the lowest income group (per capita household income of SGD0-SGD1,000), which may still not be affordable for low wage earners.

*Related Article: Art 28(2c)*

**7) Remove the annotation made in educational certificates for students given special accommodation in national examinations.** The Working Group applauds the Government's efforts to accommodate students with disabilities when they sit for national examinations. However, annotations of such accommodations are made on the certificate showing the results of the examination as well as the accommodations provided. These annotations might serve to indirectly incite prejudice when these students seek employment later in life.

*Related Article: Art 5 (3)*

As an autistic Working Group member shared:

*"I wanted to apply for extra time in my GCE 'A' Level examinations. My parents were initially very resistant against it. After I found out that my certificate will be annotated if I take it under extra time, I was hesitant and my parents' resistance was even stronger and they were adamant/violently against it. I did not apply for the extra time in the end, for the fear of prejudice and stigmatisation that the annotations could cause"*

**8) Fund the provision of FM equipment in full so that students who are Deaf, deaf or hard of hearing might bolster their academic competency through the development of receptive and expressive language at home.** As part of their academic development, students are expected to practice their schoolwork at home, as well as in the classroom. Students who are Deaf, deaf or hard of hearing are provided with frequency modulation (FM) equipment in some mainstream schools to facilitate better hearing. However, to ensure the safekeeping of the assistive device, they are not always permitted to bring such equipment home.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, students' development of both receptive and expressive language is limited to the classroom.

*Related Article: Art 20 (b)*

## **Article 25 Health**

Evidence from the general population suggests that people who are less healthy have a higher probability of losing their jobs and when unemployed, need more time to find new employment<sup>21</sup>. Taking into account existing challenges posed by disability on employment, ill health will only compound these challenges for people with disabilities. As such, the Working Group is heartened by the efforts made by the Government to ensure that people with disabilities have access to

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<sup>19</sup> SG Enable. " (Va.ecitizen.gov.sg, 2019)

<[https://va.ecitizen.gov.sg/cfp/customerPages/moe/explorefaq.aspx?Category=45090&utm\\_source=moe-corp-site&utm\\_medium=referral& ga=2.228597087.2110016055.1561742737-362884291.1561742737](https://va.ecitizen.gov.sg/cfp/customerPages/moe/explorefaq.aspx?Category=45090&utm_source=moe-corp-site&utm_medium=referral& ga=2.228597087.2110016055.1561742737-362884291.1561742737)> accessed 31 May 2019

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education. 'Ministry of Education (MOE)' (Va.ecitizen.gov.sg, 2019)

<[https://va.ecitizen.gov.sg/cfp/customerPages/moe/explorefaq.aspx?Category=45090&utm\\_source=moe-corp-site&utm\\_medium=referral& ga=2.228597087.2110016055.1561742737-362884291.1561742737](https://va.ecitizen.gov.sg/cfp/customerPages/moe/explorefaq.aspx?Category=45090&utm_source=moe-corp-site&utm_medium=referral& ga=2.228597087.2110016055.1561742737-362884291.1561742737)> accessed 31 May 2019

<sup>21</sup> Nanette Goodman. 'The Impact of Employment on the Health Status and Health Care Costs of Working-age People with Disabilities' (2015). Lead Center Policy Brief.

healthcare services, such as the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS)<sup>22</sup>, Medishield Life<sup>23</sup> and the Public Health Act that warrants the provision of accessible sanitary provisions at public toilets. In addition, the Government has also implemented various healthcare practices to improve early detection of disabilities<sup>24</sup>.

As an autistic Working Group member shared:

*"I was diagnosed late. Many of the difficulties I faced earlier in life are heartaches I would not have had to suffer if I was diagnosed earlier, had early intervention, or had gone to a special school. Sometimes I wonder how I survived all that misery and torture. These experiences have left scars in my heart and some of the wounds are still not healed."*

*Related Article: Art 25 (a)*

Further, the committee recognises the support extended to caregivers of people with disabilities<sup>25</sup>.

More can be done to expand health insurance coverage, increase accessibility to healthcare information and services and provide specialised medical services for people with intellectual disabilities. These steps will go a long way in removing barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities.

*Related Article: Art 25 (b)*

**Consequently, the Working Group recommends that the Government:**

**(1) Expand healthcare insurance coverage by,**

**1(a) Revising its eligibility criteria for national health insurance schemes<sup>26</sup> to be more inclusive of unemployed individuals.**

*Related Article: Art 25 (e), Art 27*

**1(b) Providing all persons with disabilities living in Singapore access to coverage under national health insurance schemes, regardless of citizenship status.** Foreigners and their dependants with disabilities are presently ineligible for these schemes.

**1(c) Revising its eligibility criteria for national health insurance schemes to include alternate criteria aside from household income.** While this framework aims to encourage family members to play an active role in caring for persons with disabilities, there are situations where family members are estranged, unable to or play little role in supporting relatives with disabilities. Eligibility for health insurance should incorporate other measures to ensure that persons with

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<sup>22</sup> CHAS increases the affordability and accessibility of healthcare for Singaporean citizens from lower and middle-income households. 'CHAS' (*Chas.sg*, 2019) <<https://www.chas.sg/>> accessed 31 May 2019

<sup>23</sup> Public insurance program MediShield Life "is a basic health insurance plan, which helps Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs) to pay for large hospital bills and selected costly outpatient treatments.". Although premiums are more expensive if one's disability is classified as a pre-existing condition, the availability of means-tested subsidies ensure some universal coverage regardless of ability to pay.

<sup>24</sup> This includes the Child Development Programme (CDP), Development Support Programme (DSP), Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC), initiatives to train nurses in select public hospitals to screen infants at high risk of developmental delays, issuance of a health booklet to every child containing a standardised developmental assessment checklist to assist medical professionals and parents in detecting disabilities early, the incorporation of relevant modules in undergraduate medical curriculum, the training of doctors and healthcare professionals in developmental health screening and early referral of at-risk infants to appropriate centres, as well as by introducing resource kits to assist parents in making informed choices on their child's developmental life stages.

<sup>25</sup> Singapore allows caregivers to apply for a \$200 annual subsidy to attend approved courses on how to better care for aged or disabled family members (Caregivers' Training Grant) and provides a foreign domestic worker (FDW) levy concession for families who hire a FDW to help care for a disabled family member after obtaining a Functional Assessment Report from a doctor.

<sup>26</sup> While the current Medishield Life scheme is not directly linked to an individual's employment, it is affected in that the amount that is paid into it through the Medisave scheme is based on an individual's salary.

disabilities who receive little support from their families are not disadvantaged when applying for coverage.

*Related Article: Art 26 (1a)*

**1(d) Removing its reservation on Article 25(e) and prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by private insurers.** Presently, the Ministry of Health (MOH) regulations prohibit private insurers from discriminating on the basis of disability, but only with regard to private insurers managing the Integrated Shield Plans and ElderShield Supplements. These are public insurance schemes packaged with optional benefits provided by private insurers, that are more tightly regulated and insurers may not discriminate on the basis of disability, 'except where there are fair and reasonable grounds such as due to expert or actuarial data.'<sup>27</sup> Persons with disabilities, therefore, have fewer options when seeking affordable health insurance, which may restrict their ability to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

*Related Article: Art 25(e)*

**1(e) Expanding the definition of disability to include psychosocial disabilities.** Numerous psychosocial disabilities such as schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders are presently excluded from the definition of disability addressed by the Government's Enabling Masterplan and any other disability-related Government policy (see above). Including these would result in greater awareness about psychosocial disabilities and an increase in healthcare resources allocated to support persons with psychosocial disabilities. Furthermore, persons with physical, cognitive and intellectual disabilities may also have or acquire psychosocial disabilities.

*Related Article: Art 25(1b)*

**(2) Taking steps to ensure that healthcare services provide sign language interpretation services to facilitate communication with patients who are Deaf, deaf or Hard of Hearing.**

Presently, many hospitals do not cover the cost of sign language interpreter services and ask patients to make the arrangements themselves. In addition, information about health issues needs to be available in sign language.

*Related Article: Art 21(b)*

**(3) Creating additional specialised medical services to address the mental health needs of persons with intellectual disabilities.** There is increasing awareness that persons with intellectual disabilities have a high prevalence of mental health conditions. However, general health and psychiatric services have difficulties meeting the needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and psychiatric conditions because they are complex. For instance, psychiatrists treating persons with intellectual disabilities who are referred to them may ascribe any problem identified as being purely due to mental retardation itself.<sup>28</sup> This is known as 'diagnostic overshadowing'<sup>29</sup>.

*Related Article: Art 25(b)*

Furthermore, accurate diagnosis and medical care are challenging because persons with intellectual disabilities are prone to experience other conditions such as impaired cognitive abilities and attention, functional deficits, communication difficulties and high incidence of other developmental disabilities such as autism<sup>30</sup>. Hence, the Working Group requests that more specialised medical services for persons with intellectual disabilities are opened. Examples of these services include the first community-based medical clinic for persons with

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<sup>27</sup>Initial Report, para 20.6

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> University of Hertfordshire. "Diagnostic Overshadowing" <<http://www.intellectualdisability.info/changing-values/diagnostic-overshadowing-see-beyond-the-diagnosis>>accessed 31 May 2019

<sup>30</sup> KC Wei et al. 'Improving mental healthcare for people with an intellectual disability in Singapore: bridging the health-social care divide' (2012) Singapore Medical Journal 53(7)

intellectual disabilities opened by Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)<sup>31</sup>. In addition, there needs to be closer collaboration between the social and health care sectors to develop an integrated care plan for persons with intellectual disabilities that adequately supports them<sup>32</sup>.

**(4) Enacting measures to increase collaboration between social and healthcare sectors to meet mental healthcare needs for persons with intellectual disabilities.** Persons with intellectual disabilities are disproportionately more likely to have mental health issues. Epidemiological studies have found them to be present in as high as 40-50% of persons with intellectual disabilities, a figure distinctly higher than that of the general population<sup>33</sup>. Hence, the impetus to meet the mental healthcare needs of persons with intellectual disabilities is considerable.

As the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities are complex, a comprehensive system of support for them and their caregivers is needed. Habilitation, an area more specific to the social sector as opposed to the healthcare sector, is essential in the treatment process. For instance, the management of certain behavioural issues would require interventions that help patients acquire more adaptive communication skills or address their sensory needs and involve a responsive daily schedule of training activities.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, collaboration between the two sectors is vital. Efforts on this front should thus be supported. Efforts include, but are not limited to, commissioning collaborative research on mental health needs of local population of persons with intellectual disabilities and introducing incentives to encourage healthcare professionals to train professionals in the social sector to deal with common behavioural problems, identify psychiatric problems early in persons with intellectual disabilities and deliver healthcare management plans.

**(5) Simplifying claims and periodic reassessment process to enable policyholders with what is considered severe disabilities and their caregivers to access the scheme easily.** Specific ways this can be done have been outlined within Recommendation 9 of the ElderShield Review Committee Report.<sup>35</sup>

*Related Article: Art 21(c)*

## **Article 26 Habilitation and rehabilitation**

The Working Group is encouraged by the Government and SSAs' current efforts in the running and funding of diverse programmes that enhance the quality of life of children, youth, and adults with disabilities, and train them to live as independently as possible (for example, refer to SG Enable's list of Services for Adults with Disabilities<sup>36</sup>). Additionally, robust training and development programmes

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<sup>31</sup>The Straits Times, 'Singapore's first medical clinic for intellectually disabled opens' (*Straitsimes.com*, 2018) <<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/singapores-first-medical-clinic-for-intellectually-disabled-opens>> accessed 31st May 2019

<sup>32</sup>KC Wei et al. 'Improving mental healthcare for people with an intellectual disability in Singapore: bridging the health-social care divide' (2012) *Singapore Medical Journal* 53(7)

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> These recommendations are extracted from the Eldersshield Review Committee's Report (25 May 2018)

<sup>36</sup> SG Enable. "Services for Adults with Disabilities" (*Sgenable.sg*) <<https://www.sgenable.sg/pages/content.aspx?path=/for-adults/>> accessed 1 July 2019

are available for social service professionals, and these complement the enhancement of care standards for persons with disabilities.

*Related Article: Art 19 (c)*

**On top of these efforts, the Working Group calls upon the Government to:**

**(1) Give adults with disabilities a larger and more consistent role in making and implementing policies** (for persons with and without disabilities).

**(2) Support and promote the integration of persons with disabilities in terms of independent living in mainstream, non-institutionalised settings** (e.g. local neighbourhoods).

**(3) Implement policies to increase high-skill employment and vocational training, job placement and employment support services for persons with disabilities, commensurate with market rates.**

*Related Article: Art 19 (a), Art 24 (2d) Art 27 (1b)*

### **Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination**

While job seekers and employees can address encounters of discrimination and/or unfair practices through channels such as TAFEP<sup>37</sup> and the independent Public Service Commission (PSC) and its various appeal mechanisms, there remains no specific legislation to support or protect people with disabilities against discrimination in terms of employment.

Presently, one may seek assistance from free legal clinics or bring encounters of discrimination and/or unfair practices before the courts<sup>38</sup>. The Legal Aid Bureau administered by the Government provides civil legal aid to all Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents, including persons with disabilities, who are not able to employ the services of lawyers to pursue their legal rights. However, to qualify for this service, applicants must pass the Legal Aid Bureau Means and Merits tests.<sup>39</sup>

*Related Article: Art 5 (2)*

**In the passing of Anti-Discrimination legislation and enhancing current legislation, the Working Group calls on the Government to:**

**(1) Pass robust anti-discrimination legislation or equal opportunity provisions in Singapore, specifically with regard to employment and education.** Although there is greater familiarity with the protections that anti-discrimination legislation can provide to employees who have faced unfair work practices due to their having a disability, such legislation can also give redress to students who need access to reasonable accommodations for their disabilities in the education system. Anti-discrimination legislation need not only have punitive outcomes and can also be constructive by making clear what should be provided and the drawing up of standards. An example of which is the Disability Standards for Education 2005<sup>40</sup> in Australia, which were developed as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Tripartite Alliance For Fair And Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) |' (*Tafep.sg*, 2019) <<https://www.tafep.sg>> accessed 9 May 2019

<sup>38</sup> "Disability Standards for Education 2005" <<https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>>. accessed on 24 July 2019.

<sup>39</sup> 'Do I Qualify For Legal Aid? | LAB - Legal Aid Bureau' (*Mlaw.gov.sg*, 2019) <<https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/content/lab/en/eligibility/do-i-qualify-for-legal-aid.html>> accessed 9 May 2019

<sup>40</sup> Disability Standards for Education 2005 <<https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>> accessed 9 May 2019



*Related Article: Art 4 (1a)*

Additionally, existing legislation could be enhanced to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities, for example, through the provision and use of assistive devices or support animals such as guide dogs in daily life, and also through the use of specific, disability-friendly terms in everyday rules and regulations.

*Related Article: Art 4 (1c)*

Working Group members have shared personal stories of prejudice, as well as subtle and outright discrimination. Three anecdotes are reflected as follows:

On Education: Autistic Working Group member

*“Throughout Primary School, there were many people who took advantage of my inability to understand unspoken social rules. I had difficulty following our teachers’ verbal instructions and so I was very afraid of missing their instructions. It made me very anxious and every day I would ask my classmates a lot of questions about homework and what had to be done.*

*Once they knew that I needed them to answer my questions, they used this against me. They would withhold their answers unless I lent them my stationery or gave in to their demands. They had their own stationery and foolscap paper but they insisted on using mine. I failed to realise that they were taking advantage of my naivety. I foolishly gave in each time so that they would answer my questions about the teachers’ instructions.*

*In Primary 4, there was a male classmate who would physically hit me. One time I hit back and ended up getting punished by the teacher. In Primary 5, there was another boy who would hit and disturb me. Some of my classmates regularly ganged up on me and the teachers hardly stepped in to help. When they did, I often got punished together with the bullies. My parents had to intervene by liaising with the school teachers and the principal. This went on all the way to Primary 6. I continued to face bullying in Secondary School, I continued to face bullying, not only physical and verbal but cyber bullying as well”*

*Related Article: Art 24 (4)*

On Employment: Working Group member with Cerebral Palsy (anecdote provided by another Working Group member)

*“A friend of mine who has cerebral palsy, has been rejected many times by potential employers who tell him they do not think he would be able to work comfortably in their office because he is a wheelchair user. Others were initially keen to hire him but revoked their offer on the grounds that it would not be possible to insure someone with cerebral palsy for accidents and hospitalisation, which is required by the Work Injury Compensation Act.”*

*Related Article: Art 9 (1a), Art 27 (1i)*

On Awareness, and being taken seriously as a Professional: Autistic Working Group member (anecdote provided by another Working Group member)

*“[The Respondent], who is autistic and has a PhD, tells [the Working Group member] she finds it extremely challenging to be taken seriously about autism in a professional capacity [in Singapore] despite her experience. This is in stark contrast to where she was actively practising previously ...”*

*Related Article: Art 27 (1a)*

## **Section 2: Participation in public and social life**

While the earlier section highlighted articles that directly affected employment, this section looks at the impact that access to a healthy public and social life can have on persons with disabilities. Through equal participation in economy, social bonding, community and family life, people with disabilities build healthy networks that support their entry into employment and career progression. Until the education system is fully integrated, there will be even more reliance on opportunities to interact and build relationships between people with and without disabilities in recreational and social contexts.

While Singapore has progressed significantly in achieving equality for marginalised groups in recent years, the Working Group expresses concern that persons with disabilities may still not be able to participate alongside the general population in everyday aspects of public and social life. While there is no outright exclusion of people with disabilities, barriers can still be present in subtle yet significant ways. Examples include inaccessible features at food courts that might prevent a person with disabilities from having lunch with their colleagues, or a lack of robust representation of persons with disabilities on the boards of disability organisations thereby missing out on representation in policy conversations.

In this section, the Working Group examines the Government's efforts at promoting social inclusion and proposes what more can be done so that people with disabilities are not apart from society, but instead be a part of it. The following articles have been highlighted as relevant to participation in Singapore's public and social life:

- Article 28: Adequate standard of living and social protection
- Article 9: Accessibility
- Article 21 Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
- Article 23 Respect for home and family (Respect portion)
- Article 29 Participation in political and public life
- Article 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

### **Article 28 Adequate standard of living and social protection**

The Government's social security framework holds the individual and their family primarily responsible for one's own needs, providing supplemental and targeted support for persons with disabilities and their families who are less able to support themselves.

*Related Article: Art 28 (1)*

The Working Group applauds the Government for its efforts in supporting persons with disabilities and their families to be financially independent. The Government collaborates with the Special Needs Trust Company (SNTC) in enabling parents of children with disabilities to set up trusts and provide for their child's expenses, as well as provides tax reliefs for cash top-up of the CPF accounts of spouses or siblings with disabilities.

The Working Group also commends the Government for the financial assistance that it provides to persons with and without disabilities who lack steady incomes and have little to no financial support. The Comcare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance includes a monthly cash grant, rental, utilities and transport vouchers, medical subsidies and employment assistance. The Comcare Long Term Assistance fully subsidizes medical treatment in addition to the above.

*Related Article: Art 19 (b)*

**That said, the Working Group urges the Government to:**

**(1) Reconsider the adequacy of its social security framework in ensuring that the most vulnerable of persons with disabilities and their families have a dignified standard of living.** Given the challenges of limited income and the various expenditures associated with managing their disability, most persons with disabilities struggle to put aside savings. They worry about the future when their family members will no longer be able to financially support them. They are also concerned with their own health and expect higher healthcare expenditures as they age.

*Related Article: Art 28 (2d)*

**(2) Evaluate the eligibility for financial assistance schemes and expanding its coverage appropriately.** Due to the policy of family means-testing, many persons with disabilities are not eligible for certain types of financial assistance even when they personally need it.

*Related Article: Art 20 (b)*

**3) Review the sufficiency of subsidies in covering the medical, transportation and caregiving support services' costs for persons with disabilities.** Persons with disabilities spend a significant percentage of their income on medical supplies and transportation.

Extracted from Inclusion in Healthcare<sup>41</sup>:

*"...actually going through the whole...task, going through the whole application process, [you] may only get 10%...That is so miserable and I have to go through that whole process and in the end you feel more hurt...10%, what does it help?...every month to come up with the [SGD] 1000 for...particular expenses, is a lot of money...it is not really helping."*

*Related Article: Art 9 (1a)*

**(4) Introduce a greater variety of independent living options available for persons with disabilities of different age groups beyond financial assistance.**

*Related Article: Art 19 (b)*

**(5) Review SNTC's processes to allow for a dedicated special savings account.** This account could be in the name of the beneficiary with disability. Contributions to this account, which can be used by the beneficiary after a certain age, should be tax exempted.

**(6) Act upon the Enabling Masterplan Key Thrust 2, which recommends more support for caregivers.**<sup>42</sup> In consideration of the caregivers who take on the physical, emotional and financial demands of providing care to their loved ones with disabilities, the Working Group urges the Government to support our unsung heroes - caregivers of persons with disabilities.

**The Working Group recommends the following actions:**

**7(a) Improving their well-being and enhance their caregiving capabilities by providing or funding temporary respite care options that could cater to emergency situations.** This was most apparent for caregivers of children with severe disabilities, those with chronic illnesses who required sudden medical appointments or hospitalisations or in the event of unforeseen circumstances

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<sup>41</sup> Disabled People's Association. "Inclusion in Healthcare" <<https://www.dpa.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Inclusion-in-Healthcare.pdf>> accessed 30 June 2019

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development. "3rd Enabling Masterplan" <[http://eservice.nlb.gov.sg/data2/BookSG/publish/d/dda160d8-1259-4a94-8923-80d35244041b/web/html5/index.html?opf=tablet/BOOKSG.xml&launchlogo=tablet/BOOKSG\\_BrandingLogo.png](http://eservice.nlb.gov.sg/data2/BookSG/publish/d/dda160d8-1259-4a94-8923-80d35244041b/web/html5/index.html?opf=tablet/BOOKSG.xml&launchlogo=tablet/BOOKSG_BrandingLogo.png)> accessed 30 June 2019

**7(b) Creating a consolidated system to support caregivers.** There are various offerings of support for caregivers of persons with disabilities by SSAs catering to range of persons with disabilities. However, there is often confusion within the caregiver community about what is available, and to whom. The Working Group heard that the post-diagnostic phase for caregivers of young children with disabilities is often distressing to parents, they report having to struggle with accepting the diagnosed condition and finding sources of reliable help. A consolidated system would have a government-credited database of information that caregivers can access and rely on. It also acts as a one-stop portal that medical professionals can recommend to parents on available options for them and their care recipients.

**7(c) Providing greater subsidies for existing caregiver support programmes to support caregivers financially.** Cost considerations mean that low-income caregivers are only able to access available programmes in the short term. Subsidising premiums of health insurance for persons with disabilities will also reduce medical costs for the family.

**7(d) Introducing caregiving leave and caregiving allowance for all working adults.**

### **Article 9 Accessibility**

The fear of not being able to navigate our busy and cluttered environment, of facing stigma and discrimination from people without disabilities, of having little access to information, are all major barriers to participation in life - be that going to work, going for a walk in the park or simply socialising.

*Related Article: Art 9 (1a)*

The Working Group applauds the Government for its efforts in improving the city's infrastructure to be more accessible for persons with disabilities. It retrofitted all public buildings and facilities to provide basic accessibility, including community clubs, libraries, sport facilities, market and food centres, and National Heritage Board (NHB) museums. It has, moreover, upgraded public transportation and road infrastructure with barrier-free features. In addition to public infrastructure, the Government encouraged private entities to upgrade their premises through its Barrier-Free Accessibility Upgrading Programme (2007-2016).

*Related Article: Art 30 (5e)*

Moreover, the Government undertakes various measures to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life. In politics, special accommodations at polling stations and booths are made available for persons with disabilities in enabling them to vote. In the arts, the Government encourages persons with disabilities to showcase talents at national events and organises the annual Arts & Disability Forum. In sports, the Government collaborates with Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) to reach out to groups with various disabilities and offers a wide range of sports at both the elite (professional) and non-professional levels.

*Related Article: Art 29 (ai), Art 30 (2), Art 30 (5c)*

However, there is room for improvement in terms of Singapore's city infrastructure.

**The Working Group urges the Government to:**

**(1) Hasten the retrofitting of existing older facilities.** The Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) applies to new buildings constructed

after it came into effect. The initial version of the Code in 1990 has been enhanced every few years, with the latest version coming into effect in 2013. However, when public buildings undergo major renovations the latest version of the Code is applied retroactively. As of 2017, only twelve hotels and resorts received at least a four-star accessibility rating for user-friendliness levels according to BCA's Friendly Building Portal<sup>43</sup>. Additionally, where retrofitting is not possible (such as with historical buildings that have protected status), it is recommended that accessible facilities be added to these buildings.

**(2) Upgrading of audio and visual announcements on public transport.** With regards to public transportation, the Government should install automated audio and visual announcements in buses and trains stating the upcoming stop, at bus stops, bus interchanges and train stations, stating which bus/train would arrive in one minute and which bus/train has arrived throughout the entire fleet.

*Related Article: Art 9 (1a), Art 9 (2b), 20 (d)*

## **Article 21 Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information**

**The Working Committee recommends that the Government:**

**(1) Engage and train more professionals, service providers and communities on accessibility issues surrounding persons with disabilities.** Efforts could include promoting inclusive customer service and disability etiquette among bus captains, taxi drivers and commuters who are perceived to lack sensitivity, decline to aid or even obstruct those in wheelchairs during their commute.<sup>44</sup> In particular, bus captains have to be absolutely sure that passengers, especially the elderly and persons with disabilities have safely alighted before driving away from the bus-stops.

*Related Article: Art 9 (2c)*

**(2) Encourage public hospitals to train some members of their staff in sign language to ensure fewer barriers to accessing healthcare for persons with hearing loss.**

*Related Article: Art 21 (e)*

**(3) Strengthen the implementation of the Environmental Public Health Act and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)<sup>45</sup> System Regulations to enable access for guide dogs or service dogs for autistic people or people with psychosocial disabilities.** Current legislation allows access to almost all public spaces for persons using guide dogs, but this does not apply to other service dogs and awareness of the law is not widespread. The Government may consider addressing the discrimination against guide or service dog owners by introducing punitive measures or a complaint recourse.

*Related Article: Art 20 (d)*

A Blind Working Group member shares her experience:

*“Eateries have told me that the Environmental Public Health Act states that guide dogs “may be permitted”, but they can still choose not to allow as the act does not state “must allow”. Once when facing refusal of carriage from taxi, who’s driver called the police, I was told by the police that they are sorry but nothing can be done as there is no law stating that taxi drivers cannot discriminate*

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<sup>43</sup> Building and Construction Authority. “Friendly Building Portal” <<https://friendlybuildings.bca.gov.sg/find-a-friendly-building.html>> accessed 30 May 2019

<sup>44</sup> Disabled People's Association. (2015). Achieving Inclusion in Transport: Barriers and Solutions to Inclusive Transport.

<sup>45</sup> The MRT is Singapore's railway system.

*against guide dogs nor does Singapore has antidiscrimination law that would give the police to arrest / charge the driver. The police offered to send me home, but what good does that do as the police cannot be my daily mode of transport?"*

**(4) Encourage the adoption of Assistive Technology for those who require them, in order to improve the accessibility of information and communication for persons with disabilities.** The Government should evaluate the criteria for means-testing for Assistive Technology Fund subsidies to ensure that lower-income persons with disabilities are able to purchase Assistive Technology. It should also consider expanding the Assistive Technology subsidy schemes beyond a one-time off assistance to improve the affordability of Assistive Technology and to provide for maintenance and repairs or replacements. Furthermore, more can be done to improve Assistive Technology literacy among persons with disabilities, employers and schools.

*Related Article: Art 20 (b)*

**(5) Collaborate with banks, potentially through the Association of Banks in Singapore, to improve the accessibility of financial services for persons with disabilities.** User-friendly features should include braille letters imprinted on the online banking token, automated voice guides at Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and online banking, and accessible ATMs where wheelchair users can reach the screen and keypad comfortably. One local bank has introduced 'talking ATMs' in Singapore<sup>46</sup>, but not all the other banks have followed. Moreover, the Government should work towards ensuring that these accessibility mechanisms are standardised.

*Related Article: Art 19 (c)*

**(6) Develop more accessible modes of communication or notification during times of emergency. And that these are made accessible to persons with disabilities, especially those who do not communicate in English, in addition to the emergency Short Messaging Service (SMS)<sup>47</sup>.**

*Related Article: Art 11*

**(7) Ensure consistent accessibility in television broadcasts by encouraging these service providers to adopt closed-captioning as well as sign language interpreters across both free-to-air and paid television channels, where possible.** The closed captioning that is available on streaming platforms such as Netflix are a best practice example that can be adopted on other broadcast service providers.

*Related Article: Art 21 (d)*

## **Article 23 Respect for home and family**

**The Working Group encourages the Government to:**

**(1) Eliminate discrimination and close the social distance between persons with disabilities and people without disabilities.** According to a survey by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) (2017), 62% of persons with disabilities do not feel that they are included, accepted or given opportunities to contribute or reach their potential by society.

*Related Article: Art 8 (1a)*

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<sup>46</sup> Today Online "'Talking ATMs' to help the visually-impaired" <<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/posb-launches-talking-atms-visually-impaired-customers>> accessed 30 May 2019

<sup>47</sup> Singapore Civil Defence Force. "SMS 70995 Emergency Service" <<https://www.scdf.gov.sg/home/about-us/information/sms-70995-emergency-service>> accessed 30 May 2019

**(2) Incorporate a Disability Awareness module in the Character and Citizenship Education subject of mainstream schools to raise awareness and understanding of disability.** Additionally, in SPED schools, the sexuality education guide should teach students with disabilities about healthy sexual relationships and family, rather than only tackling the issue of abuse or personal hygiene.

*Related Article: Art 8 (2b)*

### **Article 29 Participation in political and public life**

**The Working Group urges the Government to:**

**(1) Review Singapore’s reservation against Article 29(a)(iii).** Although the Government has explained that the reservation is because a specially trained officer is more likely to protect the privacy of one’s vote and is less likely to influence the vote of the person they are assisting because there are punitive measures for those that violate those rules, problems remain.

*Related Article: Art 29 (a)(iii)*

The current voting policy fails to accommodate the fact that some persons with disabilities may prefer to have someone they know and trust help them vote. This concern has been voiced by allies and autistic people.

*Related Article: Art 29 (a)(ii)*

In addition, election officials may not have the necessary skills to communicate with or provide assistance to certain groups of disabilities such as those with multiple disabilities (for example, the Deaf-Blind). This may result in persons with disabilities being less likely to vote or being left out of the voting process altogether.

*Related Article: Art 8 (2d)*

**(2) Encourage the Elections Department to work with SSAs to set up mock stations for practice before the actual voting day to help familiarise voters with disabilities with the voting process.**

These mock sessions will allow people with visual disabilities to practise using the stencils to mark the ballot paper. Autistic people and people with intellectual disabilities will also benefit from mock voting sessions with election officials. The sessions will help to establish a routine, which will make the voting process more comfortable.

*Related Article: Art 9 (2c)*

### **Article 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport**

**The Working Group calls upon the Government to:**

**(1) Do more to support artists in the disability arts space to create and showcase their work, including reviewing its funding models of arts grants and supporting incubation spaces.** Artists cite a shortage of incubation spaces for developing artists, curators and critics. It could also look towards funding small-sized art venues. Artists also cite the lack of professional presentation venues to showcase their work. Most of these venues are mid-sized, but many new works will not be able to attract a huge audience base yet.

*Related Article: Art 30 (2)*

**(2) Bridge the information gap on disability sports by publicising information on disability sports in accessible formats.** According to the Sports Index 2015, only about one-third of persons with disabilities engage in any kind of sport on a regular basis. Information on disability sports, for instance on the accessibility of venues and types of programmes available, is not easily available to persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Only one in 10 persons with disabilities, and less than half of their caregivers were aware of opportunities available to participate in sports in a survey conducted by Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY).

*Related Article: Art 30 (5c)*



## Glossary

<b>ATMs</b>	Automated Teller Machines
<b>BCA</b>	Building and Construction Authority
<b>CE Act</b>	Compulsory Education Act
<b>CHAS</b>	Community Health Assist Scheme
<b>CPF</b>	Central Provident Fund
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>DPA</b>	Disabled People's Association
<b>DPOs</b>	Disabled People's Organisations
<b>EA</b>	Employment Act
<b>ECT</b>	Employment Claims Tribunal
<b>EIPIC</b>	Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children
<b>FM</b>	Frequency Modulation
<b>HR</b>	Human Resource
<b>JAWS</b>	Job Access With Speech
<b>LMS</b>	Learning Management System
<b>LOIs</b>	List of Issues
<b>MCCY</b>	Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth
<b>MINDS</b>	Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education

<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MRT</b>	Mass Rapid Transit
<b>MSF</b>	Ministry of Social and Family Development
<b>NCSS</b>	National Council of Social Service
<b>NHB</b>	National Heritage Board
<b>ODP</b>	Open Door Programme
<b>PICs</b>	Private Intervention Centres
<b>PPIP</b>	Pilot for Private Intervention Providers
<b>PSC</b>	Public Service Commission
<b>SDSC</b>	Singapore Disability Sports Council
<b>SGD</b>	Singapore Dollar
<b>SgSL</b>	Singapore Sign Language
<b>SMS</b>	Short Messaging Service
<b>SNTC</b>	Special Needs Trust Company
<b>SPED</b>	Special Education
<b>SSAs</b>	Social Service Agencies
<b>TAFEP</b>	Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices