



Improving People with Disabilities' access to the open labour market with enhanced social protection

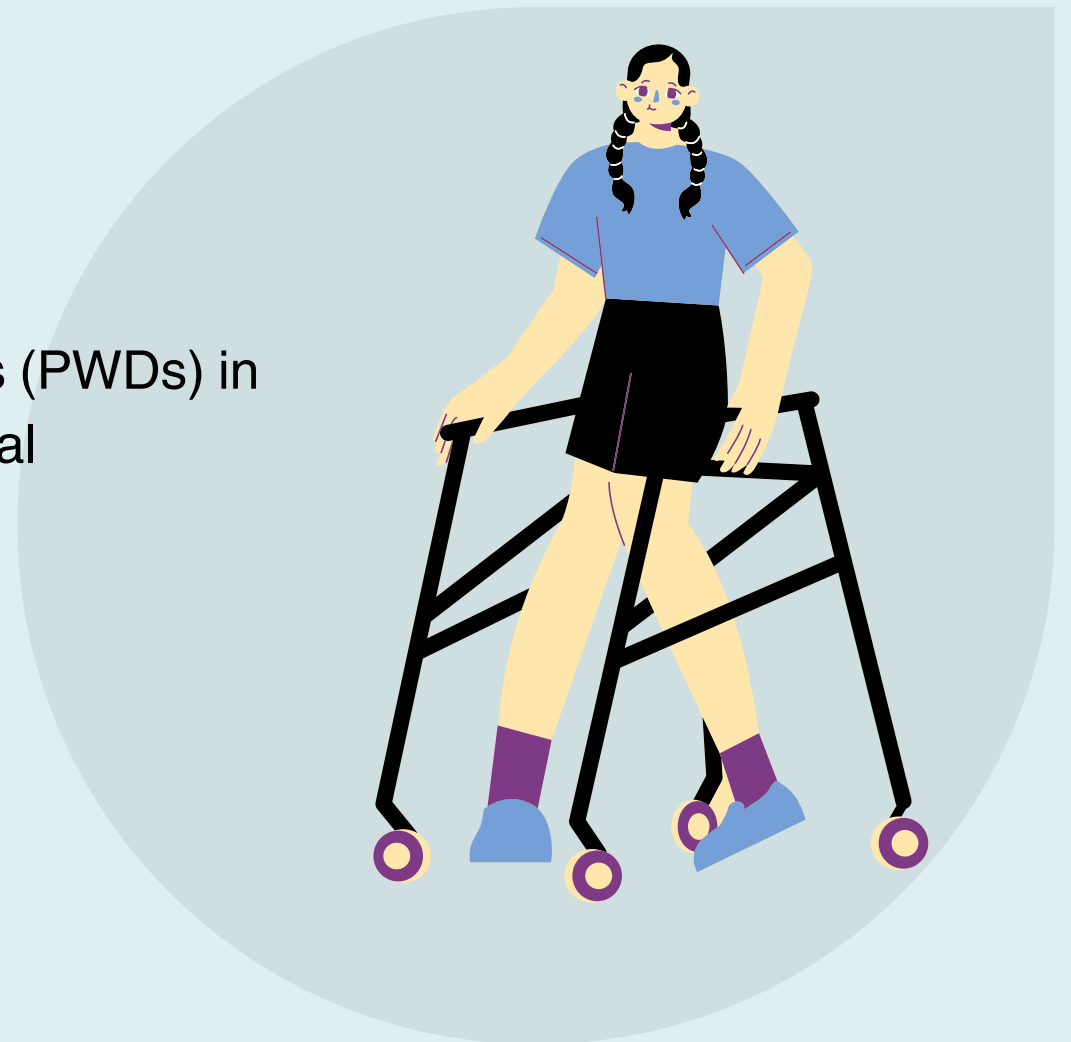
Duration: Start: 01-March-2024 - End: 30 March 2026

Project Budget: USD249,987

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Background

This project promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia by improving access to skills, employment, and social protection, while building capacity and generating policy recommendations to advance inclusive growth.



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Output 1: Sensemaking of the current gaps and challenges

Identify and analyze existing barriers, gaps, and opportunities in policies, practices, and systems that affect PWD inclusion in the labour market and social protection.



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Output 2: PWD Job Placement

Support pilot job placements and employer engagement initiatives to create meaningful employment pathways for PWDs.

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Output 3: Recommendations and Training

Develop policy recommendations and deliver targeted training for government agencies, employers, and social partners to strengthen inclusive employment and social protection systems.

This project aims to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia by improving their access to skills development, employment opportunities, and social protection. It seeks to strengthen institutional capacity and generate policy recommendations that advance inclusive and sustainable growth. The initiative focuses on three key outputs: first, identifying and analyzing existing barriers, gaps, and opportunities in policies, practices, and systems that affect PWD inclusion in the labour market and social protection frameworks; second, supporting pilot job placements and employer engagement initiatives to create meaningful and sustainable employment pathways for PWDs; and third, developing evidence-based policy recommendations and delivering targeted training for government agencies, employers, and social partners. The project adopts an integrated approach combining data analysis, stakeholder engagement, innovative solutions, and capacity building to ensure impactful, evidence-driven, and inclusive outcomes that empower PWDs to fully participate in Malaysia's economic and social development.

ILO-UNDP PWD Apprenticeship Programme



Background

PWD Project by UNDP and ILO (2024–2026) is implemented with the support of the Malaysia–UN SDG Trust Fund under the project Improving People with Disabilities. The initiative aims to address the employment and social protection challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) through an integrated approach that combines data analysis, stakeholder engagement, innovative solutions, and capacity building. Existing government incentives such as MYFutureJobs, Daya Kerja 3.0, the Return to Work Programme (PERKESO), and HRD Corp schemes form part of the ongoing stakeholder consultations. Moving forward, the project will strengthen efforts to help businesses become more inclusive of PWDs through a PWD Apprenticeship Programme, which features micro-credential training and on-the-job learning modules for PWDs. The programme also facilitates three-month apprenticeships with companies in the Klang Valley, provides post-training employment opportunities, and ensures that lessons learned are systematically documented to inform future policy and practice.



Thank you! To join or learn more about this programme, simply scan the QR code below to express your interest.



https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdUyupBUU32eAJfSUc9j-xzdMGISsSyz7sr22wtQGyT8ib_dA/viewform?pli=1

Expected Benefits:

- Access to incentives provided by HRD Corp and PERKESO
- Knowledge sharing on best practices among participating companies
- Tools and guidance from UNDP and ILO
- Direct engagement with participating companies in developing and improving industry practices, particularly for SMEs in inclusive employment

Frequently Asked Questions

1. PROGRAMME DESIGN & OBJECTIVES

Could you share the overarching objectives of the pilot apprenticeship programme and how it aligns with Malaysia's labour market needs and inclusion agenda?

The overarching objective of the pilot apprenticeship programme is to find industry-based solutions in addressing the key barriers that have contributed to the low employment rates among persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the private sectors. Specifically, the programme seeks to:

1. Enhance employability through open employment: Strengthen the skills and competencies of PWDs through industry-led skills training, capacity-building, and on-the-job learning. Training will be provided not only to PWDs apprentices but also to participating employers to ensure preparedness and greater sustainability. The pilot apprenticeship programme including training activities will be undertaken by the Project Implementing Agency (PIA)
2. Strengthen feedback and learning mechanisms: Implement continuous monitoring and evaluation to capture feedback throughout the programme. This will help identify areas for future policy and programme intervention, including improved access to national public employment services, industry facilitation to tap relevant government incentives on skills and employment, use of assistive technologies and reasonable adjustments to better support PWD participation in the workforce.
3. Foster workplace inclusion: Promote industry DEI initiatives with greater acceptance of PWDs by cultivating a culture of empathy, understanding, and inclusivity within participating companies.
4. Develop a pool of talent: Establish comprehensive profiles of qualified PWD professionals capable of contributing meaningful employment across various sectors.

How it aligns with Malaysia's labour market needs and inclusion agenda?

It aligns with Malaysia's labor market needs and inclusion agenda by directly addressing key challenges and supporting the country's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all based on the principle of "leaving no one behind." The program helps to encourage more employers, particularly SMEs in DEI initiatives whilst bridge the skills gap and tackle the low employment rate among PWDs by providing them with essential, competency-based skills and practical work experience for meaningful employment. This supports national policies like the 13th Malaysia Plan (Strategy B on Enhancing Social Mobility) and Economy Madani Framework on Raising the Floor (Improving the Rakyat's Wellbeing), which focuses on empowering vulnerable groups, and complements initiatives by the Ministry of Human Resources (KESUMA) to boost PWD employment. Furthermore, the program is a strategic effort that reinforces Malaysia's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It directly contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by providing PWDs with a path to productive employment and decent work, ensuring they are not left behind in economic progress. The program's focus on social and economic inclusion also addresses SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). By offering specialized skills training, it aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), and by providing a path to income, it helps combat poverty, contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty).

What are the key success indicators that UNDP/ILO will use to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative?

As a pilot project, the UNDP/ILO PWD Apprenticeship Programme is still in the process of exploring the appropriate result framework and key indicators to evaluate its effectiveness and, most importantly, influence policy reform. In consultation with the participating companies, the result framework will be finalised by the PIA. Drawing from international guidelines, the result framework may include both quantitative and qualitative measures:

1. Quantitative success will be measured by key metrics such as the rate of employment and retention of apprentices after the program's completion (TBC).
2. Qualitative success will be measured through the accessibility to national public employment services, workplace inclusion, transition to work, level of skills acquired by PWDs, (to be assessed via program evaluations)
3. The most crucial indicator for this pilot is its ability to generate clear, evidence-based lessons and best practices, with strong inputs from participating employers for practical use by the industry. These findings including inputs on localizing guidelines and industry-based solutions drawn from lessons learned in practice will be used to advocate for and inform broader policy changes, with the aim of establishing a replicable and scalable model for national PWD employment initiatives.

Which international best practices or models are being adapted into this Malaysian context?

The UNDP PWD Apprenticeship Programme in Malaysia draws on international best practices, particularly those promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), while adapting them to local industry needs. It is guided by key international frameworks, including ILO Convention 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (PWD), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR), which together emphasize inclusive employment, respect for dignity and autonomy, non-discrimination, accessibility, and equal opportunity.

However, we would like to emphasise that these international standards are guidelines which need to be informed by the local context. Therefore, the programme aims to localize these principles by incorporating inputs from Malaysian industries and employers. For instance, lessons from companies will be explored to develop practical, industry-based guidelines that can strengthen and refine the current approach, ensuring that inclusive employment strategies are not only aligned with international standards but also responsive to Malaysia's labour market realities.

2. EMPLOYER ROLE & EXPECTATIONS

What is the expected role of employers/ participating employers such as this pilot?

Within this pilot, participating employers are expected to act as a host organization, working closely with the PIA to ensure the program's success. Their key role includes hiring PWDs for apprenticeship positions and providing a structured OJT programme, inclusive work environment and feedback mechanism. They will also be responsible for mentoring the apprentices, offering hands-on training, and providing regular feedback on their apprentices' performance reporting and challenges faced by the employers in pilot implementation. The information and insights they gather will serve as a vital case study, helping to inform and contribute to policy reforms. The PIA will provide a hand-holding guidance and training to participating companies in preparedness, on-boarding, mentorship, monitoring and assessment of PWD trainee.

What level of commitment (resources, time, facilities) is anticipated from participating employers?

Participating employers are expected to make a multi-faceted commitment to the pilot programme, encompassing resources, time, and facilities.

1. Resources: Employers are encouraged to provide at least a minimum wage to apprentices, which can be further supported by applying for existing government incentives offered by PERKESO and HRD Corp. UNDP and ILO through the PIA could help facilitate the application to PERKESO and HRD Corp.
2. Time: A minimum commitment of 3 to 4 months is anticipated, with at least three months dedicated to the on-the-job training (OJT) and engagement to get feedback from participating employer. Employers' time is also required for providing regular feedback on the apprentices' progress, though this is expected to be on an as-needed basis depending on their availability.
3. Facilities: Ensuring a decent and safe workstation, along with basic appropriate tools. The PIA will cover the cost of additional resources required to enhance a PWD's productivity - such as assistive technology and tools - on a needs basis. Examples include screen readers or speech-to-text software for individuals with visual or motor impairments, ergonomic keyboards, assistive listening devices like hearing aids, or specialized mice. While UNDP has allocated a budget for such support, it will be disbursed subject to assessed needs, and will not extend to construction-related modifications such as building new pathways or installing ramps.

Will employers have flexibility to design apprenticeship roles that balance business needs with PWD capabilities?

The principle of this project is co-creation, where participating employers are encouraged to contribute their industry expertise in designing apprenticeship roles that balance business needs with PWD capabilities, in line with the specific nature of the job and skills required. The programme's collaborative structure between employers and the implementing agency is a key feature, acknowledging that a "one-size-fits-all" model is ineffective for both businesses and PWDs.

3. CANDIDATE POOL & MATCHING

How are PWD candidates identified, assessed, and matched with employers?

The PWD pool will be identified through several mechanisms

- Leverages existing databases (i.e., MYFutureJobs by PERKESO)
- Networks with Organisations with Person with Disabilities (OPD)

PWD candidates will be identified, assessed, and matched with employers through a collaborative process led by the PIA. They will work closely with participating employers to understand their specific business needs, current hiring practices and conduct the candidates profiling to the requirements of the apprenticeship roles. This consultation is crucial for ensuring a good fit.

Is the programme inclusive across all disability categories, or are specific groups being prioritised?

The program is inclusive across all disability categories, with no specific groups being prioritized. The selection of candidates is based on their individual competency and skills, and their suitability for the apprenticeship roles available. The final decision on an apprentice's placement is subjected to the employer', who will make the final agreement based on their assessment of the candidate's capabilities and how well they align with the business's needs.

What mechanisms are in place to ensure that candidates' skills and abilities align with employer requirements?

To ensure candidates' skills align with employer requirements, the program will use two key mechanisms.

- First, job profiling will be conducted by the PIA in close collaboration with employers. This will identify the specific competencies and responsibilities of each role to ensure a good initial match.
- Second, employers will provide on-the-job training (OJT). This hands-on training is essential for filling any remaining skill gaps, enabling apprentices to apply their abilities in a real-world setting, organisational culture, and demonstrating their productivity.

4. TRAINING & SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Who is responsible for providing technical/vocational training to apprentices—UNDP/ILO, training institutions, or the employer?

The responsibility for technical and vocational training in the UNDP PWD Apprenticeship Programme is a shared effort led by the PIA with support from employers. The PIA (currently identified by UNDP and ILO), will play the central role in delivering initial training and coordinating subsequent training needs. They will design and conduct a 5-day foundational classroom module for apprentices, covering essential technical, vocational, and soft skills. Proposed technical skills may include digital literacy and productivity tools (for example: MS Office, online collaboration platforms), basic digital marketing and social media management, customer engagement and communication systems (CRM platforms, call center applications), e-commerce support, and data entry or information management systems. In addition, the PIA will be responsible for training employers, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively conduct the OJT, mentor and monitor PWDs, and to make necessary job and workplace adjustments.

Following the initial training, the employer's role becomes critical as they will provide on-the-job training and mentorship during the apprenticeship. This hands-on experience is vital for developing practical skills. If any additional vocational training is identified as necessary to improve an apprentice's productivity, the employer can suggest it to the PIA. The agency will then explore the availability of such training and potentially arrange for it, ensuring a continuous and tailored learning experience for the apprentices.

Will apprentices have access to job coaching, mentorship, or workplace adaptation support?

Yes, apprentices in the program will have access to job coaching, mentorship, and workplace adaptation support. This comprehensive support system is a cornerstone of the initiative and will be provided through a collaborative effort. The PIA, which is still to be onboarded, will be responsible for providing job coaching and specialized support to the apprentices. This includes helping them prepare for interviews, navigate workplace expectations, and manage their career development.

Additionally, each apprentice will be assigned a dedicated mentor from within the host company. This mentor's role is crucial, as they will provide on-the-job guidance, help the apprentice integrate into the team, and offer ongoing feedback and support.

The program also ensures workplace adaptation support. The PIA will work with employers to identify and provide the necessary reasonable accommodations, such as assistive technology or flexible working arrangements, ensuring the apprentice has the tools and environment needed to perform their job effectively.

What training or sensitisation programmes will be available for employers, managers, and colleagues to build an inclusive workplace culture?

The specific training and sensitization programs for employers, managers, and colleagues are yet to be finalized but will be co-created together with participating companies, and conducted by the PIA once onboarded. The key focus of the training will cover the following but not limited to:

- **Disability Awareness:** This will educate staff on the social model of disability and the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), moving beyond stereotypes to a rights-based perspective from hiring practices, transition to employment and workplace adaptation.
- **Effective Communication:** Modules will provide guidance on respectful and effective communication with people with various disabilities and feedback mechanism.
- **Providing Reasonable Accommodations:** The training will help managers understand their role in providing reasonable accommodations and the importance of ensuring a barrier-free environment.
- **Mentorship and Support:** It will equip managers and colleagues with the skills to effectively mentor and support PWD apprentices.

5. FINANCIAL & POLICY INCENTIVES

Are there wage subsidies, grants, or tax incentives available for employers who participate?

The UNDP will not provide direct wage subsidies, but participating employers may be able to access existing government incentives. The PIA, hired by UNDP, will facilitate this process by working with bodies like PERKESO and HRD Corp to help employers secure these benefits. The PIA is be responsible for all related costs, including developing training modules, stakeholder engagement, logistics and venue fees, professional fees for trainers, and the cost of assistive technology and tools for the PWDs they onboard.

How does this programme align with Malaysia's affirmative action target of 1.5% PWD participation introduced in 2023?

The programme directly responds to the Government of Malaysia's 2023 affirmative action target of 1.5% PWD participation in the workforce, with support from the MySDG Trust Fund under the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which currently fund the UNDP x ILO project on Inclusive Employment for PWD.

By equipping PWDs with industry-relevant skills, preparing employers through workplace readiness and awareness training, and generating evidence for policy improvement, the programme bridges policy intent with practical action. It not only creates immediate pathways for PWD employment but also contributes to Malaysia's SDG commitments - advancing SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 17 (Partnerships) - positioning the initiative as both a pilot and a scalable model to help achieve the national 1.5% target.

What is the anticipated cost-sharing model between UNDP/ILO, government, and employers?

1. UNDP/ILO provides funding through the hiring of the PIA to design and deliver training, develop micro-credential modules, conduct employer engagement, and support monitoring and evaluation.
2. The Government of Malaysia, through agencies such as PERKESO and HRD Corp, complements this by offering incentives to employers who hire PWDs, including wage subsidies and training support.
3. Meanwhile, employers are expected to bear the costs of at least the apprentice's basic salary, provide reasonable workplace accommodations, and ensure proper guidance and mentorship to support long-term retention and inclusion.

6. MONITORING & EVALUATION

How will the progress and performance of apprentices be monitored during the programme?

The progress and performance of apprentices will be monitored through a continuous feedback and assessment system involving all key stakeholders. The programme will adopt international best practices informed through industry practices. The monitoring will cover the following but not limited to

- Apprentices will undergo regular skills and task assessments to measure competency gains, while supervisors and mentors will provide structured evaluations on workplace performance, adaptation, and professional growth.
- Employers will share feedback on job readiness and the effectiveness of workplace accommodations, while apprentices themselves will contribute reflections on their learning experience, challenges, and support needs.
- Families, OPDs, and community services may also be consulted to ensure holistic monitoring.
- UNDP, ILO, and the Implementing Agency will consolidate this information through pre- and post-programme evaluations, progress reviews, and feedback sessions, ensuring timely interventions, continuous improvement, and evidence-based recommendations for policy and future scale-up.

Will employers receive structured feedback or progress reports throughout the apprenticeship?

The principle of this project is co-creation, where participating employers are encouraged to contribute and provide feedback. Employers will have generous opportunity to give and receive structured and nonstructured feedback and progress reports throughout the apprenticeship.

Structured feedback i.e. reports will capture apprentices' skills development, workplace performance, and areas where additional support or adjustments may be needed. Regular check-ins and feedback sessions between the PIA, employers, and apprentices will ensure transparency, address challenges early, and strengthen collaboration. This structured reporting process also helps employers track the return on their investment in training and inclusion, while contributing lessons learned for future policy, strategies in scaling up the programme and its improvements needed.

What transition pathways are planned at the end of the apprenticeship — e.g., towards permanent or long-term employment?

As this is a pilot project, the specific transition pathways beyond the apprenticeship period have not yet been firmly established. However, the programme is designed to generate evidence and lessons learned from participating employers that will inform future strategies for industry to scaling up inclusive employment, including clearer pathways toward permanent or long-term employment. Where possible, employers will be encouraged to retain apprentices into their workforce, while feedback from this pilot will guide the development of sustainable models for PWD employment in Malaysia.

7. LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

How does UNDP/ILO envision scaling this pilot beyond its initial phase?

UNDP and ILO envision scaling this pilot by using it as a proof of concept to demonstrate how structured training, employer engagement, and workplace inclusion can successfully increase PWD employment. The lessons learned, monitoring data, and best practices from this pilot will be documented and shared with government agencies, employer associations, and OPDs to inform national policies and sector-wide strategies.

Future scaling is expected to include expanding to other regions beyond Klang Valley, diversifying sectors beyond digital marketing and customer engagement, and embedding the model into government facilitated programmes with sustainable financing mechanisms such as HRD Corp and PERKESO' social protection schemes and active labour market programmes.

What role can large employers play in ensuring the sustainability and wider adoption of such initiatives at the national level?

Large employers can play a pivotal role as the industry leader in ensuring the sustainability and wider adoption of inclusive apprenticeship initiatives by acting as industry champions and role models. Their involvement can demonstrate the business case for hiring PWDs, influence peer companies through best practices, and help normalize inclusive employment across sectors. They can also contribute to policy advocacy by sharing lessons with government and industry associations, ensuring that incentives and collaboration frameworks remain responsive to employers' needs. Importantly, their brand visibility and national reach can amplify awareness, build trust among smaller firms in supply chain, and encourage wider participation—laying the groundwork for systemic change in meeting and surpassing Malaysia's 1.5% PWD employment target.