Insight #2

Webinar: Shaping a Better Employment Landscape for People with Disabilities in Asia-Pacific

Sharing knowledge from the webinar series, 'Digital Technologies and Quality Jobs – Lessons Learnt and New Horizons, Shaping a Better Employment Landscape for People with Disabilities in Asia-Pacific is co-hosted by Digital Technology for Development Unit, Social Development Thematic Group and Education Sector Group.

Webinar Details

'Shaping a better employment landscape for People with Disabilities in Asia-Pacific'
11 August 2021, 16.00-17.30 (GMT+8)

Hosted by ADB's Digital Technology for Development Unit, Social Development Thematic Group, and Education Sector Group in partnership with Microsoft and Virtualahan | **Online via MS Teams**

Speakers:
- **Pratima Amonkar**, Chair for D&I and Accessibility, Microsoft APAC
- **Winnie Lewis**, Head, Disability Inclusion, Employment & Employability, SG Enable
- **Pratibha Kurnool**, APAC Lead & Strategic Partnerships Lead for Social Impact, Outreach, Cognizant

Opening remarks:
- **Wendy Walker**, Chief of Social Development Thematic Group, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, ADB

Closing remarks:
- **Shanti Jagannathan**, Principal Education Specialist, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, ADB

Respondent:
- **Dr. Maria Kett**, Associate Professor in Humanitarianism and Disability, UCL, and Co-Founder, Global Disability Innovation Hub

Moderator:
- **Ryan Gersava**, Founder and President, Virtualahan

Shaping a Better Employment Landscape for People with Disabilities in Asia-Pacific

A joint webinar by ADB, Microsoft, and Virtualahan

11 August 2021 | Wednesday
4:00 PM to 5:30 PM (GMT+8)

Register Here

Asia-Pacific is home to 70% of the global population of persons with disabilities.

Disability increases the risk of poverty, through lack of employment and education opportunities, lower wages, and increased cost of living with a disability.

Globally three times as many people with disabilities live in households with very low work intensity, compared with people without disabilities.

ADB   Microsoft   Cognizant   SG ENABLE   VIRTUALAHAN

The second webinar in the series was convened in partnership with **Microsoft** and **Virtualahan**, with **Microsoft's APAC Enabler Program** in the spotlight to help unpack the opportunities and barriers to improve the labor market inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Attended by a diverse audience of around 135 participants, the discussion covered:

- Experiences and challenges of different stakeholder groups committed to increasing economic opportunity for persons with disabilities in the region – across the private sector, government, civil society, and academia;

- The role of digital technologies in improving access of persons with disabilities to quality jobs;

- Drivers and constraints to upscale regional collaboration and impact for and with persons with disabilities.

The development challenge

An inclusive and diverse workforce brings multiple economic and social benefits, yet persons with disabilities still face significant barriers to access skilling and employment opportunities. Globally, almost two thirds of persons with disabilities of working age are outside the labor force. Whilst the digital economy promises new pathways to quality jobs, especially through innovations in accessible technologies, entrenched marginalization could deepen unless three key inequalities are addressed: uneven levels of future of work skills; digital exclusion, especially among the poorest; and disproportionate impacts from COVID-19 restrictions on the most vulnerable communities. Shaping a better employment landscape for persons with disabilities must be integral to rebuilding a resilient and prosperous region in the wake of the pandemic.

Webinar highlights

- Private sector, governments, civil society and academia must work together to develop comprehensive and accountable labor market solutions that directly respond to the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable persons with disabilities.

- Effective targeting of persons with disabilities is required to expand access to digital and other future of work skills and maximize participation in the digital economy.

- Asia and the Pacific region hosts promising programs and policies to support labor force inclusion of persons with disabilities that need to be exchanged and scaled up.

About the organizations

Microsoft

Microsoft is a global technology company with a mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.

Microsoft APAC Enabler Program

Microsoft APAC Enabler program launched in September 2020, brings together non-profit organizations and Microsoft partners in a consortium approach to drive disability inclusive employment.

SG Enable

SG Enable is the focal agency for the disability sector in Singapore, dedicated to enabling persons with disabilities and building an inclusive society.

Cognizant

Cognizant is a global digital consulting company with a recognized commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Virtualahan

Virtualahan is an award-winning social enterprise founded in 2015 in the Philippines as a virtual school, upskilling persons with disabilities and facilitating access to employment and entrepreneurship.

### Global Disability Innovation Hub

GDI Hub is a research and practice centre driving disability innovation for a fairer world, operational in 41 countries launched in 2016.

Pratima Amonkar, Chair for D&I and Accessibility, Microsoft APAC

Pratima opened her presentation by making a passionate case for investment in accessibility for persons with disabilities. Based on insights from Microsoft's journey growing as an inclusive business, Pratima highlighted the role of technology in enabling all people to achieve their potential. She explained that designing with and for persons with disabilities leads to innovation for the benefit of all. In particular, Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds considerable promise for enabling a personalized experience for all abilities: through AI, in the future, "the world will adapt to your needs and preferences", not the other way round. Pratima advocated that accessibility is both an opportunity and a responsibility. Companies that instill inclusion and diversity into their ethos perform better and attract the best talent. Highlighting key milestones on Microsoft's journey and sharing tips and tools from their accessible technologies, Pratima went onto sharing lessons from the pilot phase of setting up the APAC Enabler Program. The role of different partners in the consortium was emphasized, including non-profit organizations providing capacity building and training to prepare and support hiring organizations and to facilitate matching to opportunities for employment or in-company experience provided by commercial partners. Microsoft not only leads the initiative but also directly trains firms in accessible workplace and design.
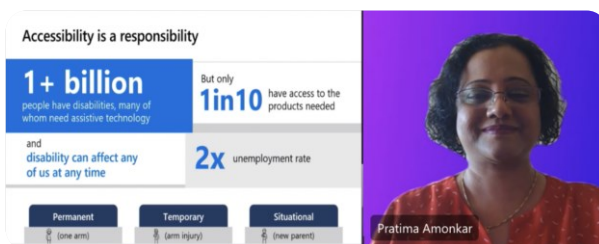

Winnie Lewis, Head, Disability Inclusion, Employment & Employability, SG Enable

Winnie presented SG Enable's comprehensive approach to serving persons with disabilities to enhance their employability and employment outcomes. This includes SG Enable's role in supporting the wider employment ecosystem, and also their partnership with Microsoft for the APAC Enabler Program. Through their work, they are building a body of knowledge on how to improve inclusive workplace practices, particularly in the technology sector. Case examples showed how placing talented interns with disabilities within well-supported companies can not only empower the individual but also influence corporate management and culture. Winnie shared SG Enable's "Equip – Engage – Employ" model that provides a holistic framework for practical support, know-how and technical assistance to companies to adopt and grow disability inclusion in the workplace. The "Enabling Mark" accreditation benchmarks and recognizes disability inclusive employers and serves as an important contribution to sharing best practices and catalyzing positive change in the business community. Winnie shared five recommendations for organizations, focused on: authentic commitment; inclusive recruitment strategies; workplace accessibility; fair and progressive employment practices; and community engagement and advocacy for wider outreach and impact.
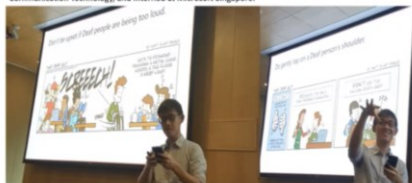
## Cognizant

Pratibha Kurnool, APAC Lead & Strategic Partnerships Lead for Social Impact, Outreach, Cognizant

Pratibha shared the experiences of Cognizant as a leading disability inclusive employer and an active partner in the Microsoft APAC Enabler Program. She highlighted the opportunities of building a corporate culture committed to diverse and inclusive practices, and shared practical insights about overcoming the possible challenges of management or mindset barriers. Drawing down from Cognizant's overall social responsibility commitment to 'Inclusion in Technology', Pratibha highlighted company investments in education and employability of underrepresented groups, such as in STEM skills, noting the need to ensure persons with disabilities will be equipped to benefit from future opportunities in the digital economy. Pratibha identified lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding among key company stakeholders as the biggest barrier to advancing an inclusive culture. For example, hiring managers can be uncertain about the practical realities of accommodating communication and collaboration with colleagues who require additional assistance. She explained how the Microsoft APAC Enabler Program provided tools, frameworks and partnerships to get started and build a "differentiated" approach for disability inclusion, across knowledge sharing, training, employee engagement and hiring/employment. In particular, Pratibha reflected on the role and value of different partners in learning and adopting leading practices.
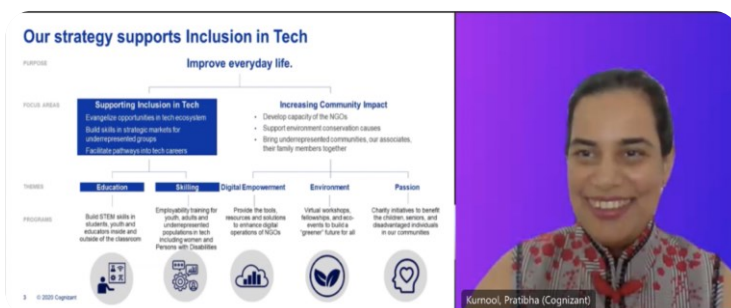
Global Disability Innovation Hub

Maria Kett, Associate Professor in Humanitarianism and Disability, UCL, and Co-Founder, Global Disability Innovation Hub

Maria acted as respondent and highlighted the importance of partnership models that connect diverse stakeholders in taking successful approaches to scale. She shared five key reflections in response to the three presentations: first, the need to bridge the education and employment gap, in terms of both learning outcomes and relevant skills, including through technology; second, the importance of continued engagement of persons with disabilities themselves in discussions about their futures, especially the most marginalized, including women, refugee and displaced children, those living in informal settlements, those with learning difficulties; third, the imperative to ensure opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic for persons with disabilities, such as remote working, are capitalized on and risks of entrenched exclusion are actively mitigated, including through investment in data to monitor no one left behind; fourth, maximizing the possibilities of South-South learning, for example through ADB's regional role as a knowledge broker; and fifth, the critical role of government in enabling an inclusive labor market ecosystem – country examples of good practices were shared, such as job matching and preferential contracting, but there is no "magic bullet" and a varied approach is required, with labor market data collection at the center.
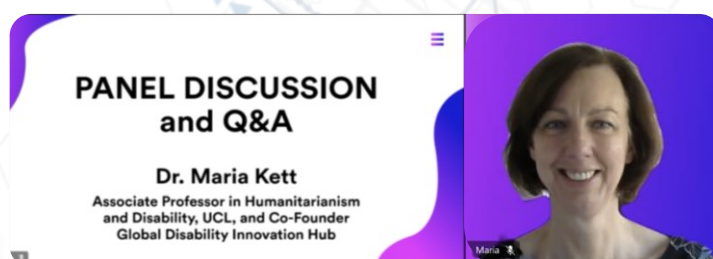
Lessons for shaping a better employment landscape for persons with disabilities

A panel discussion highlighted key lessons for stakeholders in shaping a better employment landscape for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific:

A fundamental requirement in driving disability inclusion is **raising awareness** across the ecosystem so each stakeholder understands their role, effective approaches they can adopt, and how to access support.

The unprecedented pace of innovation is reshaping the needs of the whole workforce, and it is vital that persons with disabilities have **equal access** to the skills and new employment opportunities that will dominate in the future of work – with a focus on digital skills and roles/occupations/sectors.

In the private sector, disability needs to shift from philanthropy to **business case; corporate volunteering** has the potential to drive inclusion organically and at scale.

In the public sector, **incentives to promote inclusive practices** make a critical contribution to the pace of change, such as grants for accessible job redesign or workplace modifications, and schemes to recognize and reward disability leaders.

Civil society is central to equipping both the public and private sectors and creating connections across stakeholders, helping to create a **lifecycle approach** to inclusion bridging education and employment systems.

All stakeholders must work to support and leverage **multi-sector partnerships** to unlock the specialist capabilities of individual organizations and help scale efforts to bring system-level change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped break down barriers for persons with disabilities and reframe issues of accessibility in the workplace, creating significant opportunity **to design for inclusiveness in new norms**; but dedicated efforts will be required to enable the **voice and participation of the most marginalized communities**.

Key Quotes

Poverty and disability and interrelated. Poor people are more likely to become disabled because of the conditions in which they live, and disability is more likely to make people poor, because of discrimination and inequality of access to basic services and employment.... We look forward to... insights about... how all partners can work together for - and with - persons with disabilities to fulfil their active social and economic participation in communities across our region.

- **Wendy Walker**, Chief of Social Development Thematic Group, ADB

"Inclusion unlocks social and economic value... Inclusion makes persons with disabilities more productive, and more active citizens, so they can contribute to the economy and power growth. This also reduces the burden of care and the social welfare approach, makes our societies more equitable and improves the happiness and wellbeing of all. It's a win win... It's exciting to know that technology is going to unlock so much more potential than was ever possible before".

- **Shanti Jagannathan**, Principal Education Specialist, ADB

For more information, you may contact:

Helen Osborne
Youth Employment Specialist, ADB
hosborne.consultant@adb.org

Michiel Van der Auwera
Senior Social Development Specialist
(Social Protection), ADB
mvanderauwera@adb.org

Shanti Jagannathan
Principal Education Specialist, ADB
sjagannathan@adb.org

ADB · Microsoft · Cognizant · SG ENABLE · VIRTUALAHAN