



ADVOCACY FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION IN MALAYSIA

Executive Summary¹

This study looked at the opinions not just of the adult disability community, but also of parents, family members and carers of children or adults with disabilities, as well as disability support persons, including volunteers, paid workers or professionals in any disability-related work. Collectively, in the country, these individuals comprise 30% to 40% of the electorate. Although from diverse backgrounds, they are united on the rights and needs of persons with disabilities.

The 710 respondents gave information on their disability and voting status, and opinions on political parties or candidates' disability inclusiveness. It would be prudent for politicians and political parties, especially those hoping to be elected as Members of Parliament or State Assemblymen, to heed the views of members of the electorate who are associated with disability and the OKU community. The vast majority of the disability community are registered voters who make the effort to vote, despite challenges.

This study shows that the disability community is clear that it will preferentially vote for political parties or those standing for elections that advocate for the inclusion of this community into society by making it a clear goal in their manifesto and have a performance record of improving opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Key Concerns of the Disability-related Electorate

The opinion of this large segment of the community is clear – the Government of the day or any elected representative should focus on:

- Improving employment inclusion (better and wider job opportunities);
- Improving education inclusion (inclusion in mainstream/regular classes);
- Enforcing the rights of persons with disabilities.

These three major concerns involve the daily struggles of adults and children with disabilities. Many of these problems have only improved marginally over many decades.

¹ This is the Executive Summary of the publication entitled "Advocacy for Disability Inclusion in Malaysia" (2022). This publication is available in three formats that are accessible for Blind persons and persons with other print disabilities: Accessible PDF; EPUB; DAISY format. This is the first Malaysian publication that is available in all three accessible formats.

Failure to Use and Enhance the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008

It would be important for lawmakers and the Government to note that amending the Persons with Disabilities (PwD) Act 2008 to give it punitive powers was not rated as highly as other areas. The PwD Act 2008 was inspired by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Elected representatives and governments have not invested resources in awareness raising and implementation. Thus, both are little known by most Malaysians, with limited impact of both on improving the lives of persons with disabilities, their families and those involved with them. A major revision of the PwD Act 2008 is vital, to give it the scope and powers to enforce the rights of persons with disabilities.

Special Note on Disability Registration

A proportion of individuals with disability in this survey did not have an OKU Card (disability registration) because they felt that having it would lead to stigma or they did not see how the OKU card could help them. Some were not aware of disability registration. Thus, there is an invisible group which is not reflected in the national registration data on persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development must work even more actively to remove the stigma attached to registration, especially within government departments (in particular the Education Department). Targeted approaches are needed to facilitate the disability registration of this invisible group.

Those aspiring to be elected to Parliament or State Assemblies, as well as those who are already elected representatives are urged to implement the recommendations provided in this study.

Key recommendations include the following:

Elected representatives and those aspiring to be elected to Parliament or State Assemblies:

- Make a concerted and continuous effort to make known to the general public, Ministries and Departments the PwD Act 2008 and CRPD, and the rights enshrined therein.
- Revise the PwD Act 2008 to give it the scope and powers to enforce the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Strengthen disability outreach and advocacy efforts in the East Coast states and East Malaysia.
- Develop disability-inclusive political manifestos and implement disability-inclusive action plans as part of good governance.
- Engage with persons with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities and caregivers, to understand their concerns.

- Include in decision-making processes that impact the quality of life, health, education, life-long learning and work prospects of persons with disabilities, the following: persons with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, family members / caregivers of persons with disabilities.
- Make a significant improvement in the inclusion of and accessibility for persons with disabilities in the Malaysian education and vocational training systems, as well as employment.
- Harness the contributions of persons with disabilities to the economy and society at national and local levels.

The Election Commission and Government:

Remove all barriers, to improve the accessibility of voting registration and the voting process for all who are eligible to vote, including persons with diverse disabilities, as well as the accessibility of voting venues for registered voters. Malaysian policy and lawmakers have to keep up with the 21st century shift of focus towards the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society (social and rights model), away from the long-entrenched charity and welfare model.



Photo: Pre-Pandemic Event. Photo source: Persatuan WeCareJourney.