



Achieving Fairness in Employment for Persons with Disabilities in Singapore: Executive Summary

Disabled People's Association (DPA) Singapore | March 2024

Singapore is set to enact its first anti-discrimination legislation, the Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL) later this year in 2024. Since plans for the WFL were announced in August 2021, the Disabled People's Association (DPA) Singapore has made the optimisation of this law a top advocacy priority not only because this will be Singapore's first workplace anti-discrimination law, but also because of the [accounts](#) we have received from the disability community over the years pertaining to the attitudinal and discriminatory barriers persons with disabilities face in the workplace. This is underscored by recent studies such as a [2022 study](#) on workplace discrimination conducted by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) and Milieu Insight which showed that persons with disabilities experienced discrimination at a significantly higher rate (78%) than persons without disabilities (50%).

We at DPA thus spent the last two years between 2022 – 2023 conducting qualitative research and holding dialogues and conversations where we gathered feedback from persons with disabilities on their thoughts and experiences on workplace fairness and discrimination. Over the last two years, we have already shared the various insights and feedback from persons with disabilities with entities such as the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness – the government committee formed to oversee the development of the WFL, along with other forums such as through op-eds and DPA webinars.

As the WFL heads to Parliament in 2024, DPA presents “Achieving Fairness in Employment for Persons with Disabilities in Singapore” – a report that consolidates our advocacy work between 2022 – 2023 as we advocated on the WFL. The report contains a summary of our research and conversations with persons with disabilities between 2022 – 2023 on the topic of fairness in employment, while outlining our recommendations on what we at DPA believe, based on our research and conversations with persons with disabilities and other relevant experts, is required to achieve fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore.

When providing their feedback on the topic of fairness in employment, persons with disabilities spoke on issues that covered a wide range of topic areas – issues that directly pertain to the WFL but also issues that, while outside of the perimeters of the WFL, are still relevant to the goal of achieving fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore.

We have thus structured the report into two parts – Part I focusing on our recommendations on the WFL, and Part II focusing on our recommendations on such other factors, which persons with disabilities have noted, are important to address in achieving fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore.

It is our hope and objective that the information and recommendations presented in this report will serve as a resource and assist in enhancing the discussions both amongst policy makers and the general public on matters of fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore for the upcoming year and beyond – not only for conversations around the WFL in 2024 but also in other dialogues pertaining to fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore in the years ahead. More specifically, we hope, in addition to the WFL, that the information and recommendations in this report will assist in optimising the goals of EMP2030, while bringing Singapore closer to the standards of the UN CRPD.

EMP2030: The Enabling Masterplan 2030 (EMP2030) is a government report that charts out the government's plans and initiatives to enhance disability inclusion in Singapore from 2022 – 2030. Pertaining to employment, EMP2030 sets the government's goal that “by 2030, persons with disabilities who can work will be recognised for their abilities, knowledge and skills, and are able to achieve gainful employment”.

EMP2030 has also set the target to reach 40% employment rate of persons with disabilities – up from the current 32.7%.

The UN CRPD: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is a UN international convention outlining what it means to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities. It is an internationally-agreed upon document by disability rights experts around the world that outlines the standards, principles, and practices required for disability rights and inclusion. Countries that ratify the UN CRPD – which the Singapore government has done in 2013 - enter into an agreement with the UN to work together to achieve the standards outlined in the UN CRPD.

As we outline in the Introduction of the report, we have formulated the recommendations in the report in a manner that we believe can assist to optimise the goals of EMP2030 while bringing Singapore closer to the standards outlined in the UN CRPD pertaining to the area of employment.

The report outlines a total of 14 recommendations.

Part I of the report is divided into two sections. Section 1.1 provides a summary of the various forms of attitudinal and discriminatory barriers persons with disabilities have highlighted to us, and outlines our recommendations (Recommendations 1 and 2) on the need for the upcoming WFL to have a comprehensive definition of discrimination that addresses discrimination in all its forms – especially the denial of reasonable accommodations. Section 1.2 provides a commentary of other aspects of the proposed upcoming WFL, and outlines our recommendations (Recommendations 3 – 8) on other areas of the WFL that we believe, based on our research and conversations with persons with disabilities and other relevant experts, are important for the WFL to adequately address to be effective in meeting the realities of persons with disabilities. Such other areas pertain to: how the WFL will define disability, how the WFL will work with existing and new guidelines and advisories, and how the WFL will address provisions relating to the implementation of the WFL such as prohibited retaliatory behaviours, grievance handling processes, and settlement and redress protocols.

Part II of the report is divided into three sections. Section 2.1 focuses on feedback from persons with disabilities on areas for improvement in supporting persons with disabilities towards gainful employment, and outlines our recommendations (Recommendations 9 and 10) on how such areas can and should be factored into consideration when defining and assessing the concept of “gainful employment”. Section 2.2 explores some of the feedback from persons with disabilities on how disability inclusion, and specifically disability-inclusive employment, is promoted in Singapore, and outlines our recommendations (Recommendations 11 and 12) on how several of the main initiatives of the government – such as the P&T programme and the Enabling Mark and Enabling Employment Pledge – may be enhanced to optimise the promotion of disability-inclusive employment. Section 2.3 provides an overview of other areas that surround and have a direct effect in shaping one’s employment prospects – namely the SkillsFuture system and various government financial supports; the section provides a summary of the feedback from persons with disabilities on such areas and outlines our recommendations (Recommendations 13 and 14) on potential means to optimise policies and provisions pertaining to such areas to produce fairer outcomes and enhance the employment prospects for persons with disabilities.

The recommendations outlined in this report are not designed to be exhaustive, and if anything, represent, based on our research and conversations with persons with disabilities and other relevant experts, what DPA believes is the bare minimum that is necessary in achieving fairness in employment for persons with disabilities in Singapore.

In addition to our on-going efforts in collaborating with existing partners, DPA continues to invite any new collaborations with individuals and groups from all sectors and the general public towards addressing such recommendations, outcomes, and objectives outlined in this report.

For any questions or enquiries pertaining to the report, contact DPA’s Research and Policy Manager, Max Soh at max@dpa.org.sg

The full report can be accessed [here](#).