

Case studies of inclusive employment projects for persons with disabilities

Lessons learned from JICA projects

Summary report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Advancing the social model of disability

An estimated **1.3 billion people**—about 16% of the global population—live with disabilities, and nearly 80% reside in low- and middle-income countries. Despite growing awareness and stronger policy commitments, the **employment rate for persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than for those without disabilities**, with little progress over the past decade. Promoting their employment is therefore vital to expand opportunities and advance human rights, economic development and social inclusion, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals and Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Since the 1980s, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has supported efforts to promote the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities through its technical cooperation in the field of disability and development. Early initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s focused mainly on rehabilitation and training. From the 2000s onward, JICA's approach shifted from the earlier "readiness model", based on the individual or medical view of disability, to the "**supported employment model**", grounded in the social model of disability. This transition broadened the focus from vocational training to **building inclusive employment systems**.

A turning point was the Malaysia project (2004–2008), which introduced **job coaching and supported employment** in a low- and middle-income country context. Lessons from Malaysia informed later cooperation in Jordan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and other countries, often linked with administrative reforms and stronger coordination among ministries.

JICA's comparative strength lies in **operationalising the social model of disability**, linking legal and policy dialogue with capacity development and practical mechanisms such as supported employment and job coaching. Through this approach JICA has moved beyond fragmented, project-based assistance toward institutionalised and sustainable systems for inclusive employment. Drawing on this experience, this report examines the evolution of JICA's initiatives and the results achieved, identifying lessons to inform future cooperation in inclusive employment.

1.2 Scope and purpose of the study

JICA undertook this study to review the achievements and challenges of its recent inclusive employment projects, which had previously been documented only in separate reports. This study therefore consolidates evidence from projects implemented since 2004, examining their results, the socio-economic and legal contexts of partner countries, and the lessons

emerging from their approaches. Its aim is to clarify Japan's distinct strengths and accumulated experience in promoting inclusive employment and to develop recommendations for future project design and cooperation.

The report is intended as a practical reference for both specialists and general readers—JICA staff, government counterparts, development partners and OPDs—providing concise insights into achievements, lessons and implications for policy and practice.

1.3 Study overview

The study was conducted from December 2024 to November 2025 and covered four countries—Malaysia, Jordan, Mongolia and Sri Lanka. One field visit was undertaken in each country, typically lasting about five days and including interviews with a wide range of stakeholders.

Participants included government officials, employers, employees with disabilities, NGOs, OPDs, vocational training institutes and JICA experts. Together, their perspectives provided a broad view of how employment support systems function in practice.

The study focused on legal and policy frameworks, project design and results, sustainability, enabling and hindering factors, and Japan's distinctive strengths in inclusive employment. These parameters ensured that the analysis captured both operational experience and the systemic conditions influencing project outcomes.

1.4 Countries and projects

The study reviews six projects that were implemented between 2004 and 2025 across four countries, tracing the evolution of JICA's support for inclusive employment—from early pilot initiatives to nationwide institutionalisation. The focus and scope of JICA's cooperation in each country were as follows:

- **Malaysia (2004–2015):** capacity-building with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, introducing the job coach system and marking the shift toward supported employment.
- **Jordan (2017–2020):** establishment of a job coach service system through dual approaches (NGO-affiliated and company-based job coaches) with capacity-building of the Ministry of Labour.
- **Mongolia (2021–2025):** establishment of a national job coach system in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

- **Sri Lanka (2021–2025):** strengthening interministerial linkages between labour and social welfare under the Department of Social Services.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate JICA's increasing focus on system-level reform and sustainability in inclusive employment.

1.5 Methodology and analytical framework

The study applied a case study approach to address three core questions:

- (a) How were the projects implemented?
- (b) How and in what way did the projects generate the results?
- (c) To what extent can these results be transferred or adapted to other contexts, including different countries, regions and target groups?

For questions (a) and (b), an attempt was made, to clarify the achievements and challenges of each case from multiple perspectives, referring to the three analytical dimensions of process evaluation below:

- **Implementation:** how activities were carried out and what was delivered.
- **Mechanisms:** how interventions produced outcomes.
- **Contextual factors:** how institutional, cultural and socio-economic conditions shaped results.

Data sources included a document review of project reports, legal and policy frameworks, statistics and academic literature; interviews with Japanese experts and JICA staff; and field research conducted in all four countries through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and workplace observations.

Triangulating these sources enabled the study to identify achievements, challenges and the enabling and hindering factors that shaped project results, thereby generating evidence-based lessons for future cooperation.

1.6 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. Fieldwork in each country visit lasted about one week, which limited opportunities for follow-up and rescheduling of cancelled meetings. Most respondents were directly involved in the projects, creating possible sample bias, and there was limited representation of persons with psychosocial or severe intellectual disabilities, rural populations and minority groups.

Beneficiary data were also limited. Systems for identifying and selecting supported persons were often unclear, and national disability employment statistics remain weak. In some countries, particularly where many years had passed since project completion, staff turnover and recall gaps further constrained evidence. The analysis also covered only a small number of countries, limiting the generalisability of findings.

To mitigate these challenges, the study triangulated multiple data sources, systematically documented contextual factors, and sought both internal and external review of findings to enhance their reliability and validity.

2. Case studies

2.1 Malaysia – Job coaching as a system for inclusive employment



Context

In 2004, Malaysia's unemployment was low (3.5%) and the government was reducing reliance on foreign workers, increasing pressure on firms to hire domestically. Yet persons with disabilities were largely excluded from the labour market. Registered employment data showed limited private-sector hiring, and the large number of unregistered persons with disabilities suggested structural under-participation. Employment support for those with visual, hearing, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities was minimal outside NGO initiatives. A 1% hiring quota was applied to the public sector, but private companies faced no such obligation – only incentives such as wage subsidies and tax relief. JICA identified job transition and workplace retention as weak points and chose to **strengthen the Department of Social Welfare** as the strategic entry point.

The project and its objectives

The project's overall aim was to **promote employment and social participation of persons with disabilities**, while its specific objective was to embed a sustainable supported employment/job coach system within national structures.

From 2004 to 2015, JICA supported Malaysia through a three-phase initiative shifting from traditional readiness models to **supported employment** anchored in job coaching:

Phase 1 (2004–2008) introduced job coaching and Disability Equality Training,¹ developing manuals and initial networks.

Phase 2 (2009–2012) focused on institutionalisation. The Department of Social Welfare launched the Job Coach Service Programme with a dedicated budget, established a Job Coach Unit, and developed structured training modules.

Phase 3 (2012–2015) scaled nationally, leveraging community-based rehabilitation staff as job coaches and introducing a structured four-step process for nationwide rollout.

¹ Disability Equality Training is participatory training led by persons with disabilities to promote understanding of the social model of disability and foster attitude and behaviour change toward equality and inclusion.

The project thus applied a phased approach—first introducing job coaches and tools such as Disability Equality Training, then institutionalising support through a public subsidy scheme (the Job Coach Service Programme), and finally scaling nationwide by training community-based rehabilitation staff as job coaches under the Department of Social Welfare.

Results

Among JICA's four inclusive employment projects, Malaysia achieved the most comprehensive institutionalisation of job coaching, evolving through years of collaboration into a fully integrated national system. Over the three project phases (2004–2015), **595 persons with disabilities secured employment** through job coach support. After the project ended, the Job Coach Service Programme continued nationally, producing sustained outcomes: between 2012 and 2024, a total of **1774 persons with disabilities obtained jobs**, of which 1343 placements occurred between 2016 and 2024 across a wide range of disability groups. **Retention was strikingly high:** a follow-up of Phase 2 placements—particularly those facilitated through NGOs and community-based rehabilitation centres—recorded an impressive **six-month retention rate of 99%**, underlining the stability of supported employment.

Qualitative feedback pointed to increased income, regained confidence, contribution to household income and enhanced wellbeing for persons with disabilities. Families reported greater reassurance, and some family members previously engaged in caregiving were able to take up employment. Employers, impressed by reliability and work ethic, sometimes hired more persons with disabilities as a result. Patterns show **persons with learning disabilities accounted for around 40% of placements**² reflecting the project's early strategic focus, while the consistent **2:1 male-to-female ratio** highlighted ongoing gender disparities in access to employment.

Contributing factors

Five key factors explain the project's achievements.

Institutionalisation of the Job Coach Service Programme. In Phase 1, the Department of Social Welfare secured funding and launched the programme. In Phase 2, it established a Job Coach Unit, and job coaching gained policy recognition in the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities 2007–2012 and the 2025 National Policy on Inclusive Employment and Workplace Management for Persons with Disabilities, ensuring sustainability.

Nationwide rollout. Phase 2 expanded services beyond major cities through a four-step process combining Disability Equality Training and supported employment seminars, job

² The Department of Social Welfare (Malaysia) classifies persons with disabilities into seven categories, with "intellectual disabilities" included under "learning disabilities".

coach training, Job Coach Service Programme-supported employment, and monitoring and evaluation. Targets for partnerships with NGOs, community-based rehabilitation centres, and companies enhanced uptake. A total of 437 persons with disabilities gained employment nationwide during Phase 2, although regional disparities remained.

Human resource development. A total of 1722 job coaches, 35 trainers, and eight senior trainers were trained during the project, and training continued thereafter (an additional 863 were trained from 2016–2024). Community-based rehabilitation staff were central to national expansion. Recognising that corporate engagement is essential for promoting mainstream employment, the project collaborated with companies not merely as service recipients but as implementing partners. Disability-specific NGOs also played a significant role as job coaches and trainers.

Awareness-raising activities. Across all three phases, Disability Equality Training was promoted to instil the social model of disability. Institutionalising such training across ministries and employer outreach efforts helped shift attitudes by linking the social model of disability with practical job coach tools and financial incentives, leading to tangible employment outcomes.

Inter-agency collaboration. Impact and sustainability were strengthened by engaging other ministries and local governments. For example, the Social Security Organization under the Ministry of Human Resources integrated job coaching into its Return-to-Work Programme, supporting 25 836 persons with disabilities only in 2024. The Ministry of Health incorporated supported employment into national guidelines and mental health services, employing over 600 persons with disabilities in 2019 through mental health hospitals and community mental health centres (MENTARI). The Ministry of Education trained special-education teachers to apply job coach methods in supporting transition; and local governments such as Johor State financed their own job coach.

Key enabling factors included shared key performance indicators, legal backing from the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, top-level commitment, and coordination by the National Council for Persons with Disabilities Employment Committee.

Impact

Recognising a severe shortage of job coaches, the government created **National Occupational Skills Standards** for job coaches in 2017, with support from job coach trainers trained under this project. These standards define required skills and pathways for training and provide formal national certification, raising the quality and visibility of the profession. By June 2025, 37 individuals had been certified, addressing shortages and supporting sustainability.

The project also had spillover effects beyond Malaysia. Trainers and senior trainers contributed to JICA projects in Egypt, Jordan, Myanmar, Mongolia and Sri Lanka, and materials were translated into Arabic, Chinese and Burmese. Malaysia also hosted third-country training, offering models of supported employment practices based on experience in low- and middle-income countries, and contributed to International Labour Organization and Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability initiatives.

The project's impacts were highlighted in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2021 report and referenced in the 2022 Jakarta Declaration, which calls on governments to develop job coach services.

Lessons for future programming

Malaysia's experience highlights key lessons for sustaining progress and expanding inclusive employment:

Engage companies and NGOs as partners. Promote broad participation of employers and NGOs as implementing partners through tailored training, peer advocacy, measurable targets, and public recognition to ensure comprehensive, sustainable support.

Link awareness to action. Combine Disability Equality Training with concrete measures such as job coach training, supported employment schemes, and financial incentives to move beyond short-term or charity-based hiring.

Leverage multisectoral collaboration. Involve labour, education, health and welfare agencies to expand reach, embed job coach skills across sectors, and enhance sustainability through interministerial coordination.

Address language, cultural, and religious factors. Train and recruit diverse job coaches whose backgrounds reflect those of jobseekers and employers, thereby improving trust, reducing barriers, and ensuring context-sensitive support.

Malaysia's sustained collaboration with JICA transformed job coaching into a fully institutionalised national system backed by law, policy, and budget. The model demonstrates how long-term commitment, multisectoral coordination and structured capacity-building can embed inclusive employment within public services.

2.2 Jordan – Piloting job coaching in a high-unemployment context



Context

At the project's inception, Jordan's labour market was under strain: unemployment stood at 18.1% in 2017, making job entry difficult even for non-disabled jobseekers. The **labour force participation among persons with disabilities was only 16.1%**, well below the Arab regional average of 21.6%. Persons with intellectual disabilities in particular faced entrenched stigma and limited access to education, training, and employment.

Although a **4% employment quota** for persons with disabilities applied to public institutions, companies and NGOs above the legal threshold, **enforcement was weak**. Penalty and levy mechanisms were not enforced, and employers had few incentives or means of support to comply.

Prior to this project, initial foundations for supported employment had been introduced – from 2014 to 2017, a JICA Disability Advisor dispatched to the Ministry of Labour conducted job coach training and developed related materials. However, job coach services remained fragmented, small in scale, and uneven in quality, led mainly by a few NGOs.

Against this background, JICA and the Ministry of Labour launched a new initiative to build a **coordinated and sustainable employment support system** linking government policy, NGO expertise, and private-sector participation.

The project and its objectives

The *Project to Promote Economic Empowerment and Social Participation for Persons with Disabilities* was implemented from January 2017 to January 2020 by the Ministry of Labour, with support from JICA and participation of private sector and NGO partners. It sought to promote the employment and retention of persons with disabilities through a tri-sector partnership model linking government systems, NGO services, and business engagement.

Its specific objectives were to:

- establish and pilot **supported employment based on job coaching** within public employment services;
- **raise awareness** of employers, employees and jobseekers with disabilities about inclusive employment;

- implement and strengthen the capacity of **peer counselling** to empower persons with disabilities; and
- **share the experience** and insights of job coach-based supported employment among relevant stakeholders.

Initially centred in Amman, the project was later expanded to other governorates via regional employment offices.

Results

The project demonstrated the potential of a **structured job coach approach** to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Jordan. Through collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, NGOs and the private sector, the project trained job coaches across sectors and achieved concrete employment results. However, efforts to secure a sustainable budget and legal basis for job coach services were ultimately unsuccessful, largely due to financial and institutional constraints.

Service delivery and employment outcomes. Between 2017 and 2019, 122 persons with disabilities obtained employment through job coach support, with 78% remaining employed for more than six months. Nearly half (47%) were persons with intellectual disabilities, demonstrating the approach's effectiveness in reaching those facing the greatest barriers to employment. Women represented 37% of all placements—an important achievement given that the national female labour force participation rate was only 13.7%. Interviews indicated improved self-esteem, family relations and household income contributions; as well as some evidence of role-model effects for other women in the household.

Human resource development. The project trained 185 job coaches and 14 trainers drawn from government institutions, NGOs, and private companies. Although the job coach system was not formally institutionalised, several organisations continued to apply job coach skills effectively after the project. For example, one regional employment office combined job coaching and peer counselling skills to achieve some of the highest placement rates nationwide, while an NGO working with persons with intellectual disabilities expanded its job coaches from two to ten, supporting over 400 persons with disabilities into employment, of whom 240 remained in work as of 2025.

Tools. The Inclusive Employment Guideline—originally created before the project and updated to incorporate the contents on Disability Equality Training and the new law on persons with disabilities—supported awareness among employers, jobseekers and employees about rights and working conditions under labour law.

Contributing factors

Several factors were key to the project's achievements.

Tri-sector collaboration. Collaboration among the Ministry of Labour, NGOs and private companies was central to implementation. Each sector played a distinct role: the Ministry of Labour coordinated activities and job matching; NGOs provided individual and family support; and businesses offered workplace opportunities. Regular meetings, experience-sharing seminars and joint training strengthened relationships and promoted a shared understanding of supported employment.

Human resource development and application of job coach skills. Training 185 job coaches and 14 trainers created a pool of personnel able to provide tailored employment support. In organisations where job coaches were part of regular staff and where management understood the value of disability inclusion, job coaching skills continued to be actively applied after the project, contributing to sustained employment and retention.

Ongoing professional linkages. Although the Job Coach Network Jordan became inactive after staff transfers, some core members continued to cooperate across sectors, conducting joint training and awareness activities.

Awareness linked with practical methods. Messages promoting the social model of disability were paired with practical guidance on rights, contracts and workplace accommodation. About 73% of trained employers subsequently used job coach services, improved accessibility or reasonable accommodation. Increasing awareness among employers and jobseekers and employees with disabilities about their rights under labour law and workplace conditions has led to tangible improvements, including documented cases where rights were successfully upheld.

Sector strategy – textiles. With International Labour Organization support to the textile and apparel sector, the project engaged the Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporters' Association (JGATE) industry association. Following study visits to Japan, JGATE organised two job coach trainings for its members. Approximately 73% of private sector placements occurred in the textile industry, benefiting from the large number of factories, demand for entry-level roles, employer-provided transport and the presence of large firms.

Hindering factors

Lack of sustainable financing and legal basis. External financing for job coach services did not materialise, and post-project budgeting for job coach training stalled as there was no explicit legal or policy reference to job coaches.

High staff turnover. Turnover across government institutions and companies was high. Although 185 coaches were trained and training frequency increased accordingly, many left or rotated before project end, undermining continuity.

Impact

Mainstreaming open employment. The project helped normalise open employment for persons with disabilities—beyond sheltered work—and demonstrated that persons with intellectual disabilities can succeed in mainstream workplaces. Several donors and NGOs subsequently launched programmes incorporating job coaching approaches.

Peer counselling as complementary support mechanism. Unique among the four countries, Jordan integrated peer counselling capacity-building into its project design to empower persons with disabilities. Although not originally intended as a placement tool, it ultimately enhanced motivation, problem-solving, and job retention through mutual acceptance, confidence-building, and peer exchange.

Lessons for future programming

Jordan's experience highlights important lessons for consolidating results and guiding future cooperation.

Probe feasibility of institutionalisation early and thoroughly. Map financing pathways, legal provisions, political will, inter-agency relationships and a realistic legislative timeline before setting 'system establishment' as an outcome. Periodic reassessment of labour market realities after start-up (as was done in Jordan) can help refine strategy and build counterpart commitment through joint inquiry and analysis.

Mobilise all three delivery channels. Build capacity in government, companies and NGOs to spread risk and foster synergy—placement and retention improve when tri-sector coalitions operate in coordination.

Recruit and train male job coaches (context-specific). With many male jobseekers and male-dominated worksites (e.g. factories), gender-balanced coaching teams can expand access, especially in settings where female coaches face constraints.

Educate both sides on labour law and workplace conditions. Combine employer and employee outreach with clear guidance on labour laws, wages and contracts to support retention and wellbeing.

Choose sector partners strategically. Results were strong with JGATE; and weaker with the Association of Banks in Jordan due to skill and credential requirements. Conduct sector scans to identify suitable entry points, skill profiles and human resource practices, and partner with associations capable of mobilising multiple firms.

Build depth within organisations, not lone champions. Encourage multiple coaches per institution, train line managers, and run management briefings on supported employment. Reactivate or replace networks to give coaches peer support and opportunities for continued professional development, especially where turnover is high.

2.3 Mongolia – From pilot to policy: institutionalising job coaching



Context

Mongolia entered the 2020s with moderate unemployment (6.6% in 2020) and strong labour demand, particularly in the mining sector, driven by coal exports. Yet **persons with disabilities remained largely excluded from the workforce**. In 2019, out of 96 000 working-age persons with disabilities, only 8697 were employed – less than 10%. Employment rates were especially low among persons with intellectual, visual and psychosocial disabilities.

Although a 4% employment quota existed, only 65% of eligible firms complied and few paid the levy. No institutional mechanism linked jobseekers with employers, and most initiatives were ad hoc and often charity-based. The first JICA-supported *Project for Promoting Social Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar City* (DPUB1, 2016–2020) strengthened disability statistics, accessibility and organisational capacity. It also supported the organisational development of OPDs, helping them to play a more active role in advocacy, awareness-raising and employment support. Building on these tangible gains, the second phase was launched to **address systemic gaps and establish a sustainable employment-support mechanism**.

The project and its objectives

The *Project for Promoting Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar* (DPUB2) was implemented from February 2021 to January 2025 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in partnership with the General Department for the Development of Persons with Disabilities (GDDPD). The project operated nationwide, reflecting the government's growing commitment to building an inclusive labour-market framework.

DPUB2 sought to improve the livelihoods and social participation of persons with disabilities through a national job coach system. Its objectives were to establish and implement job coach services, develop human resources and delivery networks, create a legal and financial base for sustainability, and engage both employers and jobseekers in supported-employment mechanisms.

Unlike a conventional pilot limited to short-term or small-scale trials, DPUB2 was conceived as a **complete system-building effort**, combining policy design, legalisation, financing,

workforce development and awareness-raising to ensure nationwide implementation and sustained government ownership.

Results

By 2024, Mongolia had achieved significant progress in institutionalising job coaching within national employment support framework.

Legal and financial foundations were established through a series of coordinated reforms. First, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection issued Order A/208 in December 2021, which formally registered *Job Coach* as a national occupation. Operational Guidelines for job coach employment support services, approved in May 2022, defined service standards and delivery mechanisms, and by February 2023 job coaching was incorporated into the *Unified Guideline for Employment Support Programmes* under Ministerial Order A/16, thereby giving it formal budget status. In parallel, a levy-funded grant scheme channelled financial support to job coach services. Between 2022 and 2023, MNT 863 million³ (approx. JPY 35.6 million) was disbursed to 96 job coaches from 71 organisations to cover service fees, awareness activities, and reasonable accommodation. In 2024, the grant period was extended from six to twelve months, confirming fiscal commitment beyond the project itself.

Human resource development progressed rapidly nation-wide. A total of 241 job coaches and 16 trainers were trained, including 106 in provincial areas, drawing candidates from government agencies, NGOs, job centres, private companies and special schools. The training system used contextualised materials and combined classroom instruction, study visits to Japan and Malaysia, and structured on-the-job practice. The government formally approved the programme, and in April 2024 GDDPD financed the first national course using its own resources, embedding the training within regular operations.

A job coach network, created under Operational Guidelines, became a platform for peer learning, professional development, and policy feedback. Its advocacy directly led to the extension of the grant duration to twelve months and continues to provide a channel for practice-based input into policy refinement.

Employer engagement and awareness efforts were proactive. In total, 37 advocates with disabilities co-delivered 20 nationwide corporate seminars, reaching 743 participants from 469 firms. Later sessions paired awareness activities with on-site consultations, helping convert interest into service uptake. A professional communications campaign produced 40 case stories and short films that were broadcast on national television and major business

³ MNT = Mongolian tugriks

media portals, reframing disability employment from an act of charity to a strategy for finding reliable, skilled workers.

Employment outcomes demonstrate tangible progress. By late 2024, 232 persons with disabilities had received job coach support and 151 had secured employment – a placement rate of 72.5% in 2022–2023 and 60% in 2023–2024. Six-month retention reached 69%, while turnover declined from 52% to 31%. Employers included both private firms and public agencies. Beneficiaries represented a broad spectrum of disabilities (physical, intellectual, visual, hearing, internal, and other types) with persons with physical and intellectual disabilities forming the largest groups, reflecting the project’s emphasis on inclusive access. Beyond the numbers, behavioural surveys showed clear shifts in perception: persons with disabilities reported greater confidence and income, families reported improved livelihoods as more members entered paid work, companies came to view employees with disabilities as productive contributors, and public officials increasingly recognised disability inclusion as a mainstream labour-market goal.

Contributing factors

Several key factors contributed to Mongolia’s achievements.

Joint diagnostic foundation. A year-long joint diagnostic exercise by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, GDDPD, and JICA analysed laws, financing flows and labour-market systems to align legal, financial and delivery structures. It identified levy proceeds as a sustainable funding source and secured early buy-in from policymakers.

Synchronised policy and financing reform. Policy and financing reforms advanced in tandem: ministerial orders legalised job coaching while the levy-funded grant scheme ensured immediate resourcing. This dual track avoided “unfunded mandates” and positioned job coaching as a professional, budget-backed service rather than a temporary project.

Broad recruitment and competency-based training. Broad recruitment and structured training created a large, diverse workforce. Drawing candidates from government, NGOs, schools and the private sector helped ensure nationwide coverage and reduce turnover. The combination of foundational theory with hands-on coaching practice built a credible pipeline of trainers and practitioners.

Networked governance and responsive adaptation. Networked governance allowed continuous feedback between implementers and policy-makers. The Job Coach Network’s active role in policy dialogue, training design and grant adjustment enhanced responsiveness and ownership.

Consistent leadership and international learning. Sustained leadership and international exposure also played a critical role. Senior champions within the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and GDDPD maintained consistency across government transitions, while study visits to Japan and Malaysia converted lessons into actionable reforms.

Strategic communication and employer engagement. Strategic communication amplified social impact. Professional media coverage and peer advocacy helped shift public attitudes and encouraged companies to see inclusion as both responsible and economically sound.

Impact

Mongolia's reforms fundamentally reshaped national support for the employment of persons with disabilities. What began as a donor-supported pilot evolved into a nationally owned, budget-backed system embedded in law, policy and practice. The creation of a legally recognised job coach profession and a levy-funded grant scheme replaced ad hoc charitable efforts with a durable public-service model, proving that inclusive employment can be both structured and sustainable.

The **job coach mechanism** has since become a template for outsourcing social services in the welfare sector. Building on its success, similar contracting models are now being applied to personal assistance and sign-language interpretation, signalling a broader shift toward results-based financing and multi-stakeholder delivery. The 2024 government reaffirmed its intention to expand this approach across welfare and employment services, anchoring inclusion in mainstream policy planning.

The project also strengthened **donor alignment and system coherence.** Developed in coordination with the Asian Development Bank's programme establishing Disability Employment Promotion Centres nationwide, DPUB2 used these centres for regional training, capacity development and feedback, reinforcing both initiatives and consolidating national expertise.

Equally significant were the **administrative and attitudinal changes** that followed. Disability job vacancies began to appear more visibly through public employment offices, supported-employment principles were integrated into routine labour programmes, and government agencies now regard job coaching not as a temporary intervention but as a core public service integral to inclusive growth.

Lessons for future programming

Mongolia's experience highlights several priorities for sustaining and replicating success.

Anchor reforms in law and finance. Combine legal recognition of job coaching with stable funding mechanisms to prevent unfunded mandates and ensure long-term service delivery.

Stabilise and professionalise the workforce. Recruit job coaches from diverse institutions to broaden coverage and experience, while establishing clear career pathways, certification standards, and annual training budgets to sustain motivation, prevent burnout and maintain service quality.

Expand access beyond the capital. Support regional job coaches through travel allowances, mentoring and peer-learning clinics to overcome isolation and stimulate provincial uptake.

Engage family members. Engage family members in awareness and training activities from the outset, recognising their strong influence on employment participation and retention.

Clarify and coordinate support functions. Clarify roles, coordinate services and strengthen government–job coach dialogue to prevent overload of job coaches and ensure sustainable support.

Engage employers strategically. Combine awareness campaigns, peer advocacy and clear entry points—such as grant information and company consultations—to turn interest into hiring.

Through coordinated legal, financial and institutional reforms, Mongolia has moved from isolated pilot activities to a sustainable, nationally owned job coach system. The country now offers a replicable model for embedding inclusive employment within public policy and demonstrating how government leadership, targeted investment and cross-sector partnerships can turn disability inclusion into a pillar of national development.

2.4 Sri Lanka – Strengthening welfare-labour collaboration for inclusive employment



Context

At the time of project initiation in 2021, Sri Lanka's overall unemployment rate was around 5%, yet the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic had forced many companies to downsize or halt operations, creating a particularly difficult environment for promoting inclusive employment. Despite long-standing policy commitments such as the 3% public-sector employment quota introduced in 1988, enforcement and monitoring mechanisms remained weak, and implementation was nominal.

Although national policies provided a foundation for inclusion, practical mechanisms for implementing supported employment were largely absent. Existing public employment schemes were fragmented and focused mainly on welfare rather than integration into the labour market. **Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remained limited** due to low employer awareness, inadequate workplace adjustments, underdeveloped infrastructure and persistent social stigma. Weak interministerial coordination further constrained efforts toward inclusive participation in the labour market.

In the field of disability and development, JICA had previously supported the *Project for the Education of Children with Special Needs through an Inclusive Education Approach (REACH-SS)* (2019–2024). However, this initiative marked JICA's first technical cooperation project in Sri Lanka focused specifically on employment support for persons with disabilities.

The project and its objectives

The *Project for Promoting Employment Support of Persons with Disabilities in Sri Lanka* was implemented from November 2021 to November 2025 by the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, in partnership with the Department of Manpower and Employment and with support from JICA.

The project aimed to **institutionalise a sustainable national framework for supported employment** through closer collaboration between the welfare and labour sectors. It promoted a "bridging function" in which Department of Social Services social service officers and Department of Manpower and Employment human resource development officers worked in pairs to connect persons with disabilities and companies—linking welfare services, employment support and workplace inclusion.

The project's specific objectives were to:

- establish a national framework for supported employment through collaboration between the Department of Social Services and the Department of Manpower and Employment;
- promote the social participation and independence of persons with disabilities by creating suitable employment opportunities;
- introduce and formalise a "bridging function" through which Department of Social Services social service officers and Department of Manpower and Employment human resource development officers jointly link jobseekers with disabilities and employers;
- strengthen institutional and stakeholder capacity through training, workshops and awareness activities; and
- scale up the approach nationally by utilising existing human resources and structures, without requiring new staff or large financial measures.

Implementation combined policy development, human resource training, institutional capacity-building, field demonstrations and partnerships with private companies in 25 districts.

Results

By 2025, Sri Lanka had developed a coordinated approach to supported employment linking the social and employment sectors.

Legal and institutional frameworks. A memorandum of understanding between the Department of Social Services and the Department of Manpower and Employment formalised interministerial collaboration, and an Employment Support Unit was established within the Department of Social Services to coordinate activities nationwide and manage links with regional offices. Supported employment was incorporated into official employment-support services under both ministries, ensuring sustained cooperation between the social and employment sectors.

Human resource development. Training focused on enhancing the skills of social service officers and human resource development officers who jointly supported jobseekers and employers. Training materials were prepared in both Sinhala and Tamil in consideration of linguistic and ethnic diversity. In the private sector, twenty-seven individuals completed the course as in-house job coaches within companies and eight advanced to trainer-level

preparation. However, only one job coach provided tangible employment support, highlighting the initiative's limited operational sustainability.

Employment outcomes. Between November 2021 and August 2025, 719 persons with disabilities secured employment while 488 companies and organisations hired persons with disabilities. Employment was recorded across most districts and spanned agriculture, industry and services. Retention after six months improved from 60% in 2023 to 68% in 2024, supported by continuous follow-up. Women represented 39.9% of placements in 2024, up from 33% in 2023, reflecting targeted efforts to promote gender inclusion. Among those employed, 44% were persons with hearing or speech disabilities and 14% had intellectual disabilities, while the remainder included persons with physical, visual and multiple disabilities.

Dialogue among persons with disabilities. The "SIHINA" platform (meaning "dream" in Sinhala) was created as a dialogue space among persons with disabilities to share work experiences and encourage peers seeking employment. While its main purpose was peer support, the participation of government officers allowed them to hear first-hand the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, fostering mutual trust and joint problem-solving between the government and the disability community. The creation of such spaces for direct exchange has strengthened two-way communication and could serve as a model for future projects.

Behavioural impact. Surveys and interviews showed clear attitudinal change among employers, families and government officers. Employers expressed stronger understanding of disability inclusion and willingness to hire again. Families observed greater confidence and independence among their relatives with disabilities, who themselves reported increased self-esteem and sense of contribution. Through direct interaction with participants, government officers also deepened their awareness and commitment to inclusion, narrowing the gap between administration and lived experience. Together, these shifts marked a gradual move from welfare-based perceptions toward recognition of persons with disabilities as active contributors to the workforce.

Contributing factors

Several key factors contributed to Sri Lanka's achievements.

Evidence-led, locally tailored design. The project was grounded in local realities rather than imported models, beginning with pilots in Gampaha and Colombo that informed later nationwide expansion.

Institutionalisation from the outset. The Linkage Creation Programme was embedded early within both ministries' operational plans, and an Employment Support Unit was established in advance, ensuring staffing and structural continuity.

Clear accountability mechanisms. Defined terms of reference and measurable performance indicators enhanced officer motivation and clarified responsibilities across implementing agencies.

Joint problem-solving and flexibility. Close collaboration among the Department of Social Services, the Department of Manpower and Employment, and JICA allowed frequent information-sharing, rapid adaptation and coordinated responses to emerging challenges.

Data integrity and verification. Routine data checks and verification reduced inflation bias and strengthened the credibility of results for national policy adoption.

Welfare-labour collaboration. Pairing the community reach of social welfare officers with the employer networks of labour officers improved credibility with firms, reduced staff isolation and reinforced motivation at the field level.

External tailwinds. Export-oriented firms responding to corporate social responsibility commitments and international standards such as Fairtrade certification and diversity and inclusion policies, helped create enabling conditions by providing transport, hostels and other workplace supports.

Impact

The project deepened understanding of connectivity and inclusivity in disability support, shifting focus from individual assistance to coordinated life-course support linking welfare, labour and community actors. **Supported employment is now anchored within government systems** through the Linkage Creation Programme and Employment Support Unit, providing a sustainable basis for future policy action. Nationally, discussion of a private-sector employment quota and renewed community-based rehabilitation efforts reflect **growing institutional and societal commitment** to inclusion.

Partnerships with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce extended the project's influence beyond government, inspiring employer awards, internship schemes and collaboration with other development partners. Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate progress toward a **more connected and inclusive employment ecosystem** in Sri Lanka.

Lessons for future programming

Sri Lanka's experience highlights key priorities for sustaining and scaling progress.

Start from the street, not the statute. Field-level baselines across districts revealed practical constraints such as thin welfare coverage, heavy officer workloads and fiscal limits, enabling a locally adapted Linkage Creation Programme rather than an imported model.

Institutionalise early and visibly. Embedding the Employment Support Unit within ministry structures, defining roles in annual plans and terms of reference, and formalising the memorandum of understanding between the Department of Social Services and the Department of Manpower and Employment, helped build ownership and accountability from the outset.

Create a dedicated structure and specialised staff. Establishing a unit specifically responsible for employment support strengthened both central and local capacity, enhanced professional motivation and positioned disability employment as a mainstream government function. This institutional model offers a practical reference for other countries seeking to embed inclusive employment within existing systems.

Pair welfare and labour in the field. Joint outreach visits by social welfare and labour officers signalled government commitment, combined complementary mandates and achieved high-impact, low-cost results in resource-constrained settings.

Incentivise and support enterprise-based coaching. Align coaching with career paths and performance indicators, prioritise motivated small and medium-sized enterprises and exporters, and ensure post-training brokerage and locally tailored content.

Use recognition to drive diffusion. Quarterly district meetings, awards and public storytelling converted early successes into institutional norms that motivated both officers and employers.

Invest in people and data. Strengthen Employment Support Unit staffing, officer wellbeing and succession planning, while maintaining common monitoring indicators and routine data verification to inform policy.

Make dialogue with persons with disabilities a policy tool. The SIHINA platform, which brings officials and peer groups together, built trust, surfaced ground realities and informed iterative policy development—offering a replicable model for other contexts.

Sri Lanka's coordinated approach shows that inclusive employment can be advanced even in resource-constrained contexts through practical alignment of policy, human resources and local action.

3. Cross-country analysis

Overview

Building on the country findings presented earlier, this section analyses common patterns and lessons across the four study countries. In every case, **employment outcomes for persons with disabilities improved**—most notably for persons with intellectual disabilities and for women with disabilities, groups that had previously faced both the steepest barriers to employment and the least access to employment support services.

These gains were not incidental. They were enabled by the **establishment of substantive employment services**, including job matching,⁴ workplace adaptation, and retention support, delivered by trained employment support personnel. Where these services were embedded within coherent institutional and financial frameworks—as in Malaysia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka—they played a decisive role in advancing the realisation of inclusive employment.

Across the study countries, six elements were consistently associated with these frameworks, forming an institutional architecture that enabled progress across contexts:

1. **Comprehensive preliminary research** to inform disability employment support systems and service design;
2. **Workforce development mechanisms** to secure, train and develop personnel to support the mainstream employment of persons with disabilities;
3. **Collaboration** among diverse institutions and organisations involved in employment promotion and service delivery;
4. **Partnerships with companies and NGOs** to expand job opportunities and strengthen disability employment support;
5. **Initiatives to promote attitude change** among employers, government officials and the wider public; and
6. **Distinctive features of Japan's cooperation**, including long-term engagement and adaptation to local systems.

This chapter analyses the findings across the four surveyed countries through these six cross-cutting themes and identifies implications for JICA's future project planning.

⁴ Job matching refers to creating the optimal combination between individual abilities and workplace requirements. Source: Sakai D. *Assessment and Job Matching*, JICA Project for the Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities, Job Coach Introductory Seminar materials.

3.1 Comprehensive preliminary research for institutional and service design

This study confirms the importance of **rigorous preparatory research** to shape the design of system architecture and services in inclusive employment projects. Effective baselines test legal, fiscal and delivery feasibility and align proposed mechanisms with country institutions and labour market realities. In **Mongolia**, for example, nearly a year of research was undertaken at project inception to assess legal and financial feasibility. The analysis confirmed that the statutory employment **quota and levy system** could serve as both the institutional foundation and a funding source for a job coach scheme, enabling its eventual institutionalisation.

In **Sri Lanka**, an early survey prior to detailed planning revealed a severe shortage of human resources in the welfare sector, making an NGO-affiliated job coach model impractical. The same survey identified strong labour–welfare collaboration at field level. The design therefore adopted a framework for joint promotion of employment, which produced **over 700 placements nationwide** during the project period. Because country counterparts had limited experience with baseline-type surveys, the process itself strengthened understanding and interest—a valuable secondary effect.

When introducing nationwide systems for disability employment support, **equitable access across regions** is essential. Rural areas typically face fewer job opportunities, weaker infrastructure, limited education and assistive technology, and persistent discrimination. Restricting services to major cities risks widening rural–urban disparities. At the same time, scaling nationally requires time to recruit and train personnel, pilot delivery and establish government support structures.

Each country adopted a different strategy for expanding coverage nationwide.

- **Malaysia** phased introduction by first establishing core mechanisms then leveraging community-based rehabilitation centres to extend reach to rural areas.
- **Mongolia** pursued regional expansion but continues to face challenges linked to its vast geography and resource disparities.
- **Jordan** trained disability liaison officers across governorates to achieve nationwide reach.
- **Sri Lanka** mobilised existing welfare and labour staff, enabling rapid national rollout within fiscal constraints.

Considering the implications for design, preliminary studies should examine **institutional structures, resource availability and human capacity for scale-up**, alongside labour market conditions and industrial structure, to determine feasibility and pace of nationwide

expansion. They should also probe **cross-sector issues** spanning labour, social welfare, transport, education and health, so that collaboration can be specified in project design and implementation, and thereby facilitate mainstream employment of persons with disabilities.

3.2 Building the workforce for open employment support

3.2.1 Effective approaches to securing and developing personnel

Following the design of institutional frameworks, the next challenge is ensuring the availability of a skilled workforce to deliver employment support. Securing and developing competent personnel to support the employment of persons with disabilities—across government, enterprises and NGOs—is essential for effective service delivery. In three countries, the projects emphasised the development of job coaches as bridges between persons with disabilities and employers, while in Sri Lanka, efforts focused more on strengthening public officer capacity.

Government officials

Approaches varied by country. In resource-constrained Sri Lanka, while the mandate for disability employment support had existed on paper, it had not been operationalised in practice until it was integrated into the routine functions of social welfare and labour officers. Capacity-building for these officers, combined with cross-agency collaboration, enabled inclusive employment to be implemented at low cost. Malaysia trained not only Department of Social Welfare staff but also personnel from other ministries—Labour, Health and Education—broadening institutional engagement. In Mongolia, while government officials did not serve directly as job coaches, they supported job coach training programmes and awareness seminars, laying the groundwork for public institutionalisation. In Sri Lanka, nationwide training in Sinhala and Tamil, together with a system of individual mentoring for newly appointed officers enhanced reach and confidence. These experiences illustrate that engagement methods must reflect each country's administrative realities.

Enterprises

Job coach training for private sector staff was introduced in all four countries. In Malaysia and Mongolia, training-of-trainer programmes expanded job coach pools. In Malaysia and Jordan, in-house job coaches within companies proved as effective—or more so—than NGO-affiliated coaches, particularly when managerial staff were engaged and training content was aligned with company operations. This approach not only facilitated employment and retention, it also strengthened corporate awareness of disability inclusion. However, in Jordan and Sri Lanka, many trained job coaches became inactive due to staff turnover, competing

duties, or limited institutional recognition. In Sri Lanka, economic pressures reduced company incentives to hire persons with disabilities beyond limited corporate social responsibility activities. These findings underscore the importance of reinforcing statutory employment frameworks and incentives to sustain private sector participation.

NGOs and private organisations

NGOs remained indispensable partners in delivering supported employment. In Malaysia, training community-based rehabilitation centre staff as job coaches enabled nationwide coverage of employment support services. In Mongolia, private vocational training schools improved job placement efficiency after job coach training, shortening the time to employment. In Jordan, one NGO significantly expanded its cadre of salaried job coaches, supporting more than 400 persons with disabilities nationwide.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain: high turnover, insufficient managerial support, limited disability expertise and weak follow-up or mental health support continue to undermine sustainability. Building durable human resource development systems, strengthening NGO managers' commitment, and supporting peer networks among job coaches are essential for long-term impact.

3.2.2 Building capacity through practical and on-the-job training

For personnel with limited prior experience of disability, combining foundational instruction with practical exposure and on-the-job training proved the most effective approach. Malaysia, Jordan and Mongolia implemented job coach training programmes, while Sri Lanka trained welfare and labour officers on inclusive employment support.

In Sri Lanka, officers first received introductory training on disability basics—types of disabilities, workplace challenges and reasonable accommodation—followed several months later by a second session. This follow-up expanded on the on-the-job training and company visits, allowing participants to analyse success factors, address obstacles and identify strategies for continued support. Best practices were shared in joint meetings where officials presented successful employment cases.

Overseas training programmes in Japan and Malaysia offered valuable opportunities to adapt service models to local contexts. Participants learned about inclusive employment practices, relevant systems and innovative approaches, while reflecting on their applicability at home. In Mongolia, such learning was intentionally practical rather than observational, strengthening capacity for system design, human resource development and policy formulation.

Training in Japan was particularly influential in shifting sceptical attitudes toward mainstream employment and in inspiring the adaptation of new models, notably in Sri Lanka. Training in Malaysia, in contrast, exposed participants to practical, hands-on examples in a less formal setting, leading to more realistic and transferable models. Comparative exposure to different systems and cases, such as those in Japan and Malaysia, was especially effective for institutional design in Mongolia.

Establishing job coach systems

Approaches to institutionalising job coach systems varied. In Malaysia, both job coaches and senior trainers were developed to mitigate trainer attrition, resulting in 1765 trained personnel. Training was incorporated into the annual government budget, securing long-term sustainability. In Mongolia, 16 trainers were trained and a ministerial decree formally institutionalised the job coach training and curriculum, allowing any accredited organisation to conduct courses. Jordan also trained job coach trainers, but did not obtain official recognition or dedicated funding, leaving a post-project system that remains ad hoc and largely volunteer-based.

These experiences show that building a critical mass of trained job coaches and trainers, supported by certification, official recognition and institutionalisation, is vital for national rollout and stable funding. Yet even in Malaysia and Mongolia, high turnover and systemic issues persist, underscoring the need for improved remuneration, development of career pathways, and integration of job coaching duties into official posts.

Common challenges across countries

Despite progress in training and budget allocation, the three countries—Malaysia, Jordan and Mongolia—faced similar constraints in establishing and operating job coach systems:

- **Low remuneration and incentives.** Inadequate pay and recognition cause high dropout rates, necessitating continuous recruitment and training.
- **Excessive workload.** Job coaches often absorb responsibilities better handled by public agencies, such as employer sensitisation, job creation, or life support, leading to burnout.
- **Weak knowledge-sharing mechanisms.** Job coach networks established for peer learning and retention have struggled to remain active; sustainable alternatives are needed.
- **Isolation and mental health needs.** Many job coaches work alone and encounter entrenched prejudice among employers and families, heightening stress and underscoring the need for psychosocial support.

- **Variable disability expertise.** Recruiting staff without prior disability experience (as seen in Mongolia’s employment agencies) increased awareness but left some job coaches underprepared—particularly to support persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities—leading to low confidence, and in some cases, inactivity.

Implications: variation in beneficiaries by approach

Employment outcomes differed by disability type and support model. Persons with hearing disabilities were often viewed as the “most employable” due to lower perceived accommodation needs, while those with intellectual disabilities faced greater barriers. In Malaysia and Jordan, job coaching approaches focused strongly on persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, who together accounted for roughly half of beneficiaries. In Sri Lanka, where labour–welfare collaboration was central, persons with hearing and speech impairments comprised the largest group of beneficiaries (44%). The difference may reflect not only the variation in approaches, but also factors such as target groups, workplace selection methods, regional contexts and the type and size of employers.

At project outset, employment for persons with intellectual disabilities was considered challenging in Malaysia, Jordan and Mongolia. The large number of successful placements therefore represents a major achievement. To ensure inclusivity across disability types, training curricula should incorporate diverse case studies, and partnerships with NGOs and OPDs specialising in different disability types—as in Malaysia—should be strengthened.

3.3 Collaboration with diverse stakeholders

3.3.1 Foundations of cross-sector collaboration

The projects demonstrated that effective collaboration among diverse institutions was essential to deliver and sustain inclusive employment systems. The projects worked beyond their main counterpart agencies, engaging ministries, companies, local authorities, NGOs and OPDs. This cross-sectoral cooperation strengthened service delivery, improved sustainability, and generated wider ripple effects. Active participation by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations further enhanced employment and retention outcomes.

Because employment challenges for persons with disabilities cut across multiple sectors, broad engagement was essential. Collaboration typically involved ministries of labour and social welfare, local authorities, chambers of commerce, companies, vocational and special-needs schools, health institutions and community-based rehabilitation centres—reflecting the multisectoral foundation of inclusive employment. Such cooperation helped address

systemic barriers, including accessible transport, inclusive education, assistive technology and the quality and reach of health and vocational rehabilitation services.

3.3.2 Deepening collaboration through joint implementation

Through implementation, these collaborations evolved into more formal and lasting partnerships, broadening institutional ownership and influence.

In **Malaysia**, job coaching skills were applied across a wide range of institutions. The Social Security Organization used them to support persons with work-related disabilities, while psychiatric hospitals applied them to employment support for persons with psychosocial disabilities. These services have since continued under each institution's own budget.

In **Mongolia** and **Sri Lanka**, partnership with chambers of commerce and industry proved particularly effective. Their extensive corporate networks enabled large-scale surveys during project preparation. In Sri Lanka, Chamber of Commerce staff also participated in job coach training, deepening their understanding of inclusive employment and prompting institutional initiatives, such as internships for vocational trainees with disabilities, workplace transition support, and award schemes recognising inclusive companies.

The inclusion of new actors—such as chambers of commerce—alongside traditional partners (OPDs and government agencies) marked a significant achievement, as these organisations had rarely engaged in inclusive employment before. Collaborations initiated and sustained through joint projects were highly valued by national counterparts.

In **Mongolia**, involving public employment agencies in job coach training expanded awareness but also exposed gaps in capacity—particularly on intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Some staff were unsure how to apply their skills, highlighting the need for targeted disability training and collaboration with welfare professionals when engaging institutions new to inclusive employment support.

3.3.3 Promoting participation of persons with disabilities and their organisations

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities calls for persons with disabilities to participate as both beneficiaries and implementers in all stages of development cooperation. The projects demonstrated that encouraging such participation—through awareness-raising, peer support and involvement in system design—produced tangible results.

In **Mongolia**, initial discussions on the job coach system focused on persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Following requests from OPDs, the system was broadened to cover all disability groups—an important example of inclusive institutional design.

In **Jordan** and **Sri Lanka**, persons with disabilities contributed directly to peer-support activities. In Jordan, persons with disabilities who trained as peer counsellors helped others regain confidence, find employment and remain in work. In Sri Lanka, interactions between employed and unemployed persons with disabilities fostered peer learning: the employed shared experiences that improved retention, while those seeking work gained role models and motivation.

In **Malaysia, Mongolia** and **Jordan**, persons with disabilities also took leading roles in awareness-raising and training. They were trained as Disability Equality Training facilitators, peer counsellors and awareness-raising personnel, promoting inclusion among non-disabled stakeholders while gaining paid employment themselves. In Malaysia, Disability Equality Training continues more than a decade after the project ended, funded by national institutions and sustained through active facilitators. In all three countries, OPD staff trained as job coaches now contribute directly to employment support services. Other forms of engagement included participation in project operations, collaboration as administrative officials, and participation in Joint Coordinating Committee meetings⁵ as observers.

Despite these achievements, structured mechanisms for reflecting the views of persons with disabilities in government policymaking remained weak outside Malaysia. Constraints included the limited number and weak coordination of OPDs, an absence of representative umbrella organisations, and weak or non-functional platforms for dialogue with government.

Ensuring meaningful participation of OPDs is crucial not only for inclusive employment but also for broader disability mainstreaming. At the project design stage, it is therefore important to assess the capacity and representativeness of OPDs, their coordination mechanisms, and their level of involvement in policy dialogue. Where needed, targeted measures—such as thematic training, capacity-building, or technical assistance (for example, through Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers dispatch)—should be considered to strengthen OPD engagement throughout project processes.

3.4 Building partnerships with companies and NGOs

3.4.1 The importance of partnerships

Collaboration between inclusive employers and NGOs with expertise in disability is essential to promoting inclusive employment. In **Malaysia, Mongolia** and **Jordan**, where such partnerships were integral to project design, each leveraged its respective strengths to expand opportunities and strengthen employment support systems.

⁵ As part of JICA's technical cooperation projects, a Joint Coordinating Committee meeting is held at least once a year to review project progress, discuss challenges and address any issues.

3.4.2 How collaboration worked in practice

With companies:

In **Malaysia**, companies were positioned as key partners in awareness-raising and training. Corporate representatives participated in training sessions in Japan and were involved in all business outreach activities. Tailored short-format training and numerical targets for corporate participation helped strengthen understanding and engagement in inclusive employment.

In **Jordan**, collaboration between government agencies and the textile industry association led to two job coach training programmes for member companies. This partnership yielded strong results, with 73% of employed persons with disabilities in the private sector finding jobs in the textile industry.

With NGOs:

Across **Malaysia**, **Mongolia** and **Jordan**, NGOs served as implementing partners and received job coach training, including through study visits to Japan, which expanded the pool of job coaches and trainers and strengthened collaboration between government and civil society.

In **Malaysia**, NGOs specialising in specific disability types were trained as job coaches or job coach trainers, enabling more targeted placement and retention support.

In **Mongolia**, cooperation with employment-support NGOs revealed needs beyond job coaching, such as transition support, prompting several organisations to launch new programmes.

3.4.3 Specific methods of collaboration

In **Malaysia** and **Jordan**, governments planned and implemented training programmes and coordinated with participating organisations, while NGOs provided individual and family support and businesses focused on recruitment and workplace retention. In **Malaysia**, NGOs enhanced the effectiveness of employment support by gaining corporate perspectives, while in **Jordan**, awareness-raising and training continued through public–private partnerships even after the project concluded.

3.5 Promoting attitude change among employers and government officials

3.5.1 Shifting to the social model of disability

Promoting mainstream employment for persons with disabilities requires a fundamental shift in mindset—from viewing disability as a limitation to recognising that persons with disabilities can work **when appropriate support and environments are provided**. This transition to the social model of disability is also critical for introducing and scaling up supported employment systems. At project outset, however, prejudice against disability employment was widespread, even within counterpart agencies, and vocational training was often considered a prerequisite for work.

To address this, the projects in all four countries implemented awareness-raising initiatives targeting government officials and employers.

In **Malaysia**, Disability Equality Training and supported employment were introduced, shifting perceptions from the medical to the social model of disability and paving the way for institutionalising job coach services.

In **Jordan**, awareness activities were conducted integrating Disability Equality Training content and emphasising the social model of disability. As a result, over 70% of employers who attended awareness activities improved workplace accessibility, provided reasonable accommodation, or utilised job coach services.

In **Mongolia**, Disability Equality Training delivered in a prior project meant the counterpart agency already had a solid understanding of the social model of disability, which enabled the smooth adoption of supported employment.

In **Malaysia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka**, early sharing of real employment cases helped accelerate the shift in stakeholder perceptions. In **Sri Lanka**, even without Disability Equality Training, exposure to actual cases convinced officials that persons with disabilities can work if appropriate support and environments are provided.

Training in Japan and Malaysia further reinforced this shift. Participants observed persons with intellectual, severe, and psychosocial disabilities working in diverse settings, including medical institutions. In **Malaysia** in particular, seeing successful initiatives in another developing country, where support systems were less advanced than in Japan, gave participants confidence that supported employment could be realistically introduced in their own contexts.

Awareness-raising also produced ripple effects: in **Malaysia**, the number of civil servants with disabilities increased, improving inclusivity in public administration. In **Jordan**, changes in family attitudes toward disability not only enhanced opportunities for persons with disabilities but also expanded employment prospects for female relatives including mothers and sisters.

3.5.2 Approaches to awareness-raising to connect businesses with disability employment support services

Awareness-raising is most effective when it goes beyond shifting attitudes to promoting the use of employment and work support services. Without this linkage, companies may hire only those persons with disabilities who are deemed “highly employable”, limiting broader inclusion.

The projects addressed this by combining promotion of the social model of disability with practical information about available support services.

In **Malaysia**, companies participating in Disability Equality Training were also introduced to job coaching services and preferential measures such as tax exemptions. In **Mongolia**, standalone awareness seminars had limited effect, but when job coaches were present and offered consultation sessions, companies began applying for job coach services. In **Sri Lanka**, awareness-raising was paired with joint proposals by welfare administrators who had strong knowledge of disability, and labour officials who understood company needs. This combination successfully persuaded businesses to participate. In **Jordan**, awareness-raising targeted not only employers, but also jobseekers and employees with disabilities, focusing on labour rights and working conditions. This approach helped protect the rights of employees with disabilities and reduce job loss.

These experiences show that awareness-raising works best when it combines promotion of the social model of disability with clear pathways for corporate action, such as access to job coaches, fiscal incentives, or joint administrative engagement. Raising awareness of labour rights among both employers and employees is vital to sustaining employment and improving the well-being of workers with disabilities.

3.6 Distinctive features of Japan's cooperation

At a time when academic and practical evidence on supported employment in low- and middle-income countries remains limited, JICA was among the first development agencies to introduce this approach for persons with disabilities in both low- and upper-middle-income contexts, and to demonstrate concrete results. A defining feature of JICA's approach was its **collaboration with counterpart agencies to co-develop context-specific models** rather than replicating Japan's system. Japanese expertise, human resources and accumulated experience in employment support were adapted to local conditions, yielding results that were both relevant and feasible. The human resources, experience and lessons developed through the first project in **Malaysia** became part of JICA's institutional knowledge base and were subsequently applied to other disability and employment projects worldwide.

Another valuable feature confirmed through this review was JICA's provision of continuous, long-term **accompanying support** by experts throughout project implementation. This approach ensured operational stability and was valued for several reasons. In particular, it enabled a flexible response to challenges through close dialogue with counterpart agencies, capacity-building at both central and local levels, and strengthening government functions from within. In **Mongolia** and **Sri Lanka** for example, JICA experts worked closely with partners during the planning stages, enabling thorough exploration of challenges and the co-creation of proposals that counterparts were both willing and able to adopt.

The Malaysian project—the first among the four countries—further illustrates JICA's adaptive approach. The long-term expert assigned was not specialised in supported employment, therefore the Japanese non-profit organisation Job Coach Network⁶ provided sustained technical assistance through short-term expert missions across three successive projects. The organisation also hosted in-country training to ensure that the expertise from short-term experts was incorporated into training content. This arrangement enabled the systematic transfer and institutionalisation of Japan's supported employment expertise in Malaysia, and the lessons learned were later applied in other countries, including those covered in this review.

⁶ Job Coach Network is a Japanese non-profit organisation established in 2006 to share information, build networks and train personnel in employment support for persons with disabilities. Source: <https://jc-net.jp> (accessed 4 September 2025).

4. Recommendations

Drawing on the findings from the four country case studies, this chapter presents recommendations for JICA's future support for the inclusive employment of persons with disabilities. Japan's cooperation has long offered context-sensitive, long-term, side-by-side support covering system design, human resource development, social attitude change and interministerial coordination, contributing to institutionalisation. To build on these strengths, it is important to promote (i) foundational systems that function sustainably, and (ii) concrete measures that enhance frontline execution capacity, as mutually reinforcing "twin engines". The measures below are interlinked; combined implementation can deliver more effective and sustainable outcomes.



Identify the optimal "bridge" function and integrate it into system design through rigorous assessment

In promoting inclusive open-employment support, each country should identify, based on its institutional and social context, the most effective "bridge" function that connects employers with jobseekers with disabilities, and plan from the outset how to establish and develop that role. This should be considered flexibly, without assuming a particular profession or model, while ensuring that the function is recognised as a public service and that nationwide rollout is equitable.

A sound starting point is a feasibility assessment to determine whether the proposed scheme can operate effectively in practice. Beyond standard labour market analysis, this assessment should examine the implementing bodies, delivery methods, detailed design, and legal and budgetary foundations. Its findings should inform the project design matrix and overall project plan. Conducting a well-paced, joint JICA-counterpart assessment not only strengthens the rationale for design but also builds trust, fosters consensus and supports smooth implementation. If a single round is insufficient, a two-stage process—such as deploying pipeline experts or conducting a basic planning survey followed by a detailed planning survey—can improve precision. The assessment process is itself part of the project, as it enhances design quality and promotes shared ownership. In appropriate cases, external experts may be engaged.

The comparative study identifies three elements that are key to nationwide rollout: phased expansion, robust system design and interministerial coordination. The relative importance of each varies by context. Because scaling-up remains a cross-cutting challenge, JICA should continue targeted studies to strengthen the evidence base for system design and local expansion strategies.

Build mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration from the planning stage (ministries of labour, social welfare, transport, education and health)



Inclusive employment requires coordinated support that extends beyond job placement to address daily living needs such as personal assistance, mobility, education, health care and family support. From the design phase, clarify **who is responsible for what, when and how** across relevant sectors; then map the activities and intentions of all stakeholders; and incorporate these linkages into project plans. At the detailed planning stage, existing resources and institutional commitments should be reviewed and confirmed.

Typical areas and examples of cross-sectoral collaboration include:

- **Labour and education:** training special-needs teachers on transition-to-work and establishing internship schemes with education ministries and universities.
- **Labour and health:** assessing and improving access to assistive technologies and engaging occupational therapists to provide workplace support.
- **Labour and social welfare:** developing labour-welfare operations and reviewing regulations to ensure work and disability benefits can co-exist appropriately.
- **Labour and transport:** improving accessibility of public transport and sensitising drivers to facilitate commuting support.

Such linkages address common constraints in low- and middle-income countries and reflect Japan's comparative strength in coordinating with multiple agencies. Although cross-sector coordination requires both budgets and staff time, it can significantly enhance impact and sustainability. Persistent bottlenecks identified in all four countries, particularly in transport infrastructure and inclusive education access, often required either cross-sector action within the employment project or separate, dedicated efforts. JICA should therefore share pre-survey findings internally and involve relevant units early to explore co-design, co-implementation or parallel support, thereby advancing disability mainstreaming.



Strengthen implementation and oversight to improve the effectiveness of legal frameworks

All four countries have employment quota systems and expanding legal protections for persons with disabilities, yet operational gaps remain. Legislation alone has not been sufficient to increase or sustain employment. Future cooperation should therefore focus on **strengthening delivery and oversight**, beginning with an early analysis, at the pre-survey stage, of how quota and anti-discrimination provisions are implemented and enforced in practice.

Building on progress made through bridge personnel and employer outreach, future support could combine several complementary measures: continued human resource development, audits of employer compliance and calibrated sanctions, practical guidelines and subsidies for reasonable accommodation, grievance and mediation mechanisms, transparent monitoring, and independent oversight bodies.

Because mechanisms for reflecting the views of OPDs in policymaking were limited in most of the countries surveyed, it is also important to support **meaningful OPD participation**. This includes capacity development, structured participation within projects, and institutionalised, regular policy dialogue with government.

Strategically develop and sustain diverse inclusive employment-support personnel through training, fair conditions and networks



Sustained scale-up of inclusive employment requires a **diverse cadre of professionals**, including government officials, in-company staff and NGO personnel. Beyond training job coaches and trainers, projects should aim to embed national training schemes, on-the-job training, study visits to Japan and third countries, **improved compensation and incentives**, knowledge-sharing platforms, and clear career development pathways.

Private-sector participation is especially valuable. It accelerates hiring and retention, brings employer perspectives into service design and spurs peer diffusion. For rural areas, training access should be expanded and attention given to the isolation and mental well-being of support workers. Training in Japan can be used to strengthen policy and design capacity, while third-country training provides opportunities to learn from realistic models in comparable contexts. To maximise impact, learning goals should be clarified in advance and followed up through networks, joint meetings and action-plan monitoring.

Because different approaches, such as the job coach model or labour-welfare linkage, may affect which groups benefit, training and partner development should be designed to include **all disability types**. Curricula should reflect varied disability profiles and projects should work to develop disability-specific NGOs and OPDs where relevant.



Couple mindset change with practical tools and targeted approaches that drive action

While adopting the social model of disability is essential, awareness alone does not lead to action. Awareness must be paired with **practical tools and approaches** such as job coaching, reasonable accommodation, assistive technologies and improvements in workplace accessibility.

Experience across countries shows combining Disability Equality Training and success-story sharing with practical, applied approaches yields the strongest results. For employers, specifying actionable measures—such as staff sensitisation, communication improvements (especially for Deaf employees), health management for workers with physical or internal conditions, and practical responses to daily living issues affecting persons with intellectual disabilities—helps translate understanding into concrete practice and system uptake.

Tools should be tailored and combined according to the audience and purpose.

- **Government officials and employers:** Disability Equality Training and social model of disability sessions, supported by accommodation checklists and other practical guides, encourage adoption.
- **Support workforce:** Job coach training, site visits and casebooks or videos reinforce the belief that “with the right support, people can work”.
- **Families:** Targeted briefings strengthen household motivation and engagement.
- **Jobseekers:** Peer discussions, exchange events and counselling provide role models and reduce anxiety.

Monitor not only job placements but also labour conditions and rights compliance



Monitoring should go beyond placement numbers to assess whether **workers’ rights** are respected in practice. When attention focuses solely on employment figures, key aspects such as wages, working hours, contract types, dismissals, promotion and pay progression may be overlooked.

Routine monitoring should therefore include information on sector and occupation, contract form, working hours and environment, remuneration and benefits, social insurance coverage, and compliance with labour law. It should also examine potential discrimination by gender, age or disability type, and assess whether promotion opportunities are equitable.

Experience in **Sri Lanka** demonstrated that detailed monitoring indicators can help identify employment gaps and guide targeted follow-up—compensating for limited national labour statistics on disability and promoting quality employment and sustained improvement.

Awareness-raising among employers and workers about labour law, paid leave and opportunities for career and leadership development is also important. In **Jordan**, educating both employers and employed persons with disabilities on legal rights helped strengthen rights protection.



Institutionalise ongoing follow-up and knowledge sharing

To sustain results, projects should include regular follow-up after project completion to verify not only quantitative outcomes such as placements and retention, but also the quality of operations, inter-agency coordination and the staffing and activities of employment-support personnel. Follow-up missions can provide advice or targeted technical assistance as needed. Such reviews serve to confirm that the introduced mechanisms continue to function effectively, and can also identify areas for improvement and foster autonomous operation. Further, they can enable **South–South exchange** through the continued use of trained personnel.

Possible follow-up methods include maintaining practitioner networks through social networking services and webinars—such as JICA-facilitated communities that mobilise trained alumni internationally—and requesting periodic updates to JICA offices to maintain information exchange. Because the projects in Mongolia and Sri Lanka have just ended, these cases could serve as useful opportunities for future review of approach suitability and sustainability.

Share alumni expertise and training resources across borders and promote South–South peer learning, including exchange on women with disabilities



Experience in **Malaysia** showed that personnel and training content developed through JICA projects can be designed for **horizontal application**, providing both effectiveness and value for money. For countries at an early stage of implementation, exposure to peers that have already worked with JICA lowers psychological and technical barriers.

JICA can further promote peer learning by curating and sharing resources across borders—for example, through a disability and development web hub hosting training curricula, reports, seminar decks and case stories.

International sharing on **employment of women with disabilities** is particularly important. Although women's employment increased under the projects, it remains lower than men's, and women continue to face specific risks such as harassment, commuting safety concerns, family opposition and care burdens. Related experience and know-how should be actively gathered and disseminated to inform other donors and countries.

Sustained, multi-country engagement by Japanese partner organisations also deepens field understanding and practical expertise on the Japan side, supporting the development of more context-specific cooperation models. Systematically channelling this accumulated knowledge and experience

into cross-country and South–South cooperation can further strengthen Japan’s areas of expertise in inclusive employment.



Clarify and strengthen the role of labour authorities to institutionalise inclusive employment within national systems

Historically, disability issues have been addressed mainly through charity or welfare-based approaches. Even after the shift under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities toward social and human rights models, many legal systems still reflect welfare-oriented logic, leaving responsibility for employment within welfare ministries. As shown across the four countries, **labour authorities must be fully engaged.**

Welfare ministries are well placed to provide life support and subsidies but often lack legal authority over firms. Labour ministries, in contrast, can supervise and direct employers through mechanisms such as labour inspection, and ensure compliance with employment quotas and workplace accommodation obligations. Their involvement strengthens corporate compliance and embeds disability employment within mainstream labour policy and services, including statistics and public employment services.

From the design stage, therefore, projects should clearly define the role and responsibilities of the labour ministry and incorporate them into institutional and operational arrangements to enhance institutionalisation and effectiveness.

Annexes

Annex 1. Abbreviations

DPUB	Project for Promoting Social Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Ulaanbaatar City
GDDPD	General Department for the Development of Persons with Disabilities
JGATE	Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporters' Association
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OPD	organisations of persons with disabilities

Annex 2. Terms

Disability Equality Training (DET)	Disability Equality Training (DET) is a disability awareness training <i>facilitated by persons with disabilities themselves</i> . It is a training approach designed for organizations such as companies and local governments, using a dialogue-based "discovery learning" method to examine how to build inclusive environments. DET is based on the social model of disability , which views disability as the social and environmental barriers that limit participation. (Disability Equality Training Forum)
Inclusive employment	Inclusive employment means that persons with disabilities work in the competitive labour market alongside colleagues without disabilities, with equal access to benefits and career opportunities. Its purpose is to prevent exclusion or segregation based on disability and to ensure that employees receive the accommodations and support needed to work and succeed on an equal basis with others. (Inclusive Disability Employment)
Job coach	A job coach provides structured support based on an individualized plan, setting clear goals to help the person with a disability perform their job and adapt to the workplace. Support also includes employers and family members. Assistance is not meant to be permanent; it is gradually reduced through <i>fading</i> , with the aim of establishing <i>natural supports</i> from supervisors and colleagues that enable stable, long-term employment. (Ogawa 2021)
Readiness model	The readiness model refers to an approach in which gaps in vocational abilities identified through vocational assessment are addressed through vocational training and other interventions to enhance a person's job readiness. Once the individual reaches a certain level of preparedness, they are then connected to employment opportunities. (JEED 2024)
Reasonable accommodation	Reasonable accommodation means 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. (CRPD Article 2)
Supported employment	Supported employment aims to assist individuals with significant employment barriers to work in integrated, competitive workplaces, rather than in sheltered settings, while ensuring fair wages. The approach prioritizes identifying a suitable job quickly, keeping pre-employment assessments and training to a minimum. After employment begins, a specialist such as a <i>job coach</i> provides on-the-job training and support at the workplace for a defined period. (Ogawa 2001)

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