

STATEMENT
UPR PRE-SESSION ON SINGAPORE
GENEVA, 25TH MARCH 2021
DELIVERED BY: DISABLED PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION [DPA]

This statement is delivered on behalf of THE DISABLED PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION, a not-for-profit, independent, non-partisan, research and advocacy organization set up to advocate alongside persons with disabilities in Singapore. DPA has participated in the UPR processes at the national level since 2018.

Persons with disabilities within the DPA network were consulted, however due to the Covid-19 situation, we were unable to reach out to as many individuals as expected. The only disability group that we weren't able to find any representatives from would be persons with intellectual disabilities.

This statement addresses the following issues: (1) Employment Discrimination (2) Inclusive Education, and (3) Physical and Digital Accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Here are the 3 main issues raised.

Firstly, Employment Discrimination. In a recent review of the Employment Act, DPA also called for stronger punitive measures to address discriminatory practices in the workplace. Currently, the Employment Act only prohibits discrimination in the context of unfair dismissals. There is no clear right to recourse for workers facing discrimination at other stages of employment, and no legal duty for employers to avoid it. If complaints are made to the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, it may mediate but in cases where mediation does not resolve the dispute, it cannot take enforcement measures such as reinstatement, compensation or punishment. Recommendations include identifying disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Constitution, enacting an anti-discrimination legislation to prohibit discrimination at all stages of employment, removing the reservation on Article 25(e) of the CRPD and prohibit private insurers from discriminating on the basis of disability, and expanding and update the Government definition of disability to include persons with psychosocial disabilities.

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Next, is Inclusive Education. As of March 2020, it was reported that 80% of children with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools while those with moderate to severe disabilities enrol in Special Education Schools. But the current curriculum for teachers does not provide adequate training to support children with disabilities in Government schools. While the Compulsory Education Act was amended in 2016 to extend compulsory education to children with moderate to severe disabilities, there remain significant disparities for those who are enrolled in SPED schools. Firstly, SPED schools charge higher school fees than mainstream schools. Secondly, children with disabilities are not guaranteed enrolment at SPED schools compared to those applying to enrol in mainstream schools, and lastly, while the Ministry of Education has introduced bite-sized online learning modules for teachers to cater to students with disabilities, this may not be sufficient to adequately support children with disabilities who are enrolled in mainstream schools. To add, though mainstream schools and public universities offer many foreign languages to students, Singapore Sign Language (SgSL) has been offered only at a few institutions. And neither has SGSL been recognised as an official language in Singapore. Recommendations include implementing a more robust framework for teachers in mainstream schools in terms of manpower, job scope, salary, skills training and overall professional development, and allocating more resources towards the development and recognition of Braille and Singapore Sign Language (SgSL) as official languages in Singapore.

Lastly, the issue of Digital Accessibility. The Covid-19 pandemic, increased reliance on digital technology for information and contact tracing efforts. This proved to be a challenge for people with disabilities due to inaccessible websites and interfaces. Many contact tracing regulations relied on the use of "QR codes" and not all official government announcements and speeches were in accessible alternative formats. In 2018, the new Digital Service Standards were introduced to improve accessibility and required all government websites to comply with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. These standards, however, have not been strictly enforced and many

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government websites remain inaccessible. There is also currently no requirement for television broadcasters to ensure that closed-captioning as well as sign language interpreters are provided across free-to-air and paid television channels. Recommendations include ensuring consistent accessibility in television broadcasts by encouraging service providers to adopt closed-captioning as well as sign language interpreters across both free-to-air and paid television channels.

Thank you for your attention.