

Executive Summary

The rights and inclusion of people living with disability are critical and far-reaching issues for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States (AMS). It is estimated that one in every six people in Asia and the Pacific live with disability, or 690 million people throughout the Asia–Pacific region. These 690 million people include individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, cognitive/developmental disabilities, and psychosocial disabilities. While the prevalence of certain disabilities varies amongst the 10 AMS, their citizens living with disability experience many of the same obstacles in accessing education, decent work, social protection services, and legal support. Persons with disabilities are subject to disproportionately high rates of poverty, and women and girls who live with disability face additional obstacles. While there are notable differences across the ASEAN region, we observe many similar challenges such as inadequate legislation, unequal employment, and inadequate physical access or adapted services.

Social enterprises (SEs) have emerged as key actors for developing new, innovative and scalable forms of support for persons with disabilities. Social entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon both worldwide and across the region, and SEs are uniquely positioned to provide solutions to some of the challenges facing persons with disabilities today – including effective responses to the significant issue of unequal employment. And yet, most AMS do not have a legal incorporation status for organisations that simultaneously pursue a social mission while carrying out profit-generating activities, with the notable exceptions of Viet Nam and Thailand. For this and other reasons, many of these SEs face legal and practical barriers to further expanding their positive impact on disability issues throughout the region.

By harnessing the untapped potential of SEs supporting persons with disabilities, ASEAN policymakers and other key stakeholders can achieve positive impact for both social entrepreneurship and disability rights throughout the region. Interviews were conducted with a range of SEs that are noteworthy for their support for persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN, and these interviews confirmed both (a) the tremendous potential for large-scale social innovation in the areas of inclusion and disability rights, as well as (b) the very limited support that these SEs currently receive from other key stakeholders. These interviews and additional research served as the basis for the findings presented in the Framework for Action.

The Framework for Action puts forth key findings and recommendations for governments, investors, corporations, foundations, philanthropists, SEs, and NGOs to strengthen their unique contributions to the advancement of inclusion and disability rights across ASEAN. Through the combination of targeted investments and strategic funding within an enabling regulatory environment, SEs can be empowered to unleash the full potential of their social missions. The Framework for Action also includes examples of existing good practices that demonstrate the positive impact that is already taking place across the region. Through strengthened support from all stakeholders, this positive impact can grow to protect the equality of persons with disabilities through fully inclusive economies and societies.