

Employment and Work of
Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN-Korea
in the Post COVID-19 Era

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I. Introduction

- For persons with disabilities in ASEAN and Korea, labour and employment are important issues. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the challenges persons with disabilities face in the labour and employment market after COVID-19 outbreak and what measures are available to overcome them.
- On the basis of these concerns, this study aims to explore how improvements can be made in the workforce to accommodate persons with disabilities in ASEAN-Korea in a post COVID-19 era.

- To achieve this objective, the article is organized as follows:
- First, we explore the theoretical background of the study, the characteristics of this virus, and labour in the post COVID-19 era.
- Second, we identify ASEAN-Korea employment and labour situations for persons with disabilities as results from a survey.
- Finally, the challenges to improving employment and labour for persons with disabilities in ASEAN and Korea in a post COVID-19 world are presented.

II. Literature Review

Causes of COVID-19 Outbreak

- COVID-19 is defined as a globally popular pandemic, a zoonosis caused by a pathogen that spreads between animals and humans.
- In other words, COVID-19 is an infectious disease that has spread worldwide because of the rapid globalization in modern times. The root cause of zoonosis can be found in wild ecosystem development and climate change.
- Many public health scholars and ecologists warn that pandemics will continue to appear every three to five years in the coming years, discussing the possibility of continuous pandemic shock as a trailer for 21st-century viral flooding.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Labour and Industry

- According to the ILO (2020), 81% of the world's companies have gone into partial closure or full closure since the COVID-19 outbreak, affecting 2.7 billion out of 3.3 billion workers worldwide. The shock of unemployment can be devastating to the socially disadvantaged.
- The digital transformation of the industrial sector is accelerating as the influence of COVID-19. It is foreseeable that the increase in online sales will continue owing to the changing lifestyle, such as the preference for social distance and untact transactions. With the rapid spread of telecommuting, the use of collaborative platforms that support video conferences and remote work is also expanding.

Labour of Persons with Disabilities in a Post COVID-19 Era

- Labour in the post COVID-19 era should respond to changes in society as a whole following the rapid spread of online and non-face-to-face services. To this end, it is necessary to build industrial infrastructure and accumulate human capital in response to digitalization and untact.
- As the post COVID-19 era has been created by the ecological crisis, ecological industries and jobs in the de-carbonization industry will be emphasized for sustainable human survival and prosperity. Most countries will put their national finances into green industries and sustainable development to fundamentally prevent another occurrence of a pandemic.
- The labour of persons with disabilities in the post COVID-19 era also needs to change, innovate, and adapt to these environmental changes, such as digitalization, untact, and ecological economy.

III. Labour Status of PwD in ASEAN-Korea During the COVID-19

Survey overview

- In this study, a survey was conducted to understand the current work status related to persons with disabilities and difficulties due to COVID-19 and the direction of response in ASEAN member states and South Korea.
- The questionnaire was composed of semi-structured questions to which the respondents responded subjectively. The survey questions were as follows:
- (1) status of laws specialized (or related) for persons with disabilities, (2) employment rate and status of persons with disabilities, (3) the status of employment policies for persons with disabilities (allocated employment system, protected employment, support employment, standard workplace, linked employment, etc.), (4) changes and difficulties related to labour caused by COVID-19, and (5) direction of labour policy in a post COVID-19 era.

- The survey was conducted by email from September to October 2020. Questionnaire responses as to the status of each country were answered by Disabled Peoples Organization (DPOs) workers in that country.

Survey respondents

Country	Name of the Disabled Peoples' Organization
Brunei Darussalam	Private Charity for Children with Mixed Disabilities
Cambodia	Cambodian Persons with Disabilities' Organization
Indonesia	Indonesian Association of Women and Disabilities
Lao PDR	Disability Mainstreaming Advisory Service Centre
Malaysia	Malaysian Confederation of Persons with disabilities
Myanmar	Integrated Community Development Foundation
Philippines	Government Union for The Integration of Disabled Employees
Singapore	ASEAN Disability Forum
Thailand	Transportation for All
Viet Nam	Independent Living Program Viet Nam
Republic of Korea	Persons with Disabilities' International Korea

Employment rate and status of persons with disabilities

- The employment rate for persons with disabilities was about 30% in Viet Nam, 28.6% in Singapore, 50.1% in Thailand, 50% in the Philippines, and 34.7% in Korea.
- Statistics obtained show that most persons with disabilities work in the private rather than public sector. This suggests that the proportion of persons with disabilities engaged in the informal sector, such as agriculture and self-employed businesses, is high.
- On the other hand, some countries had limited or no statistics on employment rates for persons with disabilities.

Disability-related labour acts

- As a result of the survey of the current status of labour laws for persons with disabilities, most countries stipulated labour rights for persons with disabilities in general law.
- Cambodia and South Korea were among the countries where separate laws exist that stipulate labour for persons with disabilities in addition to general laws.
- It was difficult to determine how well above the regulations were being implemented through actual policy implementation.

Employment policy for persons with disabilities

- Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Korea are the countries implementing the quota employment system as an employment policy for Persons with Disabilities, and the quota rate ranged from 1% to 5%.
- However, the percentage of persons with disabilities who are obliged to work is not known, or low.
- Singapore and South Korea were among the countries that implemented employment incentives to companies that hire persons with disabilities.
- Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, and South Korea have implemented policies such as technical support and job placement.

Work changes and difficulties of persons with disabilities due to COVID-19

- Persons with disabilities have experienced radical life disruption due to COVID-19. Most workers with disabilities have been challenged by income reduction, wage reduction, and unemployment.
- Direct causes of these difficulties include restrictions on movement, workplace closures, shortening of working hours due to social distancing.
- Furthermore, difficulties in performing tasks emerged because of restrictions in face-to-face contact and limitations in web accessibility.
- Moreover, since most persons with disabilities are engaged in the informal sector, additional burdens are added by excluding them from the public social welfare system.

Responses to employment policies amid the COVID-19 crisis

- The results of examining the response to guarantee the labour of persons with Disabilities among the COVID-19 crisis are as follows:
- First, as a human resource development policy, there were re-education and vocational training for persons with disabilities and provision of information on re-employment.
- Second, there was social insurance support for workers expected to lose their jobs or full-time workers.
- Third, as corporate support, there was wage support for maintaining employment and temporary leave allowance, and a moratorium on payment of unemployment charges for persons with disabilities.
- Fourth, there was income support for persons with disabilities at risk of income reduction and unemployment.

IV. Conclusion

- The general tasks for improvement are as follows.
- First, the findings reveal that most ASEAN countries have insufficient data on the works of persons with disabilities, making it difficult to understand the exact scope of the problem. Not only is there a lack of data on the private sector and self-employed people, but there are also cases where it is difficult to understand the employment status in the public sector.
- Since social policy could be developed only when statistical data are established, the countries need to produce the disability-disaggregated data related to employment.

- Second, it is necessary to strengthen the legal and institutional basis for ensuring labour and employment equity for persons with disabilities. For this purpose, legislation and revision of regulations can ensure the effectiveness of employment policies are required.
- Third, most persons with disabilities in the countries surveyed are engaged in informal sector labour and agriculture-oriented industries, so it is highly likely that they will not be protected by the public social welfare system, and countermeasures are needed. Therefore, persons with disabilities working in the informal sector should also be allowed to receive protections, including unemployment insurance and other social insurance measures under the serious socioeconomic crisis caused by COVID-19.

- Fourth, the public sector needs to hire more persons with disabilities and set an example in hiring them. This should expand the opportunities for persons with disabilities to work, recognize and develop their abilities, and create an opportunity for the private sector to promote employment of persons with disabilities. Countries that operate the employment quota system should strive to meet the legal mandatory employment rates starting with the public sector, and strengthen incentives to fulfill the mandatory employment rate.
- Fifth, the above tasks could be completed through faithful implementation of the SDGs, the Incheon Strategy, and the CRPD. The ALMM and AMMSWD should address the labour of persons with disabilities as an agenda, and a specific implementation roadmap for improving the labour and employment environment should be prepared and promoted. The ASEAN-Korea SCF could be used to finance and promote the plan at the ministerial level meeting.

- Next, the challenges in preparation for the post COVID-19 era are as follows.
- First, It is required to create an environment for workers with disabilities to work under thorough quarantine, rather than unconditionally shutting down sheltered workshops where persons with disabilities work, especially those with developmental disabilities.
- Workers with developmental disabilities and persons with severe disabilities have difficulty complying with basic personal quarantine, such as hand washing and wearing masks, therefore educational materials should be developed to promote understanding of safety practices and disease prevention

- Second, labourer with disabilities in the post COVID-19 era should take a preemptive response to the digitalization and untact trend. Digitization and untact could be a new opportunity for persons with disabilities with mobility difficulties, but if access to information is not guaranteed, they would be the most vulnerable group in the post COVID-19 era.
- Therefore, to adapt and exercise their ability for the untact and digital-based new works, persons with disabilities should receive training on digital civilization and ICT & digital platform industry and get support for IT devices and assistive technology devices.

- Third, the labour of persons with disabilities in the post COVID-19 era should be proactive in responding to the trend of ecological economization. People finally understand that COVID-19 resulted from the environmental destruction by human beings. Increased interest and investment in eco-friendly industries will lead to an increase in jobs in this area.
- Therefore, it is necessary to start by studying the labour of persons with disabilities to lead the decarbonization society and the decarbonization economy.

Thank you so much