

# Bridging the Gap: Employability of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the Service Industry

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## ABSTRACT

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are vital to the labor market; however, their participation remains limited despite existing inclusive laws. This study bridges the employability gap in the service industry by analyzing industry profiles, hiring practices, and primary considerations for recruitment. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative approach, the researcher employed cross-tabulation and chi-square tests to measure associations between industry profiles and key employability factors. Findings reveal low PWD employment, particularly within the tourism sector and micro-businesses. Results highlight a critical lack of formal hiring policies and supportive environments, specifically regarding accommodation

facilities and assistive technologies. Employers prioritize high school graduates with soft skills like effective communication and positive attitudes, while marketing and computer proficiency are the top-ranked hard skills. The analysis proves that educational qualifications, soft/hard skills, flexible work arrangements, and disability types are significantly associated with industry type. Conversely, physical facilities and assistive technologies are significantly linked to business size. This study concludes that there is a need to adopt inclusive hiring policies to improve PWD employability.

**Keywords:** *Person with Disabilities, employability, inclusive hiring policy, employability, descriptive quantitative research, service industry*

## INTRODUCTION

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are individuals with long-term impairments that may limit their full participation in society (CRPD, 2006). Historically, they have been marginalized due to societal misconceptions, resulting in restricted access to education, employment, and public life (Marini, Graf, & Millington, 2017).

Efforts to address these inequalities led to the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which recognized the civil rights of PWDs (ADL Education, 2017), and international initiatives such as those of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which promotes inclusive labor standards (ILO, n.d.). The CRPD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further emphasize equal access to development and human rights for PWDs. In the Philippines, these commitments are reinforced by the 1987 Constitution and national laws such as Republic Act No. 7277. (1992) and Republic Act No. 10524. (2013), which mandate non-discrimination and promote inclusive employment.

Despite these measures, employment outcomes for PWDs remain limited. In the Asia-Pacific region, unemployment among PWDs reaches 80% or higher (ILO, 2021). In the Philippines, less than 20% of the 1.9 million working-age PWDs were part of the labor force as of January 2022, reflecting low participation and weak compliance with existing laws (DOLE, 2024). At the local level, only 32% of organizations in Albay reported employing PWDs (Bongat, 2019), while many of the approximately 1.44 million Filipinos with disabilities continue to live in poverty (Pedron, 2024). These figures highlight a persistent gap between policy and practice, where legal protections have not translated into improved employment outcomes. This continuing disparity underscores the need to examine the employability of PWDs in the service industry in Albay Province.

The study generally aimed at bridging the gap of persons with disabilities' employability in the service industry by proposing an inclusive employment policy to address the gap of employment of PWDs. Specifically, it seeks to accomplish the following objectives: (1) Identify the percentage of establishments in the service industry that employed PWD. Determine the profile of the organization in terms of a) type of industry, b) size of the industry, and c) type of ownership; (2) assess the hiring practices and policies along a) job posting & recruitment, b) screening and shortlisting, c) interview process, d) assessment and testing, and e) overall hiring policy; (3) identify the primary considerations that influence the employability of PWDs along a) educational qualifications, b) skills: b.1 soft and b.2 hard skills, c) Work Experience, d. Type of Disability, e.g. Accessibility: e.1 Physical and e.2 Assistive Technology; (4) Determine the relationship between the profile of the respondents and the primary consideration that influences employability of PWDs.

Results of this study are intended to contribute to the development of a comprehensive inclusive hiring policy tailored for the service industry. This proposed policy can serve as a framework for employers in accommodating and integrating PWDs in the workplace, ensuring equal opportunities and fostering an environment that supports diversity and inclusion.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a descriptive-quantitative research design to facilitate statistical analysis through two distinct methods. The survey approach was used to obtain the employment rate of PWDs, the organizational profiles, and current PWD hiring practices. Second, a correlational approach was applied to establish whether there was a relationship between the profiles and the considerations for hiring PWDs. Stratified proportionate random sampling guided by Slovin's formula was employed.

The respondents of this study were businesses belonging to the service industry, categorized into three specific strata: Tourism and Tourism-related Services, Personal Services, and IT/IT-enabled Services, located in three cities of Albay: Tabaco City, Legazpi City, and Ligao City.

A structured, self-designed questionnaire was utilized. This instrument was grounded in existing literature and employed a four-point Likert scale to evaluate attitudes and behaviors surrounding inclusive hiring practices. A letter requesting permission to conduct the study was sent to the city mayors. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the respondents before they answered the questionnaire.

For the analysis of the data, frequency count and percentage were used. The weighted mean serves as the primary tool for interpreting ordinal data from the Likert scale. Ranking was employed to define the hierarchy of primary considerations influencing PWD employability. Cross-tabulation and the chi-square test were applied using STATA software for the determination of relationships. This rigorous statistical approach allowed the researcher to identify meaningful patterns and associations that go beyond mere chance, providing a solid empirical basis for the study's conclusions.

### **Locale of the Study**

This research was conducted in the Province of Albay, covering first, second, and third districts. This selection was based on the geographic divisions of the province. Further, it only covered three component cities that are economically active and considered component cities. These are Tabaco City (1st District), Legazpi City (2nd District), and Ligao City (3rd District).

In terms of city backgrounds, Tabaco City has transitioned from an agriculture- and fishing-based economy to a growing service sector, driven by the Tabaco International Port, which supports maritime trade, logistics, retail, tourism, and small enterprises such as restaurants and banking services. Legazpi City, the economic center of the Bicol Region, thrives on a service-based economy, particularly in education, tourism, healthcare, retail, and finance, with tourism further boosted by landmarks like Mayon Volcano and cultural events such as the Ibalong Festival. Meanwhile, Ligao City remains partly agricultural but has experienced steady growth in commerce, banking, education, healthcare, and small service businesses, thanks to improved infrastructure and better access to transportation and local markets.

By covering the three districts represented by three major cities of Albay Province, the study could capture differences in economic activities and organizational behaviors towards hiring PWDs across the province. The chosen districts represented a manageable scope for data collection considering the time constraints. Focusing on these areas ensured that the study could be conducted efficiently while still providing valuable insights. Findings from the study could inform local policymakers and business leaders about best practices and areas for improvement in hiring PWDs, tailored to the unique characteristics of each district.

### **Sampling Technique**

This study employed a stratified proportionate random sampling technique using Slovin's formula, combined with lottery sampling, to ensure fair and representative selection of respondents. The population was first divided into distinct subgroups or strata based on the three major classifications within the service industry: tourism-related, personal services, and IT and IT-enabled services. Stratified sampling was used to guarantee that each subgroup was proportionately represented in the final sample, which improves the reliability and precision of the findings by reducing sampling bias within each category (Thomas, L. 2023).

Within each stratum, lottery sampling, a form of simple random sampling, was applied. This involved placing the business names from each category into a container (after being verified via Google Maps), rolling them into small sheets of paper, and randomly drawing names one by one until the target number of establishments per stratum was reached (Hayes, 2024). This method was chosen to ensure that every qualified establishment had an equal chance of being selected, thereby upholding the principles of randomness and fairness.

The use of random sampling, especially through the lottery method, was justified to avoid researcher bias in respondent selection and to reflect the diversity of employer perspectives across different types of service industries. This approach increases the generalizability of the findings, making them more applicable to the broader population of service industry employers in Albay. Moreover, it allowed for a transparent and systematic selection process that respects the geographical and sectoral spread of businesses across Tabaco City, Legazpi City, and Ligao City.

To calculate the sample size for each stratum using Slovin's formula, you would use the following formula:  $n = (Nh/N) * n$ , where "n" is the overall sample size calculated using Slovin's formula ( $N / (1 + Ne^2)$ ), "N" is the total population size, "Nh" is the size of the specific stratum, and "h" represents the proportion of that stratum within the population. The computation is appended in Appendix A.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Percentage Rate of PWD Employment

The study revealed the low percentage rate for PWD employment in the service industry (19.08%) with significant variations across cities driven by industry types. Ligao City recorded the highest inclusion rate likely due to a high concentration of personal service businesses. In contrast, Legazpi City and Tabaco City reported lower rates respectively.

Table 1. *Percentage of Establishments with Employed PWDs*

Employment Rate	Number of Establishments under Service Industry	Establishments with Employed PWD per City	Percentage (%) of Establishment with Employed PWD
Ligao	56	14	25.00
Legazpi	68	11	16.18
Tabaco	51	8	15.69
TOTAL	173	33	19.08

The overall data reveal that only a few service industry establishments across the three cities in Albay employ Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). This low percentage suggests that PWD employment in the local service sector remains limited; however, it is insufficient to conclude that inclusivity is weak across the industry as a whole, particularly given the lack of centralized data from relevant government agencies. Nevertheless, these results align with findings by Chi (2023), who noted that PWDs face substantial challenges in entering the labor force, with fewer than 20% of the 1.9 million working-age Filipinos with disabilities currently employed, which is likewise confirmed by Bongat's (2019) study. The result well established the gap in PWD employment in Albay Province.

### Profile of the Organization

The profile of the organization as shown in table 2 reveals that tourism and tourism-related industries dominate (42.2%). The Personal Service Industry ranks second (34.7%), while the IT-Enabled Industry represents the smallest proportion (23.1%). The dominance of the tourism sector reflects Albay's status as a key destination in the Bicol Region. This prevalence suggests a significant entry point for PWD employment, a sentiment echoed by Hospitality News Philippines (n.d.), which notes that the growth of hotels opens doors for the disabled community. Furthermore, the personal service industry highlights niche opportunities for specialized manual work, such as massage therapy. Ultimately, as confirmed by Sutikmo (2018), the service industry, regardless of the specific sub-sector, demonstrates a strong potential for inclusive employment. The majority of the service industry falls under micro-enterprises (60.69%), followed by small ones (20.23%), while few are medium (11.56%) and large (7.51%), respectively. Company size is an important factor in this study, as it can influence PWD hiring behavior. Although size does not always determine a company's financial capacity, some studies, such as those by Gasper et al. (2019, 2020), have revealed that larger companies employ more PWDs than smaller companies. Larger companies also tend to have higher disability inclusion (Chan, 2020), while small companies generally maintain a positive perception toward PWD workers. This idea is further reinforced by Gasper and Palan (2020), who argue that company size is a strong predictor of PWD employment, as larger organizations are more likely to meet compliance requirements and possess the infrastructure to support inclusive practices.

Table 2. *Profile of the Organization*

Type of Industry	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Tourism and Tourism Related	73	42.2
Personal Service Industry	60	34.7
It and IT Related Industry	47	23.1
Total	173	100
Size		
Micro	105	60.69
Small	35	20.23
Medium	20	11.56
Large	13	60.69
Total	173	100
Type of Ownership		
Sole	116	67.05
Partnership	42	24.28
Corporation	15	8.66
Total	173	100

The majority of the businesses under the service industry are sole proprietorships (67.05%), suggesting that a large portion of the businesses in Albay are individually owned and managed. Some businesses are operated as partnerships (24.28%), while only a few (8.66%) operate as corporations, which are larger and more structured compared to sole proprietorships and partnerships. This low percentage reflects the limited number of large-scale or formally registered service businesses operating in the province. Nevertheless, regardless of ownership, what is more significant is that the hiring of PWDs contributes positively to the performance and reputation of the firm, helping companies obtain competitive advantages and acting as a brand for the firm (García et al., 2024), but then employers' assumptions may influence hiring decisions depending on the organizational context, disability type, and policy environment (Nagtegaal et al., 2023).

### **Hiring Practices and Policies**

The hiring practices and policies as shown on Table 3 for PWD applicants vary among organizations from job posting and recruitment, screening and shortlisting, interview process, assessment and testing, and overall hiring procedures: Job posting and recruitment practices across all three cities are generally inadequate in supporting PWD inclusion. The data reveals that service establishments in Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao generally fall short, with a rating of 2.4 (interpreted as Disagree) regarding the implementation of inclusive recruitment for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). A close look at the four indicators further supports this observation. First, most job advertisements do not include equal opportunity statements that explicitly encourage PWD applicants. Second, job descriptions often fail to clearly outline essential job functions, crucial information for PWD applicants assessing their capability for a role. Third, the lowest-rated indicator was participation in job fairs or recruitment events specifically for PWDs.

Lastly, there is a lack of accessible application options, such as user-friendly online systems or alternative formats for those with visual or hearing impairments. The context of this study significantly aligns with the study of Brouse (2023), which emphasized that making job postings inclusive is the key step in promoting disability-friendly hiring practices, pointing to the need to use accessible language, provide multiple file formats (e.g., PDF, screen reader-friendly documents), and include accessibility statements to encourage PWD applicants. Likewise, Ali and Subramanian (2024) highlighted the importance of regularly updating job descriptions and clearly outlining essential functions. b. Screening and shortlisting are critical phases in the recruitment process, wherein a pool of applicants is narrowed

down to those most likely to meet the criteria listed in a job description. It serves as the bridge between initial application screening and the final selection stages. On average, establishments in the service industry show moderate (TWM=2.5, agree) inclusiveness in screening and shortlisting PWD applicants, particularly in non-discrimination and broad role consideration. It can be said that there is growing awareness and a desire to promote fairness in hiring, particularly in cities like Ligao (AWM=2.7, Agree), though the actual implementation of inclusive screening practices remains limited. While the provision of reasonable accommodations during the screening process registered "Disagree." Ricee (2023) emphasized the need for accommodations, though it cannot be discounted that complying with accommodation requirements may entail additional costs and management efforts (Hsu, Duffy, & Becker, 2021). The establishments must conform to the law, for example, the Republic Act No. 7277 (1992), to ensure that infrastructures, facilities, streets, and public utilities are designed to accommodate PWDs to promote their mobility and independence. c. The interview process total weighted mean in the three cities registered 2.4, interpreted as "Disagree." This indicates that on average, interview practices still fall short of being inclusive and fully supportive of PWD applicants.

While there are signs of progress, especially in Ligao, most establishments lack accommodations, do not offer assistive resources, and have limited training for interviewers on inclusive practices. Shenoy (2023) highlights that workplace inclusivity requires innovative practices, such as tailored interview processes and the integration of assistive technologies. Laurel and Franco (2024) further contextualize these findings. While their study acknowledged that assistive technology enhances mobility and independence, it also emphasized ongoing barriers such as insufficient personalized devices and unequal access to support.

The same issues appear in the present study, where low ratings for interview-related accommodations reflect the establishments' lack of readiness to provide these essential tools. This reinforces Laurel and Franco's call for more efficient and equitable AT delivery, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen support systems so PWD applicants receive necessary accommodations during key stages like job interviews. d. Assessment and testing practices across the three cities fall, on average, within the 'Disagree' range. This indicates that current assessment systems pose systemic barriers that hinder the full participation of PWDs. Specifically, the failure to provide accessible formats—such as screen readers or Braille—and reasonable accommodations creates inequality, as PWD applicants are prevented from fully demonstrating their abilities. This persists despite some indication that applicants are otherwise given opportunities to showcase their skills during the assessment process (AWM=2.6, Agree).

These findings align with the United Nations' guide on *Creating a Disability-Inclusive Workplace*, which emphasizes the need to design assessment procedures that accommodate a wide range of disabilities, including mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive impairments (United Nations Development Programme (n.d.). Furthermore, the National Organization on Disability (n.d.) highlights the importance of ensuring that application platforms and assessment tools are accessible to all applicants, reinforcing the principle that evaluation processes must be inclusive and responsive to diverse needs. Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Public Service Commission of Canada emphasize that reasonable accommodation is not a form of special treatment but a legal requirement to ensure that persons with disabilities are not unfairly disadvantaged in employment and recruitment processes (EEOC, n.d.; Public Service Commission of Canada, n.d.).

Ultimately, these legal and institutional guidelines support the present study's conclusion: a lack of accommodations can distort the perceived abilities of PWD applicants, potentially excluding qualified individuals from fair consideration.

Table 3 *Hiring Practices and Polices*

Indicators	Tabaco		Legazpi		Ligao		Overall	
	W M	AI	W M	AI	WM	AI	TWM	AI
1. The company job advertisements include a statement encouraging PWD applicants and promoting equal opportunity.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
2. Job descriptions clearly outline essential functions to help PWD applicants understand the core requirements.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
3. The company participates in job fairs or recruitment events specifically aimed at PWD candidates.	2.5	D	2.2	D	2.3	D	2.3	D
4. The company provide accessible application options for PWD applicants (e.g., alternative formats, easy-to-use online applications).	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
AWM	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
<b>Screening and shortlisting</b>								
1. The screening process ensures PWD applicants are not discriminated against based on their disability.	3.2	A	3	A	2.6	A	2.9	A
2. The company provides reasonable accommodations during the screening process for PWD applicants (e.g., additional time for assessments).	1.6	SD	1.8	SD	2.4	D	1.9	D
3. PWD applicants are shortlisted based on qualifications and experience without bias toward physical ability, unless relevant to the role.	2.4	D	2.2	D	3.1	A	2.6	A
4. PWD applicants are considered for a wide range of roles, not just those perceived as easy for people with disabilities.	2.5	A	2.6	A	2.7	A	2.6	A
AWM	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.7	A	2.5	A
<b>Interview Process</b>								
1. The company offers reasonable accommodations for PWD applicants during the interview process (e.g., accessible locations, virtual interviews).	2.1	D	2.2	D	3	A	2.4	D
2. Sign language interpreters or assistive technology are provided for interviews when requested by PWD applicants.	2.1	D	2.3	D	2.5	A	2.4	D

3. Interviewers are trained to avoid discriminatory questions and evaluate PWD applicants fairly based on their qualifications	2.3	D	2.5	A	2.9	A	3	A
4. The interview process is designed to assess the applicant's skills and experience rather than focusing on their disability.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.7	A	3	A
AWM	2.2	D	2.4	D	2.8	A	2.4	D
Assessment and Testing								
1. The company provides accessible formats for assessments (e.g., screen readers, Braille, extended time) when needed.	2.2	D	2.1	D	2.7	A	2.3	D
2. Accommodate requests from PWD applicants for reasonable adjustments during assessments without penalizing them	2.1	D	2.6	A	2.6	A	2.4	D
3. PWD applicants are given equal opportunities to demonstrate their abilities during assessments.	2.2	D	2.4	D	3.1	A	2.6	A
AWM	2.1	D	2.4	A	2.8	A	2.4	D

Table 3. *Hiring Practices and Policies*

Indicators	Tabaco		Legazpi		Ligao		Overall	
	W M	AI	W M	AI	WM	AI	TWM	AI
5. The company job advertisements include a statement encouraging PWD applicants and promoting equal opportunity.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
6. Job descriptions clearly outline essential functions to help PWD applicants understand the core requirements.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
7. The company participates in job fairs or recruitment events specifically aimed at PWD candidates.	2.5	D	2.2	D	2.3	D	2.3	D
8. The company provide accessible application options for PWD applicants (e.g., alternative formats, easy-to-use online applications).	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
AWM	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.4	D
Screening and shortlisting								
5. The screening process ensures PWD applicants are not discriminated against based on their disability.	3.2	A	3	A	2.6	A	2.9	A

6. The company provides reasonable accommodations during the screening process for PWD applicants (e.g., additional time for assessments).	1.6	SD	1.8	SD	2.4	D	1.9	D
7. PWD applicants are shortlisted based on qualifications and experience without bias toward physical ability, unless relevant to the role.	2.4	D	2.2	D	3.1	A	2.6	A
8. PWD applicants are considered for a wide range of roles, not just those perceived as easy for people with disabilities.	2.5	A	2.6	A	2.7	A	2.6	A
AWM	2.4	D	2.4	D	2.7	A	2.5	A
Interview Process								
5. The company offers reasonable accommodations for PWD applicants during the interview process (e.g., accessible locations, virtual interviews).	2.1	D	2.2	D	3	A	2.4	D
6. Sign language interpreters or assistive technology are provided for interviews when requested by PWD applicants.	2.1	D	2.3	D	2.5	A	2.4	D
7. Interviewers are trained to avoid discriminatory questions and evaluate PWD applicants fairly based on their qualifications	2.3	D	2.5	A	2.9	A	3	A
8. The interview process is designed to assess the applicant's skills and experience rather than focusing on their disability.	2.3	D	2.4	D	2.7	A	3	A
AWM	2.2	D	2.4	D	2.8	A	2.4	D
Assessment and Testing								
4. The company provides accessible formats for assessments (e.g., screen readers, Braille, extended time) when needed.	2.2	D	2.1	D	2.7	A	2.3	D
5. Accommodate requests from PWD applicants for reasonable adjustments during assessments without penalizing them	2.1	D	2.6	A	2.6	A	2.4	D
6. PWD applicants are given equal opportunities to demonstrate their abilities during assessments.	2.2	D	2.4	D	3.1	A	2.6	A
AWM	2.1	D	2.4	A	2.8	A	2.4	D

Legend:                      Strongly Disagree (1.0-1.75)                      Agree (2.51 - 3.25)  
    Disagree (1.76 - 2.50)    Strongly Agree (3.25-4.00)

Finally, the overall hiring policies in three cities are not fully established or consistently applied. Most establishments lack official programs, monitoring systems, and feedback mechanisms specific to PWD applicants and employees. While Ligao shows signs of progress and Legazpi shows moderate efforts, the overall picture indicates that inclusive hiring remains underdeveloped in Albay's service industry. The consistent low average ratings across Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao Cities regarding the presence of formal hiring policies for PWDs are supported by the literature emphasizing the critical role of structured inclusion frameworks in employment. Okutayeva et al. (2024) emphasized that hiring policies are fundamental for promoting fair and inclusive employment, particularly for vulnerable groups such as PWDs. The absence of clearly defined programs, feedback systems, and monitoring mechanisms in the establishments surveyed, especially in Tabaco City, reflects a gap between actual practices and the ideal standards of inclusion described in global guidelines. Similarly, Campbell (2021) highlights that effective disability inclusion policies not only provide accommodations but also foster a workplace culture that embraces diversity and empathy, elements that appear to be lacking across most establishments in this study. Furthermore, Chan et al. (2020) found that organizations with formal disability inclusion policies are more likely to hire PWDs and enjoy benefits such as improved retention and access to a wider talent pool. In addition, Iwanaga et al. (2024) and Baldrige et al. (2018) support the view that strong disability policies correlate with higher employment rates and better workplace outcomes, especially in more established companies.

### **Primary Consideration that Influences PWD Employability**

The primary considerations that influence the employability of PWDs are the key factors that employers take into account during the recruitment process. In this study, the identified factors include educational qualifications, skills, work experience, accessibility of the workplace, and the type of disability. It can be gleaned in Table 4 that in terms of educational qualifications, employers in Albay's service industry prioritize a mix of educational attainment. The study identified a hierarchy of educational preferences. A high school diploma is the leading qualification, deemed sufficient for most non-technical service roles. Vocational graduates and college-level students are equally valued, followed by college graduates. This indicates that while higher education is respected, hands-on skills often outweigh formal degrees in this sector. Postgraduate degrees saw low engagement due to a lack of specialized professional roles, while those with only elementary or non-formal education faced the highest barriers to entry. These findings align with Saquin (2023), who emphasizes the necessity of at least a post-secondary diploma, and Alson, Espela, and Urbina (2019), who note that specific skills can make high school graduates competitive against degree holders. However, the data also highlights the "structural barriers" mentioned by Bryan et al. (2023), suggesting that true inclusivity requires ensuring PWDs receive the same employment returns on their education as their non-disabled peers.

In terms of skills, categorized into soft and hard skills, the most preferred soft skills are the ability to communicate effectively and the ability to display a good attitude, including responsibility, commitment, and accountability. On the other hand, hard skills related to marketing strategies and techniques, proficiency in MS Word, and data analysis and interpretation are among the most preferred, while technical writing is the least preferred. It can be noted that the top preferred soft and hard skills are those that complement tourism and tourism-related services. Meanwhile, hard skills such as proficiency in MS Word, data analysis, and interpretation are responsive to IT and IT-enabled industries, underscoring the growing demand for digital and analytical competencies. These findings significantly align with the study of Alson et al. (2019), which found that communication and teamwork, as well as the ability to analyze and use practical computer applications, are required soft and hard skills, respectively. Likewise, the study by Saquin (2023) found that while employers highly prefer candidates holding post-secondary education diplomas, they still value both soft and hard skills, such as computer applications and data analysis, among others. On the other hand, the study of Alson, Espela, and Urbina (2019) has different findings. The study found that employers generally prefer PWDs with a variety of soft skills over hard skills. Also, employers also showed preference for

college graduates. The significance of providing training in both soft and hard skills align with the findings of De Luna-Narido and Tacadao (2016), who stated that education and training are critical to making PWDs employable.

Table 4. *Primary Considerations that Influence PWD Employability*

Educational Qualifications	f	Rank
High School Graduate	75	1
Vocational/Technical Course	59	2
College Level	59	2
College Degree	58	4
High School Level	38	5
Elementary Graduate	10	6
Postgraduate Study	10	6
Elementary Level	8	8
Non-Formal Education	7	9
<b>Skills</b>		
<b>Soft Skills</b>		
Ability to communicate effectively in a simple manner	123	1
Displays a good attitude, including responsibility, commitment, and accountability	128	2
Ability to work collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals	105	3
Possess customer service skills	103	4
Ability to interact effectively with others	99	5
Ability to identify and solve problems	75	6
Demonstrates managerial and leadership skills	63	7
Ability to analyze situations	70	8
<b>Hard Skills</b>		
Skilled in marketing strategies and techniques	76	1
Proficient in MS Word and other basic computer skills	67	2
Proficient in data analysis and interpretation	49	3
Skilled in technical writing	35	4
<b>Work Experience</b>		
Relevant Experience	125	1
Length of Experience	55	2
<b>Types of Disability</b>		
Physical	41	1
Hearing	31	2
Vision	25	3

*Primary Considerations that Influence PWD Employability*

Accessibility		
Availability for Physical Access		
Designated accessible parking space/s	70	1
Doorways that can accommodate wheelchairs	63	2
Handrails placed on stairs, ramps, and walkways	45	3
\Comfort Rooms	41	4
Ramps	34	5
Elevators	17	6
Automatic or motion-sensor doors	8	7
Escalator	8	7
Assistive Technology		
Text-to-Speech Software	29	1
Hearing Aid	14	2
Screen Magnifier	14	2

N = 173. Multiple Response

Regarding work experience, service industry employers prioritize the relevance of a candidate's background over mere years of service. This suggests that the direct applicability of a PWD candidate's experience to a specific role is the primary hiring criterion. These findings align with Gatchalian et al. (2014), who noted that hiring decisions often hinge on the perceived value and relevant experience a PWD brings to the business. Baes (2024) further affirms that such experience demonstrates the necessary skills and knowledge for job excellence. Consequently, as reinforced by Albay et al. (2024), employers often prioritize practical experience over educational background. To foster inclusivity, companies should emphasize skills and experience that align with job requirements within their recruitment postings.

In terms of type of disabilities, PWD candidates with physical disabilities are the most preferred in the service industry (Rank 1), followed by those with hearing disabilities (Rank 2), while individuals with vision disabilities are least preferred (Rank 3). This suggests that despite mobility limitations, employers prioritize applicants who can communicate effectively and rely on key senses such as hearing and vision. Consequently, there may be less perceived need for certain assistive technologies (e.g., Braille), though accessibility measures remain essential.

Given the service industry's reliance on interaction, communication, and mobility—across tourism, personal services, and IT-enabled sectors—job roles often involve customer assistance, inventory management, and dynamic tasks. These demands highlight the need for inclusive hiring practices supported by assistive technologies such as ramps, wheelchairs, accessible transportation, hearing aids, and voice-recognition tools to enable PWDs to perform effectively.

The findings further show that disability type significantly influences hiring decisions. Employers tend to favor disabilities perceived as less disruptive to job performance, reflecting persistent biases and misconceptions about PWD capabilities. Supporting this, Alson et al. noted employer hesitation toward individuals with hearing or speech impairments, while Boman et al. (2015) found higher hiring likelihood for individuals with hearing impairments than those with psychological disabilities. This underscores how disability type often becomes a primary filter in recruitment, sometimes outweighing qualifications and experience.

Workplace accessibility for persons with disabilities (PWDs) is essential for promoting inclusivity and equality, and it covers both physical accessibility and assistive technologies. The results show that physical accessibility is generally present at a basic level, with designated parking spaces, wheelchair-accessible doorways, ramps, and handrails being the most common features. However, more advanced facilities such as elevators, automatic doors, and escalators are less available, indicating a gap between basic compliance and comprehensive accessibility. This suggests that while some establishments meet

minimum requirements, full accessibility is still limited despite legal and ethical mandates such as Republic Act No. 7277. (1992), which emphasizes the creation of a barrier-free environment (Republic of the Philippines, 1992). These findings are supported by Banate et al. (2024), who also observed moderate levels of physical accessibility in fast-food establishments, including ramps, parking spaces, accessible doorways, and wheelchair-friendly areas, as well as moderately rated restroom facilities with grab bars and spacious stalls. This further highlight that many workplaces are only moderately prepared to accommodate PWDs.

In terms of assistive technologies, availability remains limited in the service industry. Text-to-speech software is the most commonly available, followed by hearing aids and screen magnifiers, although these are still present in small numbers. This suggests a need for wider adoption of assistive tools to better support PWD applicants. This is supported by Marsico et al. (2023), who emphasized that assistive technology plays a key role in shaping positive workplace experiences for PWDs, while Ricee (2023) noted that workplace accommodations, including flexible schedules and assistive technologies, are essential forms of support for inclusive employment. Overall, the findings underscore the need for workplaces to strengthen both physical infrastructure and technological accommodations to become genuinely accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to persons with disabilities.

### **Relationship between Profile of the Respondents and the Primary Consideration that Influences PWD Employability**

The relationship between establishment profiles as shown in Table 5, such as service industry type, size, and type of ownership, and employment preferences such as education, skills, experience, type of disabilities, and accessibility is essential in identifying patterns and potential biases in hiring PWDs, as well as in strengthening employment programs in the service industry.

The analysis of the relationship between respondents' profiles and educational qualification preferences shows that industry type has a statistically significant influence, while organizational size and ownership structure do not. Specifically, the Chi-Square statistic for industry type is 16.6425 with a p-value of 0.034, indicating a significant association. This means that educational requirements vary depending on the nature of industry operations, with some sectors demanding higher levels of formal education than others. In contrast, the results for organizational size ( $\chi^2 = 29.1134$ ,  $p = 0.086$ ) and ownership type ( $\chi^2 = 13.5599$ ,  $p = 0.094$ ) show no significant association. This suggests that hiring standards for educational attainment remain relatively consistent across small, medium, and large organizations, as well as across sole proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations. These findings are supported by related literature. Saguin (2023) found that employers generally prefer PWD applicants with at least postsecondary education, reinforcing the importance of educational attainment in employability. Similarly, Jimenez and Cabaluna (2021) noted that business establishments differ in their perceptions and preferences regarding educational qualifications, which aligns with the present study's finding that industry type is the primary determinant.

The relationship between respondent profiles and soft skills shows that both industry type and ownership structure significantly influence employer expectations, while firm size does not. For industry type, the Chi-Square statistic is 37.4066 with a p-value of 0.005, confirming a significant association. This means that different sectors demand distinct soft skills, adapting requirements to the realities of their operations. For ownership type, the Chi-Square statistic is 48.6750 with a p-value of 0.000, also indicating a strong significant association. This reflects how organizational culture and decision-making styles shape the way PWD candidates are assessed. In contrast, firm size shows no significant relationship, with a chi-square statistic of 39.3778 and a p-value of 0.059. Regardless of whether a business is small or large, fundamental competencies such as responsibility and accountability remain consistent across the service industry. Overall, the statistical results confirm that soft skill expectations are shaped.

Table 5. *Relationship Between Profile and Preferences*

Profile	Chi-Square Statistic ( $\chi^2$ )	p-value:	Relationship a=0.05
<b>Educational Qualifications</b>			
Type of industry	16.6425	0.034	Significant Association
Size	29.1134	0.086	No Significant Association
Type of Ownership	13.5599	0.094	No Significant Association
<b>Soft Skills</b>			
Type of industry	37.4066	0.005	Significant Association
Size	39.3778	0.059	No Significant Association
Type of Ownership	48.6750	0.000	Significant Association
<b>Hard Skills</b>			
Type of industry	30.1324	0.003	Significant Association
Size	21.0975	0.275	No Significant Association
Type of Ownership	23.2216	0.026	Significant Association
<b>Experience</b>			
Type of industry	1.9023	0.385	No Significant Association
Size	2.6997	0.2593	No Significant Association
Type of Ownership	2.6997	0.852	No Significant Association
<b>Type of Disabilities</b>			
Type of industry	16.6697	0.034	Significant Association
Size	12.1378	0.435	No Significant Association
Type of Ownership	2.1291	0.977	No Significant Association
<b>Physical Access</b>			
Type of industry	37.406	0.005	Significant Association
Size	35.9348	0.0001	Significant Association
Type of Ownership	13.5141	0.019	Significant Association
<b>Availability of Assistive Technology</b>			
Type of industry	4.0999	0.129	No Significant Association
Size	10.4538	0.005	Significant Association
Type of Ownership	1.5678	0.457	No Significant Association

On the relationship between respondent profiles and soft skills shows that both industry type and ownership structure significantly influence employer expectations, while firm size does not. For industry type, the Chi-Square statistic is 37.4066 with a p-value of 0.005, confirming a significant association. This means that different sectors demand distinct soft skills, adapting requirements to the realities of their operations. For ownership type, the Chi-Square statistic is 48.6750 with a p-value of 0.000, also indicating a strong significant association. This reflects how organizational culture and decision-making styles shape the way PWD candidates are assessed. In contrast, firm size shows no significant relationship, with a chi-square statistic of 39.3778 and a p-value of 0.059. Regardless of whether a business is small or large, fundamental competencies such as responsibility and accountability remain consistent across the service industry. Overall, the statistical results confirm that soft skill expectations are shaped primarily by industry type and ownership structure, while firm size has little influence. This underscores the importance of tailoring training programs for PWDs to the specific demands of industries and organizational cultures, ensuring that candidates are equipped with the competencies most valued in their target workplaces.

On the other hand, for hard skills, industry type was found to have a strong association with hard skills, meaning that the sector in which a business operates directly influences the competencies it prioritizes. Ownership type also showed a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that sole proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations differ in how they value hard skills such as technical abilities, computer proficiency, and job-specific tasks. In contrast, firm size did not exhibit a significant

association. Regardless of whether an organization is small, medium, or large, its expectations for hard skills remain consistent.

Taken together, these findings emphasize that both soft and hard skills must be aligned with the specific demands of industries and ownership types. Previous studies support this conclusion. The Asian Development Bank (2021) stresses that training must match industry needs; Alson, Espela, and Urbina (2019) note that employers often prioritize soft skills such as flexibility and socialization; and Saguin (2023) points out that employers prefer PWDs with post-secondary diplomas and a mix of soft and hard skills, including computer applications, data analysis, planning, and mathematics. The evidence underscores that vocational rehabilitation and employability programs must be customized and context-sensitive, ensuring that PWDs are equipped with both the technical and interpersonal competencies most valued by the industries and ownership structures they aim to enter.

With regard to the relationship between profile and work experience, the findings show that work experience is not significantly influenced by employer profile factors when hiring persons with disabilities (PWDs). On industry type, with a Chi-Square value of 1.9023 and  $p = 0.385$ , no significant association was found. Organizational size, with a Chi-Square statistic of 2.6997 and  $p = 0.2593$ , also showed no significant relationship. And last, ownership type results of chi-square 2.6997 and  $p = 0.852$  confirmed no significant link. Overall, the findings highlight that experience is not a decisive factor in PWD hiring across industry, size, or ownership. Employers are more concerned with what applicants can do rather than how long they have worked. This aligns with Gatchalian et al. (2014), Baes (2024), and Magrin, Marini, & Nicolotti (2019), who all emphasize that skills, resilience, and positive attitudes matter more than lengthy work histories.

On the relationship between profile and the type of disabilities, the findings show that industry type is the only factor with a significant influence, while organizational size and ownership structure do not. For industry type, the Chi-Square statistic of 16.6697 with a p-value of 0.034 indicates a statistically significant association. This means that certain disabilities are more commonly employed in specific industries. For organizational size, the Chi-Square statistic of 12.1378 with a p-value of 0.435 shows no significant association. Whether an organization is small, medium, or large, the diversity of disabilities represented among employees does not vary significantly. For ownership type, the chi-square statistic of 2.1291 with a p-value of 0.977 also reveals no significant association. Sole proprietorships, partnerships, and corporations appear to follow similar hiring practices, offering comparable opportunities for PWDs regardless of disability type. Overall, the findings imply that industry type matters most in shaping disability representation, while size and ownership do not. This underscores the need to match PWDs with industries that align with their abilities and to prioritize workplace culture and accommodations over organizational characteristics. These results complement earlier studies. Chan et al. (2020) found that larger companies often score higher on disability inclusion due to structured policies, but the present study focused on micro and small enterprises in Albay, showing that size does not necessarily determine inclusivity. Campbell (2021) emphasized that true inclusion goes beyond physical accommodations, requiring a culture that values individuals with both visible and invisible disabilities. Together, these insights reinforce that disability inclusion must be industry-sensitive but universally applied across organizations, ensuring equal opportunities for PWDs regardless of size or ownership.

The analysis of assistive technology provision shows that organizational size is the most significant factor, while industry type and ownership structure do not have a meaningful influence. For industry type, the chi-square statistic of 4.0999 with a p-value of 0.129 indicates no significant association. This means the adoption of assistive technology is not industry-specific. For organizational size, the Chi-Square statistic of 10.4538 with a p-value of 0.005 reveals a statistically significant association. For ownership type, the Chi-Square statistic of 1.5678 with a p-value of 0.457 shows no significant association. The findings emphasize that size matters most in determining assistive technology availability, with larger organizations better equipped to provide inclusive tools. Smaller enterprises, which dominate the service industry, require

external support to bridge accessibility gaps. These results align with existing literature. Campbell (2021) stressed that inclusion must extend beyond physical access to systems that enable equitable participation, such as accessible application platforms and assessment tools. Marinaci et al. (2023) highlighted that assistive technology is most effective when it aligns with functional needs, identity, and social environment—dimensions often overlooked in microenterprises. Similarly, Laurel and Franco (2024) pointed out structural gaps in access to assistive devices, particularly in smaller establishments, and called for more efficient and equitable delivery systems.

1. The inclusive hiring policy framework presented in the study serves as a structured guide to ensure that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are given equitable opportunities throughout the employment process. It begins with a strong legal foundation, anchored in national laws such as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (RA 7277), RA 10524, and Labor Advisory No. 14, s. 2016, which mandates equal labor standards and benefits for PWDs. From there, the framework outlines each stage of the hiring process. At the job posting stage, inclusivity is emphasized through clear descriptions that specify qualifications, role expectations, and available accommodations. During screening and shortlisting, candidates are evaluated based on competencies rather than disability status, ensuring fairness. The interview process requires disability awareness training for hiring managers, accessible settings, and accommodations such as assistive technology or interpreters, with questions focused on abilities rather than limitations. It also highlights the importance of workplace accessibility and accommodations, including ramps, ergonomic workstations, assistive technologies, flexible schedules, and adjusted duties to support PWDs in performing effectively. To sustain these practices, implementation and monitoring mechanisms are recommended, with regular training and oversight committees ensuring consistency. Finally, a feedback system allows organizations to gather input from employees, especially PWDs, to refine policies and address barriers.

In summary, the framework embeds inclusion at every stage from compliance and recruitment to workplace accessibility and continuous feedback. It promotes a culture where PWDs are valued, supported, and empowered, ensuring that inclusive hiring is not only a legal requirement but also a sustainable organizational practice.

## CONCLUSION

Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the service industry across Tabaco, Legazpi, and Ligao cities remains limited, with inclusive hiring practices not yet fully institutionalized. The industry is dominated by micro-sized, tourism-related establishments, mostly under sole proprietorship, and these characteristics strongly influence hiring practices and the availability of formal policies. While some positive initiatives exist, particularly in Ligao and Legazpi, hiring policies for PWDs are still fragmented and underdeveloped. Employers' hiring considerations focus mainly on educational qualifications, skills, type of disability, and work experience. Secondary education and vocational training are most valued, reflecting the entry-level nature of service jobs. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and customer service, alongside technical skills like marketing knowledge and basic computer proficiency, are prioritized. In terms of disability type, individuals with physical impairments are most often considered, followed by those with hearing impairments, while those with visual impairments are least favored. Work experience also remains a crucial factor in employability. Statistical analysis further shows significant associations between industry type and both educational qualifications and disability type, indicating that certain industries prefer specific levels of education and skills. Industry type and ownership structure are also significantly linked to soft and hard skill requirements. However, work experience does not show a significant association with industry profile, suggesting it is a general requirement across sectors rather than industry-specific.

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