

Media Release

Goodwill High, Systems Weak: Singapore Not There Yet on Disability Inclusion

*Nationwide survey shows that 1 in 2 Singaporeans finds workplaces inaccessible,
few know about available training or grants*

Singapore, 13 November 2025 – A new nationwide survey led by Singapore Management University (SMU) has revealed that while Singaporeans care deeply about inclusion, the pathway from empathy to employment remains steep. Despite widespread goodwill, both persons with disabilities (PWDs) and the general public rate Singapore’s employment policies below moderate in effectiveness, with future improvement by 2030 seen as only “minor”.

Among those in hiring positions, both PWDs and members of the public admitted they were only “a bit willing” to hire a person with disability, a sobering sign that positive sentiment has yet to become action.

When asked what would most improve employment for PWDs, both groups ranked empowerment and practical enablement highest. Meaningful inclusion at the workplace is held back by poor accessibility, low awareness of support schemes and a lack of practical employer tools.

The study, Engage.Me., was created and led by [Singapore Management University \(SMU\)](#) Principal Lecturer of Statistics [Rosie Ching](#), and supported by the [Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped \(SAVH\)](#) and the [Singapore Association for the Deaf \(SADeaf\)](#).

Together, they surveyed the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, people with visual impairments, persons with physical impairments as well as members of the general public to collect data on perceptions, awareness and engagement in inclusive employment.

Said **Ms Rosie Ching**, “Every statistic in the results shows goodwill but goodwill without access doesn’t get anyone hired. Until we improve workplace accessibility, make support easy to find, and give employers practical tools and benefits, people with disabilities will keep hearing ‘you’re welcome here’ while the door essentially stays half-closed, akin to being invited to a feast and left standing outside the restaurant.”

The study began in July 2025, and over a two-month period, polled a total of 7,265 people, which included 171 visually-impaired respondents, 193 deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, 151 persons with physical disabilities, 961 people who work or volunteer with PWDs and 5,789 members of the general public across Singapore.

Full survey results are accessible at www.screeningstatistics.com/engageme.

Key findings of practical implications:

1. Accessibility the weakest link

- More than half of PWDs rated physical, tech and social accessibility in workplaces below 50%, with technology scoring the lowest.

- The public was even more critical, with 6 in 10 rating tech accessibility as the weakest link in inclusion efforts.
- Ms Ching commented: “Accessibility, especially digital, is still the critical bottleneck. Without the means to apply, connect, or communicate, participation in employment, education, and social life, including the ability to apply for jobs, collaborate with colleagues, and engage in community or policy processes, engagement simply isn’t possible. If digital access fails, PWDs cannot even reach the stage of engagement that defines genuine participation.”

2. Awareness gap: 8 in 10 unaware of training, 7 in 10 unaware of hiring grants

- The survey found a striking lack of awareness of government or employer support.
- 8 in 10 PWDs have never heard of training programmes for employability.
- 2 in 3 are unaware of hiring grants for PWDs.
- Even among those in hiring roles, fewer than one in two have heard of workplace grants or PWD employability training schemes.
- Ms Ching commented: “Goodwill is evident, but support remains significantly inadequate. Without clear signposting and practical nudges, awareness lags, and with it, genuine inclusion.”

3. Support gap: PWDs rate their self-sufficiency far below expectations

- PWDs rated their job satisfaction at 6.38 out of 10, a “high-average” score. However, their ability to financially support themselves stands at just 5.4 out of 10, far below the 7.0 that the general public believes it should be. This marks a significant perception gap.
- In other words, job satisfaction is holding up due to PWDs being reasonably satisfied with their jobs. However, financial self-sufficiency is not, because they feel markedly less secure about their ability to stand on their own feet financially. The disconnect highlights how positive public sentiment has yet to translate into tangible empowerment and financial security.
- Ms Ching commented: “While job satisfaction among PWDs is reasonably high, their perceived ability to support themselves financially drops significantly, well below even what the public believes it ought to be. This disconnect shows that goodwill alone has not yet translated into real empowerment or economic independence.”

4. Mindsets alone are not enough to increase engagement with PWDs

- The study revealed a positive correlation between attitudes towards PWDs (Disability Attitude Index, DAI) and employment engagement (Disability Employability Index, DEI). However, attitudes account for only 11% of actual engagement.
- This indicates that mindset shifts alone are not sufficient to move the needle. Although attitudes toward persons with disabilities (PWDs) are generally positive, they do not strongly predict employability outcomes.
- While inclusive attitudes are important, sustainable inclusion requires structural enablers such as accessibility, training, and policy support to translate good intent into meaningful employment outcomes.
- Ms Ching: “We’ve statistically shown that Singaporeans care and empathise. Yet inclusion for persons with disabilities happens only when empathy is matched with infrastructure. Without proper accessible systems, inclusive hiring, and genuine workplace support for employers as much as for employees, good intentions rarely pave the way for real opportunity.”

Key Recommendations:

1) Fix digital and information gaps:

More than half of PWDs rated accessibility below 50%, and 8 in 10 were unaware of existing training or hiring grants. To address this gap, the study recommends developing a national “Inclusion Gateway”, a unified digital portal that connects job opportunities, grants, and training programmes. The platform would feature SMS or Whatsapp prompts that guide users step-by-step and be co-tested by PWD users.

2) Equip employers and tie incentives to inclusion outcomes

Mindsets account for only 11% of employability outcomes; structure does the rest. To address this gap, the study recommends introducing inclusive-hiring perks for business leaders. Companies that actively close accessibility and hiring gaps could receive tax benefits or national recognition, ensuring inclusion is no longer an act of voluntary goodwill but a measurable, recognisable and rewardable business practice.

Mr Samuel Choo, SAVH Executive Director commented: “SAVH is deeply grateful for this meaningful collaboration with Singapore Management University to uncover valuable insights into the lived realities of persons with visual impairment. The Engage.Me. findings highlight accessibility as the key stumbling block to employability, what we have long observed on the ground, and which we now have concrete statistical proof of.

The awareness and support gaps revealed by this survey are equally worrying. Many persons with disabilities, including employers, remain unaware of existing training and hiring grants. Goodwill is there, but awareness is not. Without both, inclusion stalls. SAVH will continue to shine a light on these support schemes, not only within our own services but across the wider community. Because inclusion is more than awareness, it takes accessible technology, prepared employers, and real opportunities that lead to independence and dignity for every person we serve.”

Mr Josh Lye, SADeaf Executive Director commented: "We're encouraged that the study supports what we already know: that Singaporeans care and empathise with persons with disabilities. But we're also reminded that for good intentions to lead to real opportunity, empathy must be matched with infrastructure - properly accessible systems, inclusive hiring and genuine workplace support for employers and employees. We're glad we could make a small contribution to this SMU study. The insights are a helpful step towards building more inclusive systems and opportunities, and empowering Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard-of-hearing individuals."

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About Singapore Management University

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research that addresses issues of global relevance, impacting business, government, and society. Its distinctive education, incorporating innovative experiential learning, aims to nurture global citizens, entrepreneurs and change agents. With more than 13,000 students, SMU offers a wide range of bachelors, masters and PhD degree programmes in the disciplinary areas associated with six of its eight schools - Accountancy, Business, Computing, Economics, Law and Social Sciences. Its seventh school, the SMU College of Integrative Studies, offers degree programmes in deep, integrative interdisciplinary education. The College of Graduate Research Studies, SMU's eighth school, enhances integration and interdisciplinarity across the various SMU postgraduate research programmes that will enable students to gain a holistic learning experience and well-grounded approach to their research. SMU also offers a growing number of executive development and continuing education programmes. Through its city campus, SMU focuses on making meaningful impact on Singapore and beyond through its partnerships with industry, policy makers and academic institutions. SMU celebrates its 25 years of meaningful impact this year, and remains committed to its vision of driving innovation, transcending boundaries and transforming lives. <https://www.smu.edu.sg/>

ENGAGE.ME. STATISTICAL DATA

Engage.Me.

Engage.Me. Full Report 2025

Dataset size: 7,265 respondents × 103 variables. All estimates at 95 percent confidence, significance level = 0.05.

- Accessibility is the choke point, where more than half of PWDs rate physical, tech and social accessibility at workplaces below 50%; tech is worst according to PWDs. The general public are more scathing than PWDs in their rating of accessibility, with more than 6 in 10 rating tech as the lowest.
- Awareness is sorely lacking. 8 in 10 PWDs haven't heard of training for employability and 2 in 3 haven't heard of grants for hiring PWDs. The general public fare no better, with 7 in 10 not having heard of such grants.
- For those positions of hiring, fewer than 1 in 2 (48.3%) have heard of workplace grants, with slightly over 1 in 2 (51.72%) having heard of training of PWDs for employability.
- Job satisfaction is rated average but support is not. PWD job satisfaction ≈ what the general public thinks it should be, but PWDs say they are able to financially support themselves at an average 5.40/10, a level which is markedly lower than what the general public thinks it should be for PWDs at 7.01/10.
- What to prioritise: PWDs: financial support + empowerment; public: employer action + empowerment.
- Attitudes & action together. More positive attitudes (Disability Attitude Index DAI) correlate with higher engagement and employability (Disability Employability Index DEI), but practical supports for heavy lifting are lacking.

1) SAMPLE SIZES & PRECISION (MOE @95% at p = 0.5)

Group	n	Percent
P1	193	2.66%
P2	171	2.35 %
P3	151	2.08%
P4	961	13.23%
P5	5,789	79.68%
TOTAL =	7,265	100%

2) DEMOGRAPHICS (gender, nationality, race) + tests

- 3627 males, 3638 females. Gender balance
- Race (counts): Chinese 5,122; Malay 862; Indian 810; Eurasian 158; Others 313.
- Gender & indices: women score higher than men on DEI ($p \approx 1.17e-6$) and DAI ($p \approx 5.37e-5$).
- Age & cohorts (indices): DEI/DAI vary across cohorts; Gen Z is lowest on DEI; Gen X highest. For DAI, Boomers significantly lowest.
- Education & indices: clear upward gradient - higher education, higher DEI/DAI (ANOVA $p < 10^{-28}$ and $p < 10^{-29}$ respectively).

Bottom line: Inclusion indices are strongest for higher education groups; gender signal favours women.

3) KNOWLEDGE OF DISABILITY LANDSCAPE

- K2 (self-rated knowledge): “Low Average” (~3.6/10 across cohorts); no gender difference.
- KSTATE items (correct/incorrect):
 - KSTATEA: 76.2% correct
 - KSTATEB: 66.0% correct
 - KSTATEC: 43.1% correct (worst understood) - “PWDs are a liability due to health issues.”
 - KSTATED: 82.1% correct (best understood) - public recognises “most PWDs prefer not to work” is false.
- K3 (reasons for low knowledge, among K2<50): top three reasons: no personal connection to disabilities (47.2%) followed by no outreach or education (21.0%) and do not know (16.0%)

Bottom line: Knowledge is too low and uneven; myths persist around “liability” frames.

4) JOB-SEARCH SUPPORT NETWORKS (ranked)

- PWD (PD3) - Social > Nothing > Professional > Financial
 - “Nothing” ranked #1 by 42.5%
 - “Social” ranked #1 by 44.6%
 - “Professional” ranked #1 by 37.8%
 - “Financial” most often #3 (34.1%)
- General public (GP3) - Professional > Social > Financial > Nothing
 - “Professional” #1 by 49.3%
 - “Social” #2 by 38.2%
 - “Financial” #3 by 53.6%
 - “Nothing” overwhelmingly #4 (86.7%)

Bottom line: PWDs most commonly report “no support”; the public imagines a neat, professional-led support stack.

5) ACCESSIBILITY PERCEIVED <50% - PWD vs GENERAL PUBLIC (z-tests)

Domain	PWD <50% (n/N; %)	General Public <50% (n/N; %)	Notes
Physical	261/515 (50.7%)	3501/6750 (51.9%)	Both ≈ half rate sub-50
Technological bottleneck	293/515 (56.9%)	4299/6750 (63.7%)	Tech is the tightest
Social	249/515 (48.4%)	3799/6750 (56.3%)	Social access also weak

Bottom line: Half or more rate workplace access below 50% across the board, especially for technology.

6) TRAINING & GRANTS AWARENESS (PD2/GP2, PD6/GP6) + “NO” GAP TESTS

- Training awareness: majority “No” in both groups:
 - PWD: highly significant majority of NO 79.4%, YES 20.6%
 - GP: highly significant majority of NO 63.4%, YES 36.6%
 - PWD-GP “NO” divide is significant ($p \approx 2.47e-13$; CI +12.3 to +19.7 percentage points), showing PWDs more unaware of training than general public
- Grants awareness - “No” dominates:

- PWD: highly significant majority of NO 64.7%, YES 35.3%
- GP: highly significant majority of NO 69.5%, YES 30.5%
- PWD-GP “NO” divide is significant, direction favours PWD ($p = 0.022$; CI -9.1 to -0.56 percentage points), showing PWDs more aware of workplace grants than general public

Bottom line: Awareness is the bottleneck. It could be the lowest-cost lever with the fastest payoff.

7) WORK MATCH, JOB SATISFACTION, FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- WKMATCH (PWD): mean 5.90; $t(515) = 3.50$; $p = 0.000512 \rightarrow$ slightly above 5.5, rated average; no P1, P2, P3 differences.
- WKSAT (PWD): mean 6.38; $t(515) = 7.73$; $p \approx 5.8e-14 \rightarrow$ above 5.5, rated high-average; no P1, P2, P3 differences.
- FINSUP (PWD): mean 5.41; $t(515) = -0.71$; $p = 0.478 \rightarrow$ lower than average; blind more financially able than deaf

Compared to GENERAL PUBLIC,

- WKSAT: No significant difference between PWD and GP in WKSAT
- FINSUP: PWD $<<$ GP

Bottom line: Satisfaction is holding; the real pain point is financial support for PWDs.

8) WHAT IMPROVES EMPLOYABILITY (PD11/GP11) + PD12/GP12 GAPS

- Importance of support means (ranked):
 - PWD: Financial support (7.77) > Empowerment (7.70) > Employer support (7.62) > Accessibility (7.56)
 - GP: Employer support (8.07) > Empowerment (8.04) > Financial support (7.91) > Accessibility (7.84)
- Perception/experience signals among P1-P3 (selected):
 - Treated unfairly at work/school: overall significant ($p = 0.029$); physically disabled $\sim$ blind $>>$ deaf
 - Included in decisions: physically disabled > deaf $\sim$ blind ($p = 0.0074$).
 - Encouraged to lead: Physically disabled > deaf $\sim$ blind (not significant ($p = 0.165$))
 - Excluded socially; family distancing; awkward public situations: all not significant ($p = 0.530$)
 - Friends/colleagues support in public: Physically disabled > blind $\sim$ deaf ($p = 0.038$).

Bottom line: PWDs prioritise cash-and-capability levers. But the general public puts employers first. Inclusion signals exist especially for social and family, but are uneven at work and in decision-making.

9) DISABILITY ENGAGEMENT & ATTITUDES INDICES (DEI & DAI) + CORRELATION

- By profile (means; ANOVA sig.):

- DEI: P4 (59.95) highest; others 53.9-55.9; between-group $p \ll 0.001$.

This means that people who volunteer or work with PWDs have the most optimistic perception of PWD employability, significantly higher than all others.

- DAI: P4 (64.41) > P5 (60.22); between-group $p \ll 0.001$.

This means that people who volunteer or work with PWDs have the most optimistic attitude towards PWDs, with the general public with the most negative attitude towards PWDs.

- Gender: Women > Men on DEI (56.29 vs 55.10; $p \approx 1.17e-6$) and DAI (61.60 vs 60.17; $p \approx 5.37e-5$).

This means women hold more open and optimistic perceptions towards PWDs and their employability, than the men do.

- Age: DEI remains in the mid-fifties percentile and hardly moves through mid-life cohorts; DEI lowest for Gen Z; with M, X (highest) and B no different. Gen Z think most poorly of PWD employability. For DAI, Boomers think most negatively of PWD, followed by Gen Z with Gen X highest again.

- Race/Religion: DEI/DAI vary modestly; selected pairwise differences significant (e.g., some Christian/Catholic/ Hindu groups > Buddhist on DEI and DAI).

- Education: strong monotonic gains; DEI and DAI both rise with education (ANOVA $p < 10^{-28} / 10^{-29}$).

- DEI $\leftrightarrow$ DAI relationship: Multiple $R = 0.334$; $R^2 = 0.112$; $\beta(\text{DAI} \rightarrow \text{DEI}) \approx 0.229$ ($p \approx 8.36e-189$).

This means the more positive the attitude or perception towards PWD, the greater the employability of a PWD, with moderately positive but highly significant correlation.

- HIRE split: DEI(Yes) 58.79 vs 55.30 ($p \approx 1.69e-19$); Employers willing to hire PWD have significantly higher mean DEI than unwilling employers.

DAI(Yes) ~ DAI(No) (ns, $p = 0.149$): Employers willing to hire PWD are no different in their attitudes towards PWD than unwilling employers.

Bottom line: Attitudes and engagement are linked but only about 11% of engagement is explained by attitudes; we recommend pairing mindset shifts with practical enablers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Make support visible: a “Where to start” hub for training & grants, with WhatsApp/SMS nudges.

2) Equip employers: credentials, recognition and rewards for inclusive hiring