



Employing Persons with Disabilities

A Handbook for Employers in Myanmar

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

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This guide was first published in 2018 as a joint initiative by the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) and the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AAR Japan), and part of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Partnership Program in Myanmar with the support of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. It was based on consultation with businesses, Disabled People Organizations, and government departments in 2018. It was updated in 2024.

MCRB was set up in 2013 by the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) with funding from several donor governments including UK, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, but is no longer active.

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Design by [Ethical Sector](#)

Cover photo: Kay Zar Kyaw, 20. Born with no right leg, Kay Zar Kyaw works at a tailoring shop, sewing purses.

Cartoon Credit: Aw Pi Kyeh

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1

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS HANDBOOK?

The aim of this guide is to help employers and others to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in Myanmar so that persons with disabilities can work on an equal basis with others. By ensuring that persons with disabilities find and stay in employment, fewer will fall into, or stay in, poverty.

Persons with disabilities still have lower access to the labour market compared to persons without disabilities. According to the World Report on Disability (2011), an analysis for 51 countries indicates that employment rates for men and women with disability are 52.8% and 19.6% respectively, compared to 64.9% and 29.9% for men and women without disability, respectively.



STATISTICS

52.8%

Employment
Rate for Men with
Disabilities

19.6%

Employment Rate
for Women with
Disabilities

64.9%

Employment Rate
for Men without
Disabilities

29.9%

Employment Rate
for Women without
Disabilities

Myanmar's 2014 census also indicates a similar trend: persons with disabilities aged 15-64 years are less likely to be participating in the labour force compared to those without a disability. Only 47.2% of those with a mild walking disability participate in the labour force, compared to 67.6% of those without a disability, a 20% gap.

These data clearly show the need to promote employment of persons with disability. This means promoting accessible employment, opportunities for self-employment; making the necessary adjustments and modifications ('reasonable accommodations') making sure that persons with disabilities participate on an equal basis in the workplace; supporting them to be more productive; and avoiding any form of discrimination.

WHAT DOES THIS HANDBOOK COVER?

The guide covers:

- demographic information about person with disabilities in Myanmar;
- examples of discrimination against person with disabilities in the workplace;
- the Myanmar legal framework protecting person with disabilities and promoting their participation in society;
- terms, definitions, and communication about disability;
- success stories from person with disabilities;
- tips and advice for employers;
- contacts and sources of more information.



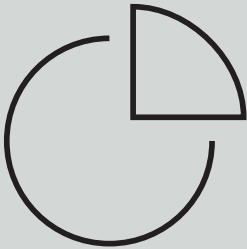
Persons with disabilities still have lower access to the labour market compared to persons without disabilities.

Khup Sian Kim, 25, has a congenital disability of the legs. Ms. Kim works as an accountant at a bookshop.

2

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE A DISABILITY IN MYANMAR?

According to the 2014 Myanmar Census, out of a total of **50.3 million** people, **2.3 million** people (4.6% of the population) have some form of disability, many of whom have little or no access to a job. The Census shows that:

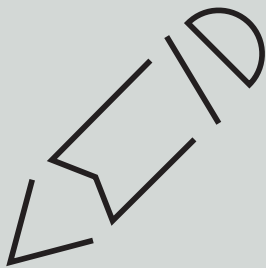


2.3 MILLION PEOPLE have difficulties in one or more of the four functional domains (seeing, hearing, walking, and remembering or concentrating).



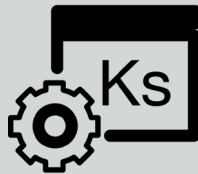
17% OF MALES & 32% OF FEMALES

with a disability are illiterate.



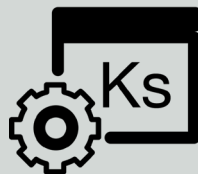
27% OF MALES & 39% OF FEMALES

with a disability have no access to education.



ONLY 29% OF MALES & 15% OF FEMALES

with moderate/severe walking disabilities are in the labour force.



ONLY 30% OF MALES & 21% OF FEMALES

with moderate/severe disabilities relating to remembering and concentrating are in the labour force.

These rates may be under-reported. The 2011 World Report on Disability of The World Health Organization (WHO) estimate Myanmar's disability rate as 6.4%. Indeed, the 2019 Myanmar Inter-Censal Survey reveals a disability prevalence rate of 12.8%, with states like Chin, Rakhine, and Ayeyawady reporting rates as high as 20.6%. Furthermore, conflict since 2021 will have resulted in more people acquiring disabilities from landmines and other causes.

3

WHAT IS 'DISABILITY'?

The concept of disability has evolved over the past 50 years. Historically, disability had been understood through a medical approach. On the other hand, "the social model" has also been dominant in interpreting disability. In recent years, "the interactive social model" has become a commonly used framework to understand disability. Further information on these models are as follows.

The **United Nations Convention on the Right of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** says that: "Person with disabilities 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".

(Article 1, United Nations Convention on the Right of Person with disabilities)

The **medical model** defines disability as an individual health problem, illness, or impairment. Social exclusion is seen as the result of limitations imposed by the impairments rather than barriers in the environment.

The **social model** defines disability as a consequence of environmental, social, economic, and attitudinal barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society. The social model differs from the medical model because people are viewed as being disabled by society rather than by their impairments.

In the **interactive social model**, disability is not considered as a characteristic of the person, but rather the result of interaction between the person and his/her environment. This is in line with the definition of the UNCRPD, which promotes the principle that all people must have equal opportunities to access and participate in society. Over last few decades, there has been a paradigm shift from charity based approach to human rights based approach.

Myanmar's 2015 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines 'Disability' as not being able to fully participate in the society due to physical, attitudinal, or any other form of barriers.

3.1

TYPES OF IMPAIRMENT

The 2015 Law defines a ‘person with disabilities’ as a person who has one or more long-term physical, visual, speech, hearing, psychosocial, intellectual or sensory impairments, whether innate or not. The method of assessment and categorization of types and level of disabilities is under discussion by the relevant Ministries in Myanmar, as of 2018.

3.2

IS AN HIV-POSITIVE PERSON A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY?

UNCRPD does not explicitly refer to HIV or AIDS in the definition of disability. However, governments are required to recognize that where persons living with HIV (asymptomatic or symptomatic) have disabilities which, in interaction with the environment, results in stigma, discrimination or other barriers to their participation, they can fall under the protection of the Convention. Governments should ensure that national legislation complies with this understanding of disability. Some countries, such as the USA, have accorded protection to people living with HIV under national disability legislation. Other countries have adopted separate anti-discrimination laws. In Myanmar the National AIDS Programme of the Ministry of Health and Sport was leading the drafting of a law protecting people with HIV from discrimination; however as of 2024, this had not been finalized.

4

DISABILITY AND THE LAW IN MYANMAR



In December 2011 Myanmar ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). In 2015, the Government enacted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the legal framework for compliance with the UN Convention. Chapter 10 covers “access to employment for persons with disabilities” and sets out obligations for employers.

The Law provides for the possible introduction of a requirement for companies to employ a quota (percentage) of persons with disabilities to be set by the National Committee, which was established in September 2017. Failure to meet the quota could result in fines, to be used for a fund for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Law also provides for the possibility of tax incentives if an employer employs more than the set quota of persons with disabilities. A quota for employment of persons with disabilities has not yet been set.

Bye-law/regulations under the Law were adopted in December 2017 by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. Under Section 2 of the Regulations, persons with disabilities can apply for registration with the Department of Rehabilitation of the Ministry of Social Welfare, at township/district level. This has been rolled out since 2022, and as of mid-2024, a pilot process for registration was underway in 14 townships, mainly in Naypyitaw, Yangon and Mandalay; just over 5,000 persons with disabilities had been registered. Chapter 8 of the bye-law provides specific provisions on promotion of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. It includes roles and responsibilities of the National Committee such as coordinating with government organisations, private businesses and related organisations; facilitating the establishment of specialized vocational training schools and inclusion of persons with disabilities in vocational trainings; facilitating job coach training programme, on the job training and skills development training.

The employer is required to report to the township labour offices quarterly on how many employees with disabilities have been employed in accordance with the quota to be set by the National Committee, as well as any vacant positions. They are also required to make necessary adjustments and adaptation to “**reasonably accommodate**” (see **Box 1** overleaf) persons with disabilities at workplaces. The chapter also includes a detailed process for how an employer who cannot meet the quota, should contribute a designated amount to a fund for protection of the rights of persons with disabilities’.

The 2020 Myanmar National Building Code includes provisions on accessibility under Section 2.7. The provisions include building and design specifications and construction facilities for accessibility

for persons with physical disabilities. Whether or not detailed regulations are put in place, the concept of “**Universal Design**” (see **Box 2** overleaf) is applicable to remove barriers for persons with disabilities. Those with a permanent disability are exempted from compulsory military service under the 2010 People’s Military Service Law which was brought into force in February 2024.

BOX 1 - REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS



UNCRPD defines “Reasonable accommodation” as “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

BOX 2 - UNIVERSAL DESIGN

UNCRPD defines “Universal design” as “the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”



5

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Discrimination can be direct or indirect:

- **Direct** discrimination occurs when one person is treated less favourably because of disability than another in a comparable situation.
- **Indirect** discrimination occurs when laws, policies, or practices which appear neutral at face value have a disproportionate negative impact on some individuals. For example, requiring a birth certificate for school enrolment may discriminate against ethnic minorities who do not possess, or have been denied, such certificates.

Discrimination is the cause of the challenges that persons with disabilities in Myanmar face concerning employment such as:

- access to, and poor quality of education;
- lack of capacity and confidence to look for a job;
- lack of information, technical assistance and transportation;
- negative attitudes of employers or co-workers;
- lack of accessible workplaces; and
- Inadequate training facilities or capacity-building programs or exclusion from existing training facilities or capacity-building programs.

The majority of difficulties faced by persons with disabilities are caused by other people's misunderstanding of their capabilities.



“Discrimination on the basis of disability” means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.”

- UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, UNCRPD

Examples of discrimination against persons with disabilities in the workplace:

- Places or buildings that do not have assistive features such as ramps, handrails, banisters or elevators.
- Prejudice based on the preconceived idea that persons with disabilities cannot work.
- Employment policies that exclude persons with disabilities from jobs that they are able to perform.
- Lack of accessible communication such as through a sign language interpreter or materials printed in braille.
- Offensive teasing and hostile remarks about a person's disability, which might result in an unfair treatment or decision concerning his/her employment such as demotion or layoffs.

5.1

DISCRIMINATION - SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

MA PA PA'S STORY (FEMALE, 23)

"I was infected with polio when I was 8 months old. It left me with a disability in my right leg. I can walk without assistance but it is difficult to run and walk for long periods of time. Although I was sometimes teased about my disability by my classmates, I never gave up trying to achieve my goal of being independent.

My parents supported my goal, and because of them, I could continue my education and graduated from university with B.A in English.

I wanted to work as a salesperson, for example in a supermarket or a shopping mall. But most of the shops require an applicant to be able-bodied, so they exclude persons with disabilities when they recruit. I applied many times for sales staff positions at different companies, but was never selected".



KO HTET HTET'S STORY (MALE, 30)

"My right leg has a disability due to polio. I use a crutch. I have difficulties in walking for long distances and carrying heavy items.

I applied for a job as an administrative assistant at a company. I was appointed when my direct supervisor was out of the office on a business trip. I was really happy and tried my best during the probation period. I completed all the assigned duties and followed office rules and other instructions.



My direct supervisor then came back after a few weeks. I was called by the Human Resources Manager and told that my employment agreement was cancelled. The Human Resource Manager said that my direct supervisor did not want to hire persons with disabilities because he assumed that persons with disabilities could not perform some duties such as delivery of items or visits to other companies and shops. I was shocked. I realised I had lost my job due to stereotypes about disability".

6

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Employing persons with disabilities can make good business sense. It can contribute to the bottom line in a number of ways:

- Independent studies provide evidence that persons with disability have a very positive work attitude and work ethos. Employers see employees who have a positive attitude in the workplace as being valuable to their business.
- Employees with disabilities can be just as productive as their peers, or even more so, providing they are appropriately matched to jobs, and their needs accommodated to enable them to work productively.
- Candidates with disability generally have very good problem-solving skills, as they have been challenged to find creative ways to perform tasks.
- Employees with disabilities have greater retention and higher attendance rates and better safety records than those without a disability. This reduces the costs of absenteeism and staff turnover, such as recruitment, hiring, and training.
- Employees with disabilities contribute to a more diverse workforce with increased morale and teamwork among all staff, who find working with persons with disabilities rewarding, which in turn improves the general work environment and productivity.
- Companies that hire employees with disabilities can strengthen their reputation and brand with their own staff, customers and the community. A 2006 study in the USA showed that 92% of consumers felt more favorably toward companies that hire employees with disabilities, and 87% said they would prefer to give their business to such companies.
- An employee with disability can help a business to develop marketing strategies to reach this growing sector of the market (and one which will grow faster if more persons with disabilities access jobs). According to WHO, 16 percent of populations have some type of disability and the rate of disability is increasing as the population ages. That is also 16 percent of populations as potential customers.



6.1

CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Some Myanmar companies and organisations have successfully incorporated inclusivity and diversity in their operations to enhance the employment of persons with disabilities. The following case studies show how they seek to do this. All but one were compiled during 2018, and some of the employees featured may no longer be at the companies.

KO MYINT HTUN OO'S STORY WITH BLUE OCEAN OPERATING MGMT. CO.

Myint Htun Oo is a Customer Service Representative at 1875 Call Centre, Blue Ocean Operating Management Co.

He is 23 years old and has a congenital malformations associated with short stature. He has worked in this position for nine months. His main duties are to answer inquiries from customers by phone; ascertain problems or reasons for the call; and search and provide appropriate information from a database.

"I am happy working here. I have been teased about my disability and called bad names by some of my colleagues, which made me sad. At the same time, I have a supervisor and colleagues who support me. For example, when I first started working with Blue Ocean Operating Management Co. I couldn't reach a fingerprint reader on the wall to record attendance but I was very hesitant to seek help. After a while, my supervisor noticed and raised the issue with HR to discuss the ways to solve this problem. In the end, my manager adjusted the height of the fingerprint reader within my reach.

I am also happy that the company organizes workshops on disability issues for all employees to learn how they can communicate and work together with persons with disabilities. Even though I have been treated unfairly in the past, I want to stay focused on my work and help my colleagues understand persons with disabilities have a lot to contribute just like anyone else. It's great that my company encourages me to participate in trainings and my colleagues give me feedback to improve my performance. I feel that my communication skills and computer literacy have become better since I started working here. I love my job and colleagues."

(Ko Myint Htun Oo, Customer Service Representative)



Myint Htun Oo, 23, has a congenital short stature. Myint Htun Oo works at Blue Ocean Call Centre.

“He is a fast learner and always willing to work hard. He is very bright and it didn’t take long to train him. It first came to my attention that 8 other employees with disabilities and Myint Htun Oo were facing difficulties clocking in and out on the fingerprint reader and so I decided to ask for a permission from the HR department to re-arrange the attendance system. The department quickly referred the issue to our IT department to talk about the technicality of installing appropriate accommodations.

In the end, they just lowered the fingerprint reader for every employee to reach. It did not cost at all. I was very happy that the HR and IT departments were supportive and cooperative to implement this kind of arrangement for our employees with disabilities. I am also very proud of Myint Htun Oo for attending many workshops. When he comes back, he shares his knowledge and information with his colleagues. This is helping our employees a lot to become educated on disability issues.”

(U Sony Than, Account Manager)



Myint Htun Oo (first on left) with his colleagues at Blue Ocean Call Centre.

“I am committed to building a culture of inclusivity and equality in my company. We organize town hall meetings on a monthly basis to talk about our corporate values and I often tell my staff that we are family. Family takes care of one another. It doesn’t matter if you have disabilities or not. It doesn’t matter if you need additional assistance to accommodate your special needs. We work together to help each other.

When we first started hiring persons with disabilities, it was one of our strategies to combat our high turnover rate. And now we have a quota policy to hire 3 percent of persons with disabilities in our company. They are more loyal and patient than persons without disabilities because they face problems on day-to-day basis. This is also why they perform so well in customer service.

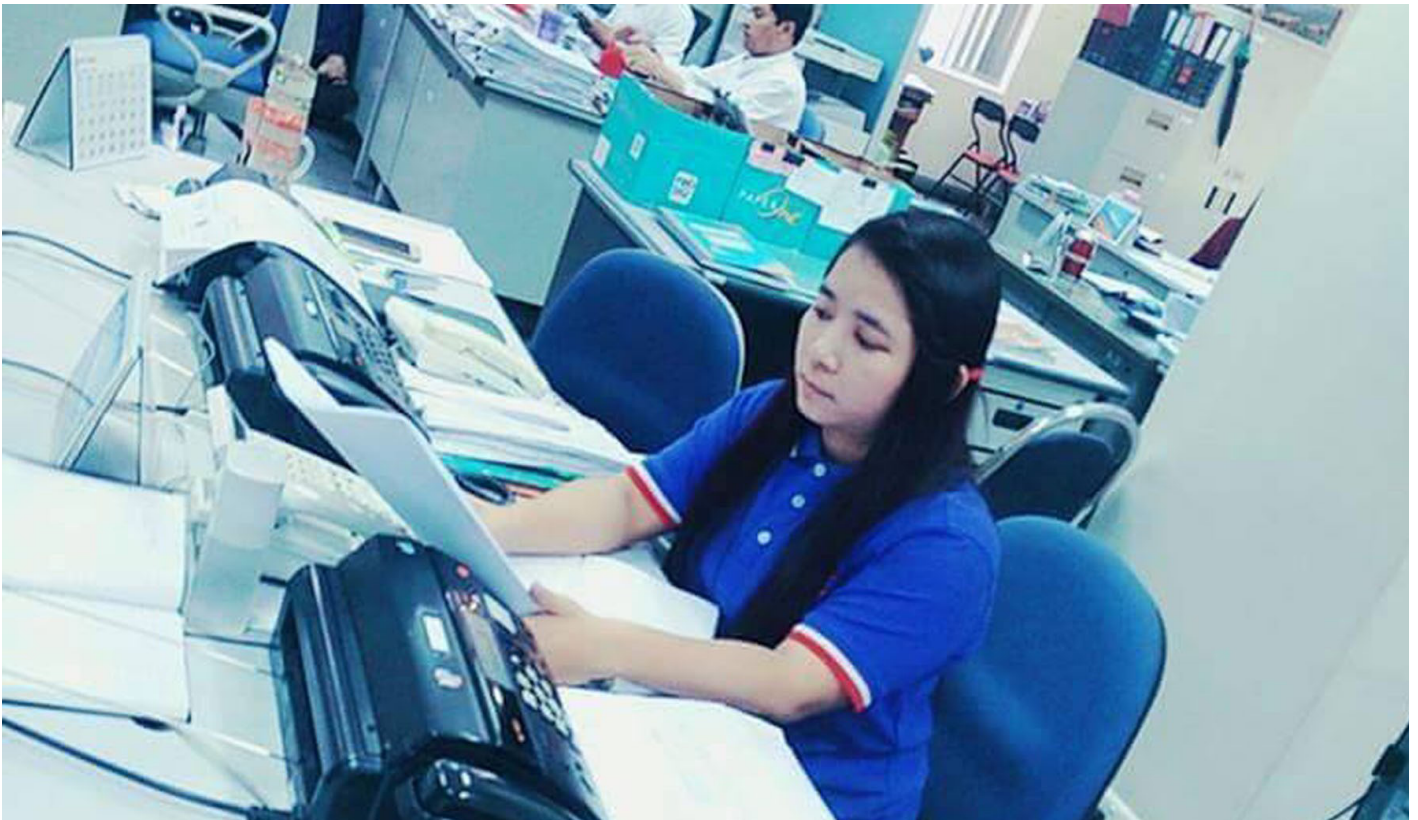
I once had a visually impaired staff member who worked in quality control. He could pay attention to every detail of every call to ensure quality of our telecommunication service. It is the company's responsibility to create equal job opportunities and to take care of its staff. We don't have to wait for laws to decide what's right and what's important."

(U Htun Htun Naing, Chairman and CEO)

MA KHIN NILAR WIN'S STORY WITH KANBAWZA BANK (KBZ BANK)

Khin Nilar Win is a Junior Assistant in Administration Department at KBZ Bank Limited, Kamayut Branch. She is 28 years old and has difficulties in walking due to polio.

She has worked in this position for a year and a half. Her main duties are sorting incoming/outgoing letters, answering phone calls to take messages and redirecting the calls to her colleagues.



Khin Nilar Win, 28, has difficulties in walking due to polio. Khin Nilar Win works at KBZ Bank.

“I like my work-land feel accepted because my supervisor gives me fair and just evaluation on my performance, disregarding my disability. I feel good working at the bank also because I have not been discriminated against by my colleagues”.

(Ma Khin Nilar Win, Junior Assistant)

“Khin Nilar Win is a loyal and respectful person. We recruited her because she has impeccable communication skills and self-discipline acquired from her past two years’ experience as a customer service representative at her previous job.”

(Ko Aung Kyaw Soe, Senior General Manger, and Ko Ye Win, Assistant Manager).



Khin Nilar Win (right, sitting on a chair) with her colleagues at KBZ Bank (Head Office).

“KBZ Bank has 12 employees with disabilities. One employee has hearing difficulties and other have mobility difficulties. They work either at branch bank, HR department, ICT/Call center, finance, loan, admin, or board of director’s office. We first started employing persons with disabilities in July 2016 as one of corporate strategies to promote diversity in the workplace. To further enhance the institutional culture of diversity, we incorporated disability awareness in the staff development package. We have seen that these employees with disabilities are loyal and hard-working. Currently, KBZ Bank does not have a quota policy on the employment of persons with disabilities. However, we would like to hire more persons with disabilities for further corporate diversity.”

(Daw Yu Wai Maung, Head of CSR Department and Mr. Devanandan Batumalai, Head of Learning and Development, Human Resources).

KO THET PAING SOE'S STORY WITH SULE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

Thet Paing Soe who is 29 has been a Service Associate in the Laundry Department of the Sule Shangri-La Hotel in Yangon since 2014. He has difficulty in hearing speech. His duties are washing, drying, and ironing clothes and linens.



Thet Paing Soe, 29, has difficulties in hearing and speech. Thet Paing Soe works in the Laundry Department of the Sule Shangri-La Hotel.

"I felt very nervous at first because I can only communicate in sign language or in writing. However, I am now very happy working at Sule Shangri-La Hotel because they value my contribution and also I've made some friends. They also support me to perform my duties better. Even at a job interview, they arranged a volunteer translator who could sign and speak. My manager arranges regular consultations with me and the volunteer translator on a monthly basis to talk about concerns I might have at work and various solutions to these challenges.

Before I started working at the hotel, I sold chewing tobacco, worked as a mushroom farmer, and a waiter at a restaurant. However, I could not earn enough money to support my mother. Now I feel very proud of myself that I can support her while saving some money for my future. I would like continue working at the hotel for another six or seven years."

(Ko Thet Paing Soe, Service Associate)

“Thet Paing Soe works better if we give him one assignment at a time so that he can concentrate on a single task. Communication is always a challenge but we talk in writing. When he first started, he was a little worried about using machines for ironing. But very quickly, he learned all functions in almost all sections in the laundry department including the washing, drying, and ironing sections. He seems to have very consistent concentration and never wastes time when completing his duties. This makes him more productive than other staff. I find him very dutiful, and one of the strongest staff members we have.”

(U Aung Hein, Laundry Manager)



Thet Paing Soe (the fifth person from the right) was invited on the stage by Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for MSWRR at the 12th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on 17 October 2017.

“Sule Shangri-La Hotel employs ten persons with disabilities. Of these, six are persons with hearing difficulty and the rest have difficult with mobility. When we first started hiring persons with disabilities we sought advice and arranged a series of consultations with Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs).

It took a while to find ways to promote constructive cooperation and smooth communication between staff without disabilities and staff with disabilities. To enhance understanding on disability issues among our staff we incorporated disability awareness trainings into our orientation package for new staff. Now our employees with disabilities work in different departments depending on their capacities.

One of the employees with mobility difficulty can speak sign language and works in the HR

department to ensure the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities. This is good for our company because he is aware of issues that persons without disabilities might be oblivious to. There are only advantages to have employees with disabilities in the service industry where customers might have various needs to be accommodated. When you are always working with colleagues with disabilities, you become aware of how you can engage with persons with disabilities and our customers with disabilities to try to solve issues they might face. In 2012 we set a hiring target of 2% persons with disabilities of its permanent staff for all Shangri-La Hotels. Shangri-La Hotels plan to hire more persons with disabilities in future."

(U Jimmy Phyo Min Thein, Assistant HR Director)

KO KYAW ZIN LATT'S STORY WITH MYANMAR APEX BANK (MAB)

Kyaw Zin Latt started working in Call Center of Myanmar Apex Bank in Yangon in 2014 and now works as a Senior Assistant. He is 31 years old, and is a below-knee amputee due to a car accident. He wears a prosthetic leg. His duties include receiving and responding to customers' calls, and supporting and training Junior Assistants. There are 32 staffs in the Call Center, out of which 16 have disabilities.



Kyaw Zin Latt, 31, has a below-knee amputation due to a car accident. Kyaw Zin Latt works at MAB Call Centre.

"When a local NGO, *Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI)*, first told me about the vacancies at the MAB, I decided to apply because I've always been interested in working at a bank.

The company was just starting to employ persons with disabilities and there were three other newly employed persons with disabilities when I got a job. I worked hard to familiarize myself with assigned tasks and my supervisors were usually very helpful in assisting me. I've never faced any outright discrimination at work but when some colleagues were giving me a stare or a judgmental look on my disability I felt uncomfortable. It was their first time to see staff with disabilities in their workplace.

Another challenge was I myself did not know how to communicate with other persons with disabilities because I couldn't convey my feelings and difficulties I face. Likewise I did not know how I could seek advice and information from others. This is why I regularly participated in open conversation sessions that the company organized to share my feelings, ideas, and suggestions to solve problems with my fellow colleagues with disabilities as

well as my supervisors. Through this, I gradually became more aware of disability issues in my workplace and active in detecting and resolving problems for persons with disabilities. Solutions are usually very simple. For example, office chairs should be replaced by adjustable chairs for employees with mobility difficulty to work more comfortably at his/her desk. I am also happy that I am given training opportunities to attend lectures by professionals such as Ms. Tin Moe Lwin to learn new skills and knowledge to engage with my duties better. I became more confident about communication and problem solving skills. I would like to continue my work for some more years and make my career at MAB."

(Ko Kyaw Zin Latt, Senior Assistant)



Kyaw Zin Latt (the tall man in the middle) with Call Centre Team at Myanmar Apex Bank.

"The employment of persons with disabilities was initiated by our corporate leadership after we received request from MILL. This prompted us to thoroughly incorporate the concept of "equality" in our operation and management, which meant giving equal employment opportunities to persons with disabilities. We had to get ourselves prepared to welcome persons with disabilities by identifying specific tasks that they can be productive doing.

For example, we ruled out certain positions that required standing for long hours and carrying heavy items. This was very important because persons with disabilities have capacity to work when given proper training and necessary arrangements. We decided that the Call Centre, IT and admin department would be the best fit for persons with disabilities to work.

Kyaw Zin Latt was one of the first staff members with disabilities we hired but there are 22 employees with disabilities now. (16 at the Call Centre, 2 in IT and 4 in admin department). In order to make our working environment inclusive, we hold open conversation sessions with all staff members in

the Call Centre every month. This face-to-face communication works very well to promote mutual understanding on problems and challenges at stake and to build strong teamwork. We usually communicate issues discussed to our Managing Director to implement a timely and effective response.

Employees with disabilities work very hard to improve their performance. During the training period for example, staff with disabilities practiced typing more than their colleagues without disabilities. Even though we currently do not have a quota system or target percentage to employ persons with disabilities we want to continue striving to provide an equal and inclusive workplace for all staff members.”

(Daw Win Thu Mon, Call Centre Manager, Supervisor)

KO KAUNG HTET NAING’S STORY WITH NOVOTEL YANGON MAX

Kaung Htet Naing has an intellectual disability. He works as a Commis II assistant in the Main Kitchen at Novotel Yangon Max, part of Accor Group. In April 2017, he was nominated as Employee of the Month for Main Kitchen by Novotel Hotel. In addition, he is the goal keeper of a football team for persons with intellectual disabilities and has competed in matches in three countries as a representative of Myanmar.



Kaung Htet Naing, 26, works in the Main Kitchen, Novotel Yangon Max.

“My name is Kaung Htet Naing and I am 26 years old. I have been working here as an assistant at the main kitchen since 2015. My main duties are making sandwiches, and salads. Sometimes I assist in creating the buffet display at the restaurant. I really enjoy working here and now I have many friends. I am going to work here for many years and I have a dream to work as a chef trainer

in the future. (Ko Kaung Htet Naing, Commis-II Kitchen Assistant, Main Kitchen, Novotel Yangon Max)

Ko Ya Naung Tun, one of Kaung Htet Naing's supervisors, said "There are two persons with a hearing disability and three persons with an intellectual disability working in our main kitchen. We aim to build a strong relationship with them by creating a workplace that will make them comfortable. Most importantly, we need to be patient and understand their needs. From the beginning, all staff received disability awareness and communication training from a master trainer from Accor Management which included topics on how to communicate with persons with different types of disabilities. I believe this is one reason why we did not face any challenges in working with our fellow co-workers with disabilities.

Our staff with disabilities concentrate very well on their jobs, and they are detail-oriented and hard-working. They can produce the same output as other workers now, and there is no discrimination against them. Our hotel has three shifts: morning, evening and night. We assign them to work during the normal office hours shift i.e. from 9 am to 5 pm. Kaung Htet Naing is able to come to work by himself. We now rely on him and he contributes a lot to us. I often tell the other staff to support and encourage our colleagues with disabilities as much as possible. Persons with disability are dutiful workers. I believe that employers gain benefits by employing them. So it will be beneficial for both sides for more employers to start considering employing persons with disabilities."

(Ko Ya Naung Tun, Supervisor, Main Kitchen)



Kaung Htet Naing, preparing vegetable salad for the guests.

Mr. Eugene Yeo, Director of Sales and Marketing Department comments: “We employ 11 persons with disabilities, with the support of Shwe Min Thar Foundation, a Disabled People’s Organization. Three of them have physical disabilities, three staff have intellectual disabilities, and the other five have hearing disabilities. Before they started their employment with us, we considered suitable positions and the right tasks for them, by discussing with relevant departmental supervisors and managers. Furthermore, our master trainer explained how we should include diversity and non-discrimination in every discussion and orientation at the hotel.

Since 2013, Accor Management has a policy to employ persons with disabilities at the level of 2 % of total number of permanent staff. In line with this, we will employ more persons with disabilities in the future. I would like to encourage employers to work with people from diverse backgrounds, as it helps us to have different perspectives.

(Mr. Eugene Yeo, Director, Sales and Marketing Department)

KO NAING NAING HTWE’S STORY WITH THE UNION

Naing Naing Htwe has volunteered for two years at the HIV Prevention Program at The Union in Mandalay, a branch of the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, an international non-government organization.

He is 55 years old and was born with a short right leg, numbness in his ankle and with feet inverted and smaller than normal. His right hand has deformities with the wrist bent inward, and small fingers. He is able to walk unaided with a crutch. After acquiring HIV in 2005, Naing Naing Htwe is taking Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) and maintains good health and is able to work. His main duties are providing education and counselling services for initiation and treatment adherence.



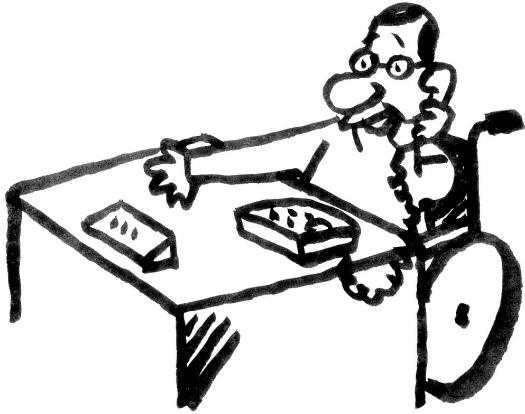
“My workplace is fun. The medical doctors and colleagues at the workplace work together and give warm love. I am also a member of the Tri-Star self-help group which is affiliated with Myanmar Positive Group (MPG), and was elected as the representative of people with disabilities living with HIV. I joined the Board of Representatives of MPG in April 2024. When I attend meetings with MPG, we offer each other peer to peer support, and they take care of my needs. I have not experienced any negative reaction due to my HIV status or my disability. The doctors, staff and colleagues from The Union also treat me warmly as they do others, and we have good collaboration.

I would like to thank The Union for employing people with disabilities because there are few opportunities in Myanmar. Since I got this job, my knowledge about anti-retroviral drugs and treatment and the quality of counselling has increased. I wish other organizations and entrepreneurs would consider taking on employees with special needs, and giving them to work without any discrimination based on their disability or HIV status, just as I have been able to do. Managers need to encourage all employees to work together, and focus on our ability, not our disability, as that is what will open up employment opportunities for persons with disability. Now that I have joined MPG's board as a representative of people with disabilities living with HIV, I will try to advocate the difficulties faced by my communities and try best to help them.”



6.2

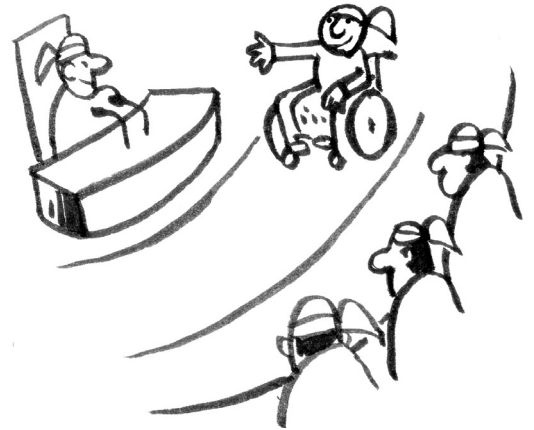
WHAT DO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE WORKPLACE?



Employees with disabilities should be offered what is known as ‘a reasonable accommodation’ (see Box 1 on page 14), or just ‘an accommodation’.

This is (usually) nothing to do with their housing. It is any change or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that would ensure a person with disability apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals in the workplace. Accommodations have accurately been described as “productivity enhancers” and come in many shapes and forms.

Installing ramps, handrails or elevators in buildings to give persons with disabilities barrier-free mobility or modifying a workspace allows physical accessibility for persons with disabilities at the workplace. The 2016 draft Myanmar National Building Code provides guidance on accessibility including building specifications and signage. In addition, overleaf are examples of ‘reasonable accommodation’ which can enable employees with disabilities to enjoy or exercise their rights on equal basis with other employees.



The Job Accommodation Network (www.askjan.org) is an online resource that can suggest ‘accommodations’ for different types of disability.

ACCESSIBLE AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

- Ensuring application software is accessible, e.g. online application systems
- Providing screen reader software. Screen readers are software programs that allow persons with seeing difficulty to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display. (As of early 2018, screen readers are not available in Myanmar Language but this is under development.)
- Utilizing videophones to facilitate communications with colleagues who have hearing difficulty



ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS

- Providing sign language interpreters or closed captioning at meetings and events
- Making materials available in braille or large print

POLICY ENHANCEMENTS

- Modifying a policy to allow a caregiver or service animal (e.g. guide dog) in a business setting
- Adjusting work schedules to allow employees with chronic medical issues to go to medical appointments and complete their work at alternate times or locations
- Including non-discrimination and equal treatment policies in selection/promotion process, and providing equal training opportunities.
- Creating policy frameworks to prevent hateful remarks and teasing about a person's disability and to encourage corporate culture to promote understanding on disability and diversity in the workplace.

6.3

HOW MUCH DOES A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION COST?

Although businesses and line managers are often concerned that 'reasonable accommodations' could be costly, studies show that costs associated with workers with disabilities were minimal, and in many cases, such as a shift change, cost nothing. Usually they were worth the expense when compared with positive benefits such as increased retention rates and employee motivation.

6.4

WHAT ARE APPROPRIATE TASKS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISABILITY?



Each person with a disability is an individual with particular capacities which need to be understood. However, some tasks may be more suitable for certain difficulty. For example, tasks which do not require frequent movement from place to place would be more suitable for those with difficulty in seeing or physical mobility.

For persons with intellectual difficulty, less complex tasks that can be performed without decision-making skills. Working hours and likely overtime or shift work requirements should also be considered. Employers should discuss the employee's needs with them and identify the necessary 'accommodation', for example a change to the working environment; assistive equipment including software; or workplace training to accommodate their various needs.

6.5

HOW CAN OUR COMPANY RECRUIT AND RETAIN PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?

All staff have a role in promoting employment of persons with disabilities. But it is essential that senior leadership set the tone for the whole organisation to ensure that the benefits of employing persons with disabilities are understood, and that appropriate measures are taken to accommodate their needs.

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt and communicate the company's policy and strategy for promoting employment of persons with disabilities • Ensure voices of employees with disabilities are reflected.
HUMAN RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise and deliver the policy and strategy for promoting employment of persons with disabilities • Ensure recruitment practices do not discriminate directly or indirectly • Educate other staff on employment of persons with disabilities and non-discrimination • Ensure legal requirements are understood and complied with • Include employees with disabilities as a staff member in the department.
LINE MANAGERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide induction and on the job training for persons with disabilities • Manage the persons with disabilities • Address any needs for reasonable accommodation • Appoint employees with disabilities as a manager
EMPLOYEE WITH DISABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform the allocated tasks • Communicate to managers any requirements for 'reasonable accommodation'
CO-WORKERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and include co-worker with disability
PROCUREMENT MANAGERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether supplies can be procured from persons with disabilities-led enterprises. • This could include sourcing corporate gifts from disability social enterprises, which will both provide income for persons with disabilities and demonstrate that the company is disability-friendly

There should also be employees with disabilities in corporate leadership, human resources, and management to promote inclusivity on all levels in the workplace. These people often identify problems in various aspects of operation that others might overlook.

Ongoing communication between the employee, managers and their co-workers is vital: line management in each department, and human resources staff should maintain effective lines of communication about assistance to persons with disabilities, especially supporting new employees with disabilities.

FOUR STEPS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

PLAN

- Make a corporate leadership commitment to being a disability-inclusive business. Ensure corporate policies, procedures and practices specifically mention the word "disability".
- Make guidelines on recruitment, selection, reasonable accommodation, communication and non-discriminatory treatment of employees with disabilities.
- Establish a detection and reporting mechanism in case of discrimination on grounds of disability at work.
- Stay up to date on legislative requirements concerning disability.
- Ensure that the hiring of persons with disabilities is part of a company's overall hiring plan, and this is endorsed by company leadership and communicated to all employees and externally.
- Build links with organisations led by or working with persons with disabilities, including vocational training courses and schools, and social enterprises and consider partnerships with them, including potential for procurement.

PREPARE

- Consult with employees with disabilities, DPOs or any entities specialized in disabilities about the accessibility of the working environment for persons with different types of disability (e.g. tasks, training, working environment such as barriers, shifts).
- Learn more about options for 'reasonable accommodation' with DPOs, and make use of toolkits and online resources (e.g. www.askjan.org).
- Arrange general awareness raising activities about persons with disabilities for the managers and staff.

RECRUIT

- Indicate in job announcements that qualified individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply and that reasonable accommodations will be provided.
- Seek assistance from DPOs specialized in various disabilities to ensure the recruitment announcement is accessed by potential employees with disabilities and to secure a pool of qualified candidates with disabilities.
- Ensure that reasonable accommodations are offered and available for the interview process. This could include:
 - » Inviting a sign language interpreter for persons with hearing difficulties or who have significant difficulty in speech.

-
- » An accessible meeting or interview location for persons with mobility difficulty.
 - » Using email, texting, or a telephone relay operator rather than direct phone communication for persons with difficulty in hearing or speech.
 - » A technology device or modification for a person with a difficulty in hearing or seeing.
 - » A counselor or representative for the candidate asking to be contacted in advance or requesting to go on the interview with the candidate.
 - » A schedule adjustment or a flexible workplace.
- Train the interview panel to conduct the interview in a confident and non-discriminatory manner.
 - Train the future line managers on how to communicate with employees with disabilities, how to provide an inclusive work environment and how to detect problems.
 - Identify with the successful candidate - or any caregivers or mentors they identify that they will need the reasonable accommodations to tasks, schedules or the working environment, and put this in place.
 - Arrange further awareness-raising about persons with disabilities for staff in the host department.
 - Retain and review applications from applicants with disabilities when future openings occur.
 - Start an internship programme specifically for persons with disabilities (ensuring the necessary support is in place for interns as for full employees). A 2013 study showed that existence of a disability-focussed internship scheme is the single most important factor in increasing the likelihood of employing persons with disabilities.

RETAIN

- Conduct regular consultations with employees with disabilities to review their performance, identify any operational issues and barriers, career development, and training possibilities.
- Ensure that both the line manager and HR communicate with the employee to address any remaining barriers and problems
- Adapt workplace accommodations if necessary
- Modify or simplify tasks to enable maximum productivity of employees with disabilities in consultation with the employee's direct supervisor if necessary.
- Ensure workplace professional and social events are accessible to employees with disabilities.
- Hold supervisors accountable for implementing management practices that support diversity including employees with disabilities.
- Encourage all employees to have equal access to opportunities for career development e.g. conferences, training, and rotational assignments. This might involve:
 - » ensuring that all online professional development classes and materials are fully accessible;
 - » reserving a portion of employee training funds to provide disability related accommodations for training opportunities;

-
- » offering specialized leadership programs for employees with disabilities similar to existing leadership programs for other traditionally underrepresented groups.
 - Ensure existing and new co-workers continue to be trained on how to welcome workers with disabilities.
 - Ensure there is a contact point in Human Resources for questions that managers, employees with disabilities and their co-workers may have regarding working with employees with disabilities.
 - Establish a disability support group of employees with disabilities who can meet to discuss disability employment issues and make recommendations to management.

6.6

DISABILITY INCLUSION IN EMPLOYMENT CHECKLIST

This checklist serves as a self-evaluation or baseline assessment tool to examine the extent to which a company's operation and management are inclusive of persons with disabilities.

- Does your company have a code of ethics, corporate principles, or policies which includes non-discrimination concerning persons with disabilities?
- Does your company have a self-established target percentage/number for the employment of persons with disabilities?
- Does your company know where and how to find/recruit persons with disabilities?
- Does your company actively look to attract and recruit persons with disabilities?
- Does your company provide a fully inclusive and accessible recruitment process?
- Does your company carry out reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities when necessary?
- Does your company carry out training or workshop for the staff to become aware of disability issues in the work environment?
- Does your company ensure that persons with disabilities are treated equally with others in their employment including providing opportunities for development and progress of employees with disabilities?
- Does your company have detection and reporting mechanism in case of discrimination on grounds of disability at work?
- Does your company consider accessibility when building, purchasing or renting new facilities?
- Does your company review all rules and regulations governing employment, job retention and return to work on a periodic basis to ensure that they do not contain elements of discrimination against persons with disabilities?

7

HOW SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE ABOUT DISABILITY?

Good communication and etiquette is vital in developing relationships with customers with/without disabilities and employees alike:

- Use a normal tone of voice when greeting someone.
- Treat adults as adults. Address a person with disabilities by their first name only if you are addressing everyone with the same familiarity
- When introduced to a person with disabilities, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands.
- Speak directly to a person with disabilities, even if accompanied by an interpreter or assistant.
- Use "People First" language such as "person who is blind" instead of "the blind person".
- Don't impolitely ask questions about a person's disability (e.g. "what happened to you?") unless it is brought up by the individual.
- Do not attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are speaking to.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- Be patient and listen attentively.
- If in doubt, ask yourself how you would want to be treated. Always be willing to adapt to someone's individual preference.

7.1

COMMUNICATION AT RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEW STAGE

Given the importance of the job interview, it is important that those on the interview panel, particularly the line manager, are trained to ask questions about disability in an appropriate way and feel comfortable doing so.

WHAT TO ASK OR SAY	WHAT NOT TO ASK OR SAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you perform the job with or without an accommodation?• Can you tell me why you feel you are a good fit for this position?• Can you describe how the accommodation requested would assist you in accomplishing the task?• (If medical exams are required of all employees). If offered the position, you will be required to complete a medical exam. Job offers are contingent upon passing this exam.• Let me tell you about our work culture and ask you about your work style.• These are the essential functions of the job as explained in the job description. Tell me more about how you would perform these functions.• While the job task is typically performed this way, tell me more about how you could accomplish it with the accommodation you mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will you need an accommodation to perform this job?• Can you tell me about your disability?• How much will that accommodation cost?• We are concerned about our liability and safety issues if we hire you.• We don't know if you will fit in with our work culture.• This is the way the job needs to be done and cannot be modified.• Employees are used to getting this done a certain way and I don't think they would accept the accommodations you requested.

7.2

USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

These are some examples of terms commonly accepted by organisations working for and with people with disabilities. Don't let this put you off from communicating. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

WHAT TO USE	WHAT NOT TO USE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have a disability e.g. persons with seeing difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To suffer disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with hearing difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deaf-mute
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with physical disability, or person with a disability or, if appropriate, a person with a mobility difficulty Persons with reduced mobility (PRM is mainly used when talking about transport) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cripple Invalid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wheelchair User 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair-bound
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with psychosocial disability Persons with a mental health condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental Mental patient Schizophrenic Lunatic Psycho
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with Down's Syndrome Persons with cerebral palsy Persons with brain damage Persons with autism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handicapped person Mentally handicapped Subnormal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with intellectual disability, a person with a learning disability or difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons of short stature, or people of restricted growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Midget or dwarf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seizures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fits, spells, attacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-disabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able-bodied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-visible disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hidden disabilities



Soe Thiha Soe, 23, was born with a disability of the arm. Soe Thiha Soe prepares a presentation to a client, promoting advertising products that his company produces.

Myanmar Centre for
Responsible Business



[E. info@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org](mailto:info@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org)
www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org
www.mcrb.org.uk

Further resources about disability inclusion, and other information about responsible business, are available from the Myanmar Sustainable Business Network
www.myanmarsbn.org