

# **Two worlds apart, yet similar?**

**A comparative study of disability policy reforms and employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments from Norway and India**

**Gagan Chhabra**

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**Gagan Chhabra**

**OSLOMET**

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In early 2015, I had no plans to pursue a PhD, as many people had advised me that it was a hill too steep to climb with my severe visual impairment. During this period, I was immersed in student rights advocacy and as a part of the lobbying and outreach efforts; I got a serendipitous opportunity to meet Curt Rice, Rector of Oslo Metropolitan University. Curt, you placed the thought of getting a PhD into my consciousness and nudged me to pursue it whole-heartedly, and I followed your pragmatic advice. Your prudent foresight, continual support and profound belief in my abilities mediated my career choice. Thank you for all of the thoughtful conversations on diversity, accessibility and disability inclusion; I am grateful for your mentorship and friendship.

I submitted my PhD research proposal in 2016 wherein I broadly sketched a comparative research design to contrast disability policies and employment experiences of the youth with disabilities across Norway and India. I was extremely fortunate, not only to be accepted into the PhD program but also to be placed under the astute advisorship of one of the foremost comparative disability researchers, Rune Halvorsen. Without Rune's insightful and experienced counsel, I would fail to operationalize and conclude my PhD research. Rune, your profound influence on my work can be observed through many of your citations strewn across my entire thesis. Much gratitude for your thoughtful guidance and continual encouragement.

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This thesis is dedicated to curious contrarians, meandering misfits, and devalued deviants; scholars, advocates and activists who contribute to the realization of disability rights and to all the Temporarily Able-Bodied individuals, as the experience of disability is more universal than what we acknowledge.

Gagan Chhabra, Oslo, June 7, 2021



## Summary

This comparative study contrasts the disability policies and employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments from Norway and India. Its point of departure is the recognition that the labour market inclusion of blind and visually impaired youth is a perennial problem across countries in both the Global North and Global South. Based on this grim labour market reality experienced by young adults with visual impairments, the overarching question the current thesis explores is as follows: *What are the avenues of convergence within government policies aimed at promoting employment inclusion and similarities among the employment experiences of youth with visual impairments in Norway and India?*

The thesis is based on a qualitative case study methodology that entailed a policy review commencing in the 1990s. Moreover, 25 policy experts (11 from Norway and 14 from India) and 29 young adults with visual impairments (12 from Oslo and 17 from Delhi) were interviewed. The philosophy of pragmatism was employed to produce useful knowledge that is theoretically informed, empirically grounded and contextually conscious.

The thesis is significant on three grounds. First, there is a dearth of comparative disability research involving countries from the Global North and Global South. Norway has been contrasted to other developed countries, while India has been compared with developing countries. The present study undertakes a comparison hitherto never made. Second, the voices of young adults with disabilities have largely been overlooked in cross-national research. The current study foregrounds the previously underexplored employment narratives of young adults with visual impairments, who are relatively marginalised in the labour market in Norway and India. Third, comparing policies, institutions and lived perspectives across developed and developing countries could challenge ethnocentric proclivities, national stereotypes and cultural clichés. The current thesis offers a nuanced understanding of disability policies, labour market institutions and employment experiences from two disparate countries. All this cumulatively expands the contours of comparative disability research and youth studies.

Five research articles constitute the foundation of this thesis. The first research article is predicated on a review and analysis of policy documents and describes the points of convergence within the social regulation reforms between these two significantly different

countries commencing in the early 1990s. The findings of this article point towards a globalisation of social regulation policies.

The second research article is grounded on interviews with policy experts, and it explicates the impact of two factors that contribute to the said social regulation policy convergence. The findings suggest that not only is there a globalisation of social regulation reforms, but common factors, such as the impact of international treaties and the grassroots mobilisation of disabled people and their organisations, are influencing these disability policy reforms.

The third research article is based on qualitative interviews with qualified young adults with visual impairments and describes their barrier perceptions linked to employers' discrimination. The findings indicate the prevalence of ableist proclivities, spurious assumptions, outdated misconceptions and attitudinal barriers, which preclude qualified young adults with visual impairments from labour market participation.

The fourth article is also based on youth interviews and contrasts a few individual factors and institutional enablers that foster social resilience and facilitate employment inclusion among qualified young adults with visual impairments as they try to secure employment in Oslo and Delhi. The findings accentuate that young adults with visual impairments are not passive actors, but resourceful agents who can cope with, adapt to and transform their labour market realities.

The fifth article is predicated on critical reflections and experiential insights from the field study in Oslo and Delhi. It revisits a few opportunities and perils associated with the insider–outsider dichotomy within disability research. The article invites researchers to adopt the in-betweeners' position on the insider–outsider continua while conducting qualitative cross-national disability research.

The thesis and its accompanying five research articles do not focus on significant differences, which are partly intuitive and overtly obvious, but rather, they focus on points of policy convergence and experiential similarities prevailing across Norway and India. The current thesis offers contextually nuanced comparative insights and generates contingent working hypotheses that should be vindicated or refuted by undertaking more Global North–South disability research.

## Sammendrag

Denne komparative studien sammenligner funksjonshemmingspolitikken og arbeidslivserfaringene til unge synshemmede i Norge og India. Som utgangspunkt står erkjennelsen av at inkludering av unge blinde og synshemmede i arbeidsmarkedet er et vedvarende problem på tvers av land tilhørende det globale nord og det globale sør. Følgelig har denne avhandlingen én overordnet problemstilling: *Hva er likhetene mellom regjeringenes politikk for å fremme inkludering av funksjonshemmede i arbeidsmarkedet, og hvilke sammenfall finnes mellom unge synshemmedes erfaringer på arbeidsmarkedet i Norge og India?*

Avhandlingen er basert på en kvalitativ case studie-metodikk. Jeg har gått igjennom funksjonshemmingspolitikken i Norge og India fra starten av 1990-tallet og frem til i dag. Videre ble 25 policyeksperter (11 fra Norge og 14 fra India) og 29 unge voksne med synshemming (12 fra Oslo og 17 fra Delhi) intervjuet. Pragmatisme har vært en filosofisk og metodologisk ledetråd, med det mål for øyet å produsere nyttig kunnskap som er både teoretisk informert, empirisk forankret og kontekstuel bevisst.

Avhandlingen er særskilt aktuell av tre grunner. For det første er det mangel på komparativ forskning på funksjonshemming som involverer land fra både det globale nord og det globale sør. Norge har blitt sammenlignet med andre utviklede land, mens India har blitt sammenlignet med utviklingsland. Denne studien, derimot, foretar en sammenligning som hittil aldri er gjort. For det andre har stemmene til unge med nedsatt funksjonsevne i stor grad blitt oversett i tverrnasjonal forskning. Denne avhandlingen framhever de marginaliserte erfaringene til unge synshemmede i Norge og India. For det tredje kan en sammenligning av policyer, institusjoner og erfaringsbaserte perspektiver på tvers av utviklede- og utviklingsland utfordre etnosentriske tilbøyeligheter, nasjonale stereotyper og kulturelle klisjeer. Gjeldende avhandling gir en nyansert forståelse av funksjonshemmingspolitikk, arbeidsmarkedsinstitusjoner og erfaringer fra to forskjellige land. Samlet bidrar avhandlingen til å utvide den komparative forskningen om funksjonshemming og unge voksne.

Fem forskningsartikler inngår som del av denne avhandlingen. Den første artikkelen er basert på en gjennomgang og analyse av politikkdokumenter og beskriver likhetstrekkene mellom reformene i sosial reguleringspolitikk fra Norge og India fra begynnelsen av 1990-tallet. Funnene i denne artikkelen peker mot en globalisering av reformer innen sosial regulering.

Den andre forskningsartikkelen er basert på intervjuer med policyeksperter, og belyser to faktorer som bidrar til endringene i den sosiale reguleringen nevnt over. Funnene antyder at ikke bare globaliseringen av reformer i sosial reguleringspolitikk, men også andre faktorer – som internasjonale traktater og grasrotmobilisering av funksjonshemmede og deres organisasjoner – påvirker disse reformene.

Den tredje forskningsartikkelen er basert på kvalitative intervjuer med kvalifiserte unge synshemmede og beskriver hvordan barrierene de erfarer er knyttet til arbeidsgivers diskriminering. Funnene indikerer en utbredelse av «ableist» tilbøyeligheter, feilaktige antakelser, utdaterte oppfatninger og holdningsbarrierer, som igjen utelukker kvalifiserte unge voksne med synshemminger fra deltakelse i arbeidsmarkedet.

Den fjerde artikkelen er også basert på ungdomsintervjuer og sammenligner enkeltfaktorer og institusjonelle forhold som fremmer sosial resiliens og muliggjør inkludering av kvalifiserte unge voksne med synshemminger når de prøver å sikre seg arbeid i Oslo og Delhi. Funnene fremhever at unge voksne med synshemming ikke er passive aktører, men ressurssterke agenter som kan takle, tilpasse seg og transformere deres situasjon.

Den femte artikkelen er basert på refleksjoner og erfaringer fra feltstudiet i Oslo og Delhi. Den går gjennom noen få muligheter og problemer angående insider-outsider dikotomien innen funksjonshemmingsforskning. Artikkelen inviterer forskere til å innta en mellomposisjon i insider-outsider-kontinuumet (in-betweener) mens de gjennomfører kvalitativ, tverrnasjonal funksjonshemmingsforskning.

Avhandlingen, inkludert de fem forskningsartiklene, fokuserer ikke på signifikante forskjeller, som delvis er intuitive og åpenbare, men fokuserer snarere på det vi finner av politisk konvergens og erfaringsmessige likheter mellom Norge og India. Avhandlingen gir kontekstuell nyanserte komparative innsikter og genererer betingede arbeidshypoteser som bør bekreftes eller avkreftes ved å gjennomføre mer funksjonshemmingsforskning på tvers av det globale nord og sør.

# Contents

- 1. Introduction ..... 5
  - 1.1. Background..... 5
  - 1.2 Mapping the employment situation of people with disabilities in Norway and India ..... 7
  - 1.3 Research questions ..... 10
  - 1.4 The significance of this comparative study ..... 13
    - 1.4.1 Comparisons hitherto never made ..... 13
    - 1.4.2 Voicing the marginalised perspectives..... 14
    - 1.4.3 Understanding nuances from a distance ..... 15
  - 1.5 Scope ..... 15
  - 1.6 Structure of the thesis ..... 17
- Chapter 2: Two Worlds Apart – Contextual Differences in Norway and India ..... 19
  - 2.1 Setting the stage ..... 19
    - 2.1.1 Features of the labour market and labour market institutions..... 19
    - 2.1.2 The typology of welfare regimes: social democratic and protective ..... 21
  - 2.2 Contrasting the disability policy landscape and institutions ..... 25
    - 2.2.1 Disability policy landscape..... 25
    - 2.2.2 Salient institutions ..... 29
  - 2.3 Critical takeaways ..... 33
- Chapter 3: Philosophical Ideas and Analytic Concepts ..... 34
  - 3.1 Pragmatism ..... 34
    - 3.1.1 Producing useful knowledge..... 34
    - 3.1.2 Accumulating knowledge..... 35
    - 3.1.3 Beyond predictions and explanations to a dialogue ..... 36
  - 3.2. Middle-range theory and concepts..... 36
    - 3.2.1 Perspectives on disability ..... 37
    - 3.2.2 Perspectives on discrimination and ableism ..... 42
    - 3.2.3 Perspectives on social regulations ..... 45
    - 3.2.4 Perspectives on policy reforms ..... 48
    - 3.2.5 Perspectives on youth transitions..... 51
    - 3.2.6 Perspectives on resilience and social resilience..... 53
  - 3.3. Exploring the scope of meliorism: top-down and bottom-up interventions..... 56
- Chapter 4: Research Methodology ..... 59
  - 4.1 Comparative case study method ..... 59
    - 4.1.1 Case selection ..... 60
    - 4.1.2 The four criteria to assess this qualitative case study ..... 61

4.2 Two phases of research .....	63
4.2.1 First phase .....	64
4.2.2 Second phase .....	68
4.3 Ethical considerations and study limitations .....	72
4.3.1. Ethical considerations .....	72
4.3.2 Study limitations.....	74
<b>Chapter 5: Summary of the Research Articles .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Article I: Two Worlds, Too Apart to Converge? A Comparison of Social Regulation Policies Aimed at the Employment of Disabled People in Norway and India .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Article II: Two Factors, One Direction Towards Social Regulation Policy Convergence: Learning from Policy Experts in Norway and India.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Article III: Turning a Blind Eye to Employers’ Discrimination? Attitudinal Barrier Perceptions of Vision-Impaired Youth from Oslo and Delhi .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Article IV: Social Resilience in the Labour Market: Learning from Young Adults With Visual Impairments in Oslo and Delhi .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Article V: Insider, Outsider or an In-betweener? Epistemological Reflections of a Legally Blind Researcher on Conducting Cross-national Disability Research .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Concluding Discussion.....</b>	<b>86</b>
6.1 The five working hypotheses .....	87
6.2 Contributions of the study .....	89
6.2.1 Contributions to welfare regime studies.....	89
6.2.2 Contribution to the social policy research.....	92
6.2.3 Contribution to the labour market studies.....	93
6.2.4 Contribution to youth transition studies .....	95
6.2.5 Contribution to disability studies.....	97
6.3 What’s in it for you? .....	100
<b>References:.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Appendix 1: The Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research (NSD): Research confirmation.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Topical guide for experts interviews Norway .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Topical guide for experts interviews India.....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Topical guide for interviewing youth with visual disabilities .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Consent form for interviewing experts.....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Consent form for interviewing youth with visual disabilities.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>The Articles .....</b>	<b>147</b>



## **The Research Articles**

Five research articles constitute the foundation for this comparative thesis. At the outset, these articles are introduced with the view of contextualising the thesis, and they are referred to using the numerals I to V.

### **Article I**

Chhabra, G. (2019). Two Worlds, Too Apart to Converge? A Comparison of Social Regulation Policies Aimed at the Employment of Disabled People in Norway and India. Published in *ALTER- European Journal of Disability Research*, vol. 13, pp. 83-100.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2011.001>

### **Article II**

Chhabra, G. (2021). Two Factors, One Direction Towards Social Regulation Policy Convergence: Learning From Disability Experts in Norway and India. Published in *ALTER- European Journal of Disability Research*, vol. 15 issue 1, pp. 29-45.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2020.10.001>

### **Article III**

Gagan Chhabra (2021) Turning a blind eye to employers' discrimination? Attitudinal barrier perceptions of vision impaired youth from Oslo and Delhi, *Disability & Society*, 36:10, 1688-1711.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2020.1816000>

### **Article IV**

Chhabra, G. (2020). Social Resilience in the Labour Market: Learning from Young Adults with Visual Impairments in Oslo and Delhi. *YOUNG*. 2021;29(5):508-528.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308820977397>

### **Article V**

Chhabra, G. (2020). Insider, Outsider or an In-between? Epistemological Reflections of a Legally Blind Researcher on Conducting Cross-National Disability Research. Published in *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* vol. 22, issue 1, pp. 307-317.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.696>



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

*What do you do?* This is a question we have often asked and answered across different social and professional settings. This innocuous question has an impressive universal appeal because it offers a window into a person's work and life. Work is regarded as a quintessential element of human flourishing, and equitable access to work is considered an important human right (Heymann et al., 2014; Lawson, 2005; May-Simera & Kamundia, 2005; Saleh & Bruyère, 2018; Waddington et al., 2017). For the individual, work is valuable for many reasons. First, it offers economic independence and financial security. Second, it facilitates identity formation, community participation and social acceptance. Third, it promotes psychosocial well-being and nurtures a sense of dignity (Schur et al., 2013). The income-generating feature of work is intuitively understood and apparently valuable; however, work also provides a latent function because it contributes to human flourishing (Paul & Batinic, 2010), opening a pathway to adulthood, personhood and citizenship (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Halvorsen et al., 2018).

Work is sought in the labour market, which, like any other market, consists of two sides: a supply side, which involves individuals who are willing to sell their labour and want to be employed, and the demand side, which constitutes employers who are willing to recruit the individuals wanting a job. This entails a process wherein potential employees, who are interested in stable and well-paid jobs, are matched with prospective employers, who are keen to recruit productive employees (Frøyland et al., 2019; Mont, 2014). However, labour markets are fraught with imperfections and do not necessarily operate seamlessly. Often, governments must intervene in the form of active labour market policies, such as job-training programmes targeting individuals, and social regulations, for instance antidiscrimination norms aimed at employers, to enhance general labour market participation (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). There exist employment barriers that preclude vulnerable groups from actively participating in the labour market. Indeed, not all those who are qualified, willing and able to work are successful in securing gainful employment (Mont, 2004; World Health Organization, 2011). The current comparative study contrasts disability policies and employment experiences from two significantly different countries—Norway and India—to accentuate the perverse influence of employment barriers on a specific vulnerable group, namely blind and visually impaired youth.

Following the recent trends within youth studies, young adults often encounter difficulties participating in the labour market because they have limited work experience, chequered

employment histories and reduced capacity for human capital accumulation (Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al.; 2011; Walther, 2006; Woodman, 2012). Young adults are witnessing unprecedented labour market precariousness, which is further exacerbated by increasingly protracted, nonlinear, risk-laden, fragmented and chaotic employment transitions (Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011). However, a certain section of this subgroup—namely young adults with disabilities—seems to be the most disadvantaged among the youth population.

Global estimates suggest that there are around 180–220 million young people with disabilities (Goldin, 2015, p. 130), and they are one of the most socioeconomically marginalised groups across developed and developing countries (Gregorius, 2014; United Nations, 2010). Their labour market precariousness is all the more enhanced when they encounter additional employment barriers. These barriers constitute the demand side, for example, employers engaging in disability-based discrimination, or those constituting the supply side, for example, the disabled youth failing to secure relevant education and job-related training owing to resource constraints (Bruyère & Van Looy, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Roggero et al., 2006). Over and above their labour market precariousness, disabled youth encounter complex, prolonged and unpredictable transitions to adulthood because they often fail to secure requisite education, acquire employable skills, achieve gainful employment, build relationships and live independently (Bussi et al., 2019; Groce, 2004; King et al., 2003; Sapra, 2014; Stokes et al., 2013). It is vital to understand the situation of young adults with disabilities who experience an employment gap compared with their nondisabled counterparts; their employment experiences need to be addressed because historically, their accounts have been overlooked and sidelined within disability research and youth studies (Gregorius, 2014; Singal, 2008).

The present thesis is based on a qualitative case study methodology (George & Bennett, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012), which, for the first time, contrasts government policies that are designed to influence market functioning, reduce market imperfections and promote fairness and justice across two disparate countries. Here, specifically, the thesis explores the country cases of Norway, which belongs to the Global North, and India, which is situated in the Global South<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the current thesis juxtaposes the hitherto marginalised

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<sup>1</sup> Global North and Global South countries are heuristic constructs, connoting not only geographical divides, but also economic, political, cultural and social disparities (Barnes, 2018; Mignolo, 2007). Global North countries are understood as rich, developed, industrialised and raw material consuming, most of the time with an advanced welfare state; they constitute a minority of the world. However, Global South countries are poor, developing, industrialising, have an underdeveloped welfare state and constitute a majority of the world (Singal, 2010).

employment experiences of a few qualified young adults with visual disabilities to better comprehend the influence of employment barriers and the protective factors that contribute to their labour market success in Oslo and Delhi. This qualitative study is based on five research articles that uniquely discuss the points of policy convergence and accentuate the similarities among the employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments from two disparate country contexts, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of disability policies and institutions and the employment situation of visually impaired youth. This comparative study is based on original, empirical data and offers avenues for developing theoretical propositions, working hypotheses and undertaking analytic generalisation. Within disability research, Global North–South studies are rather rare; therefore, this cross-national thesis expands the contours of comparative disability research. Moreover, by voicing the previously underreported perspectives of blind and visually impaired youth, it fosters an interdisciplinary dialogue within disability research and youth studies.

## **1.2 Mapping the employment situation of people with disabilities in Norway and India**

Before taking a deep-dive into the employment situation of people with disabilities in Norway and India, it is worthwhile to take a cursory glance at the employment situation of people with disabilities worldwide. Global estimates suggest that there are one billion people with disabilities, constituting approximately 15 per cent of the world's population (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 29). Among the group of people with disabilities, around 470 million are of working age (Waddington et al., 2017, p. 73), and a vast majority of them remain unemployed in developed and developing countries alike (Mizunoya & Mitra, 2013). Within the broad category of disabled people, estimates indicate that there are about 285 million people with visual impairments, of which 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, more than 90 per cent live within developing countries (Vaughan & Schroeder, 2018, p. 4). A significant proportion of people with visual impairments from both developed and developing countries remain unemployed and encounter labour market precariousness (Chhabra, 2020a; Wolffe & Spungin, 2002). Mapping these global estimates

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Many Global North countries have a colonial legacy and constitute the advanced metropolitan parts of the world, while the countries belonging to the Global South are those belonging to the relatively 'backward' periphery (Ghai, 2012; Grech, 2012; Grech & Goodley, 2012). However, not all countries in the Global South are poor. They also constitute countries such as Brazil, which have rich elites, while they also consist of relatively rich and industrialised countries, such as Australia (Meekosha, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For medicalised definitions of what constitutes people who have mild, moderate, severe vision impairments or blindness and the prevalence rate across developed and developing countries, see World Health Organization, 2017.

contributes to the contextualising of the employment situation of people with visual disabilities from Norway and India.

In Norway, estimates from the labour force survey in 2019 indicate that 17.6 per cent of the population within the 15–66 age group constitute people with disabilities. Within the working-age population, there exists a stark disability employment gap, wherein 40.6 per cent of working-age disabled people are employed compared with 73.4 per cent of the general population (Statistics Norway, 2020). Over the years, among the Nordic countries, Norway has shown the lowest employment rate for people with disabilities. In addition, there is a significantly higher proportion of people with disabilities on income maintenance (Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016; OECD, 2010). Furthermore, in the Norwegian context, people with disabilities encounter severe labour market precariousness, manifesting in the form of temporary or part-time employment prospects (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Hansen & Svalund, 2007). Therefore, among the developed countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Norway is assessed to be ‘mediocre’ (Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016, p. 22) and is lagging behind in disability employment (Halvorsen et al., 2016, p. 65). Within the broad group of persons with disabilities, the labour market situation for disabled youth seems to be quite precarious as there is an increase in the number of young disability pensioners in Norway (Bragstad, 2015; Bragstad 2018; Dyrstad et al., 2014; Hansen & Svalund, 2007; Unge Funksjonshemmede, 2016), and their permanent or premature employment exclusion is becoming a cause of concern for the Norwegian government (Prop 1 S, (2011–2012); Meld. St. 33 (2015-2016)).

Among working-age disabled people, those with visual impairments seem to constitute one of the lowest rungs of the labour market ladder (Berge, 2007; Lorentsen & Berge, 2011; Markeds- og Mediainstituttet, 2006; NORCE, 2019). A survey from Statistics Norway in 2011 indicates that the employment rate among people with visual impairments is 46 per cent compared with 78 per cent within the general population (Andersen & Skarholt, 2014, p. 12). Different studies have pointed out that a relatively wide employment gap has persisted over the past few decades (Andersen & Skarholt, 2014; Berge 2007; Lunde, 1994; Nordvik, 2008; Opinion, 2018; Proba, 2012; Synovate, 2008). Moreover, although, a greater proportion of people with visual impairments secure education at the university level compared with the general population, qualified people with visual impairments with higher education encounter employment exclusion (Andersen & Skarholt, 2014). Thus, it has been observed that many

youths with visual impairments face multiple employment barriers, prematurely exit the labour market and are frequently offered disability pensions by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Berge, 2007; Dyrstad et al., 2014; Nordvik, 2008; Opinion, 2018).

In India, the census statistics from 2011 indicate that there are 26.8 million persons with disabilities, 'constituting 2.21% of the total population' (Government of India, 2017, p. 157)<sup>3</sup>. Disability and poverty are significantly intertwined in the Indian context, and disabled people are considered to be among the poorest of the poor (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006a; Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2007; Singal, 2008). The employment rate for working-age individuals (15-59) with disabilities is estimated to be around 36 per cent, which varies significantly based on factors such as type of disability, gender and location (urban or rural) (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2016)<sup>4</sup>. In recent years, the employment situation for disabled people remains precarious even in the formal sector, as they form less than 1 per cent of the workforce (Bhattacharya et al., 2015, p. 3). However, it must be stated that the formal sector constitutes a minuscule part of the Indian labour force, and most disabled people are 'casual labourers, or attending domestic services or indeed begging' (Singal, 2008, p. 14). Based on the census statistics from 2011, there are approximately 4.1 million disabled youth (age group 19–29), wherein barely 2 per cent are educated and 1 per cent are employed (Youth4jobs, 2020).

Unlike Norway, it was difficult to get nationwide employment rates specifically for persons with visual impairments for India. In addition, studies exclusively focusing on the theme of employment inclusion for people with visual impairments have been few and far between. However, notable exceptions are small-scale studies based out of cities such as Delhi (Batra, 1981), Bangalore (Pal & Lakshmanan, 2012), parts of Kerala (Prasad, 2014) and rural areas in Bengal (Ghosh et al., 2008). These context-specific studies might fail to depict the complex countrywide employment situation. Notwithstanding the study limitations, a few notable

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<sup>3</sup> However, these official figures are widely contested, pegging the number of persons with disabilities in India at 7–8 per cent of the general population (Bhattacharya et al., 2015, p. 3). Based on the population extrapolation figures from 2017, estimates indicate that there are approximately 107 million people with disabilities in India (Trust for Retailers & Retail Associates of India, 2019, p. 54). Furthermore, civil society in the past has estimated the figure of persons with disabilities in India as high as 120 million people (National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> However, these estimates have to be taken with a grain of salt because according to UN figures, only about 100,000 persons with disabilities have succeeded in obtaining employment (Sapra, 2014, p. 3).

features concerning the employment context of people with visual impairments could be cautiously inferred.

First, in the Indian labour market, those with visual impairments are ‘the most disadvantaged’ (O’Keefe, 2007, p. 94; Saigal & Narayan, 2014, p. 330). Second, a large proportion of people with visual impairments are employed in casual, irregular and informal sectors in the economy, such as agriculture and domestic activities, and only 3 per cent of the blind individuals are regular employees (Ghosh et al., 2008, p. 170). Third, historically, a vast majority of people with visual impairments are self-employed in livelihood activities such as furniture caning, operating phone booths, candle and incense making and street hawking (Prasad, 2014). Fourth, within the formal sector, there has been a growing consciousness of the issues of accessibility of information and communication technology systems and offering reasonable accommodations to enhance work inclusion for persons with visual impairments (Pal & Lakshmanan, 2012; Saigal & Narayan, 2014). However, no drastic improvements in their employment rate have been witnessed. Fifth, people with visual impairments encounter multiple attitudinal employment barriers, such as misconceptions and prejudices concerning their capabilities (Batra, 1981, p. 6), resulting in their economic exclusion and social marginalisation (O’Keefe, 2007).

Although young adults with visual impairments acquire more education than other impairment groups, for example, the hearing impaired and physically impaired (Singal et al., 2011, p. 1208), and are more actively engaged in advocacy efforts as compared with other impairment groups (Singal & Jain, 2012), their educational and advocacy efforts do not necessarily translate into higher employment outcomes. Thus, it could be cautiously inferred that blind or visually impaired youth face a high degree of precariousness in the Indian labour market (Chhabra, 2020a)<sup>5</sup>.

### **1.3 Research questions**

Not only do young adults with visual impairments encounter labour market precariousness in Norway and India, but this trend of employment exclusion also seems to be replicating across other countries in the Global North (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Connors et al., 2014; Shaw

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<sup>5</sup> Although a diligent effort was made to harmonise the comparison of statistical figures, it must be acknowledged that the employment statistics are not directly comparable between Norway and India, as there might be definitional and computational differences. At any rate, these statistical figures were employed as a heuristic tool to point towards the grim labour market reality encountered by people with disabilities, young adults with disabilities and the visually impaired youth in Norway and India.



et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2013) and Global South (Gregorius, 2014; Singal et al., 2011; Singal & Jain, 2012). Blind and visually impaired youth confront multiple employment barriers on both the supply and the demand sides. The supply-side barriers entail inadequate job training, while the demand side involves employers' ableist attitudes and disability-based discrimination (Crudden et al., 1998; La Grow & Daye, 2005; Lynch, 2013; McDonnall 2019; Wolffe & Spungin 2002). However, little attention has been given to explore the perverse influence of demand-side barriers, such as discrimination in the labour market, on employment inclusion among youth with visual disabilities (McDonnall, 2019; McDonnall et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2007).

The point of departure for the current thesis is the recognition that the employment of youth with visual impairments is a perennial problem across countries belonging to the Global North and Global South (Chhabra, 2020a). Moreover, the attitudinal barriers manifesting in the form of ableist proclivities and disability-based discrimination prevailing within the labour market have been relatively underexplored (Jones & Wass, 2013; Nario-Redmond, 2019). In addition, there is a general expectation among disabled youth that they need to participate on equal terms in the employment arena (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). This expectation is mediated by Article 27 'Work and Employment' of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which demands governments create an open, inclusive and accessible labour market (Heyer, 2015; United Nations, 2006; Waddington et al., 2017). Based on the grim employment situation and general expectation that there will be a levelled playing field in the labour market, the overarching research question is as follows:

*What are the avenues of convergence within government policies aimed at promoting employment inclusion and similarities among the employment experiences of youth with visual impairments in Norway and India?*

To answer this overarching question, I have identified five more specific research questions:

1) Which social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people have been implemented in Norway and India since the early 1990s? To what degree are they converging?

- 2) If social regulation policy convergence is observed, what factors are contributing to this convergence?
- 3) Which demand-side employment barriers are encountered by qualified young adults with visual impairments (age group 20–35) when they are trying to access employment opportunities in Oslo and Delhi, and what is the influence of the said barriers on their employment prospects?
- 4) What factors foster resilience and facilitate a few qualified young adults with visual impairments to overcome the employment barriers in Oslo and Delhi?
- 5) What is the influence of the researcher's identity (biological constraint and biographical story) on the process of knowledge production while conducting Global North–South qualitative disability research?<sup>6</sup>

To answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative case study that entailed a review and analysis of policy documents and interviews with policy experts and young adults with visual disabilities. To begin with, I compare the social regulation policy reforms aimed at the employment of persons with disabilities that have taken place in both Norway and India since the early 1990s, here uncovering the factors contributing to these reforms. The main objective was to analyse the policy reforms, institutional arrangements and contextual factors, with the view to trace points of convergence. Thereafter, I contrasted the demand-side employment barriers to understand the efficacy of social regulation reforms and protective factors that contribute to labour market success for youth with visual disabilities. The primary aim was to foreground the common employment narratives of young adults with visual impairments and spark an interdisciplinary Global North–South dialogue between disability research and youth studies. I then addressed a few critical reflections pertaining to researcher identity and positionality while conducting cross-national disability research. Finally, I round up this comparative study by synthesising the findings from the research articles and addressing the main question.

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<sup>6</sup> The first four questions were premeditated and directly contributed to answering the overarching research question, while the last question emerged subsequently in the process of conducting this qualitative case study.

#### **1.4 The significance of this comparative study**

There are three reasons that demonstrate the empirical and theoretical significance of the current thesis. First, it contrasts hitherto unexplored social regulation policies from Norway and India. Second, it voices the marginalised perspectives concerning the employment barriers and critical success factors of young adults with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi, which have never been contrasted before. Third, it offers a critical and nuanced understanding of policies, institutions and employment experiences, which could expand the contours of comparative disability research and youth studies.

##### **1.4.1 Comparisons hitherto never made**

There is a dearth of comparative disability research contrasting countries from the Global North and Global South (Grech & Goodley, 2012; Meekosha, 2011). Within comparative research, the focus has been on contrasting policies, institutions, programmes and experiences from North America and Europe<sup>7</sup> (Miles, 2003). In addition, there has been a unidirectional flow of knowledge and research from the Global North to the Global South (Grech & Soldatic, 2016; Meekosha, 2011). The literature review, which includes the comparative disability research including Norway and India, indicates the following: First, Norway has been contrasted to countries belonging to the Global North, such as the Nordic region (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014; Halvorsen et al., 2016; Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017; Tøssebro 2013; Tøssebro, 2016), Europe (Bussi et al., 2019; Drøpping et al., 2000; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2018; Hansen et al., 2011; Hvinden, 2004; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003, Kuznetsova et al., 2017) and North America (Bruyère & Van Looy, 2014; Vedeler & Schreuer, 2011). Second, not only are disability policies compared among the countries belonging to the developed world, but there is also an underlying tendency where redistributive policies (social benefits and social services) are prioritised over cross-national comparisons (Tøssebro, 2013; Tøssebro, 2016). Third, predominantly, the comparative research focus has been on the implementation of social redistribution policies, for example, the offering of social benefits such as disability pensions (Mitra, 2009; Prinz, 2003), and the provision of social services, such as user-controlled personal assistance (Andersen et al., 2014; Askheim et al., 2014; Brennan et al., 2017).

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<sup>7</sup> According to Miles (2003), in the domain of disability policies and rehabilitation programmes, there has been an inordinate focus on Western European and North American (WENA) countries. Eurocentrism has been a significant problem within disability research (Grech & Goodley, 2012, p. 51), which could contribute to the creation and perpetuation of scholarly colonialism (Meekosha, 2008, p. 2).

However, very limited focus has been given to social regulations, for example, antidiscrimination reforms (Halvorsen et al., 2017b; Tøssebro, 2016).

In contrast to the above, the literature review suggests the following: First, India has been compared with other developing/middle-income countries (Chirinda & Chen, 2016; Mactaggart et al., 2018). Second, the predominant focus has been on disability policies that are concerned with poverty alleviation and community rehabilitation (Miles, 2003), education outcomes and livelihood opportunities for disabled people (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006a; Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008, Singal 2010; Singal & Jain, 2012). Third, no specific comparative disability research entailing Norway and India was found. However, there is a recent interest in contrasting the welfare regimes between Norway and India (Törnquist & Harris, 2016). Thus, through the current qualitative case study, an attempt has been made to undertake a comparison that has hitherto never been made in disability research.

#### **1.4.2 Voicing the marginalised perspectives**

In social research, there are a few narrative accounts that historically are overlooked, and bringing a voice to the marginalised perspective is often regarded as a good in itself (Barnes, 2018; Mignolo, 2007)<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, foregrounding the perspectives of blind and visually impaired youth is crucial. The literature review indicates that first, disability research and youth studies have predominantly focused on privileging the perspectives of disabled youth belonging to the Global North, and there is a very limited focus on understanding the life perspectives of youth with disabilities coming from the Global South (Singal, 2008; Singal 2010; Gregorius, 2014; Sapra, 2014). Second, disabled youth have been regarded as voiceless and unable to articulate their lived perspectives (Groce, 2004; Shah, 2016), which has contributed to their experiential accounts being silenced or overshadowed (Singal, 2007; Singal, 2010). Third, disabled youth encounter ‘double marginalisation’ (Singal, 2008, p. 2) by being excluded from the policies and research done within the rubric of youth studies, as well as in the policies, programmes and research literature addressing issues related to people with disabilities (Gregorius, 2014; Sapra, 2014). Fourth, there is a very limited focus on understanding and researching the employment narratives of young adults with visual impairments belonging to the Global North (Connors et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2007) and those

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<sup>8</sup> Voicing the marginalised perspective is fraught with complexity because it constitutes two aspects. Voicing as ‘speaking for’ an oppressed group or voicing as ‘re-presentation’ of reality (Spivak, 1988, p. 70). Through this dissertation, I am not trying to speak for the qualified visually impaired youth who were interviewed; however, it is vital to foreground their narrative accounts and experiential insights so that their labour market reality can be better comprehended.

coming from the Global South (Chhabra, 2020a; Chhabra, 2020c; Gregorius, 2014; Singal & Jain, 2012). Thus, it becomes vital to foreground the experiential insights of young adults with visual disabilities from both the Global North and Global South.

### **1.4.3 Understanding nuances from a distance**

In general, comparative research is valuable for two reasons. First, it allows us to guard against the problem of ethnocentrism, popular prejudices, cultural clichés and national stereotypes (Anderson, 2016). Second, it can facilitate in expanding our cultural sensitivity and intellectual horizon, thereby making reality more comprehensible, as it becomes less hindered by ideological blinders (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990; Heidenheimer et al., 1990). Within the field of disability research, comparative studies have become more prominent because they facilitate the evaluation of policies, institutions and experiential insights (Bruyère et al., 2004; Chhabra, 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2018; Heymann et al., 2014; Waldschmidt, 2009).

While conducting the current comparative study, I soon realised that I was a ‘sociological stranger’ (Hellawell, 2006; Simmel, 1950) or an in-between (Chaudhry, 2017; Crossley et al., 2016), who was situated on the sociocultural margins in both Norway and India. This unique position facilitated observing not only what was visible, but also exploring the invisible, the unwritten and latent (Anderson, 2016). In the current thesis, I partly reflect on the pros and cons of being perceived as an in-between on the insider–outsider continua. This in-between positionality has helped me contrast the institutions and structures and understand cultural norms, social expectations and prevailing attitudes that have shaped the employment experiences of qualified youth with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi from a unique vantage point. Often, comparative studies with incisive findings come from the experience of exploring ‘strangeness and absences’ (Anderson, 2016, p. 132). The present thesis and the accompanying five research articles provide nuanced perspectives concerning social regulation policy convergence, institutional change and the employment situation of young adults with visual impairments. All this cumulatively expands the contours of comparative disability research and youth studies.

### **1.5 Scope**

It is crucial to flesh out a few definitions and define the scope of the present thesis to facilitate the interpretation of the later comparative analysis.

**Social regulation policies:** The term social regulation policies has been actively employed in articles I and II and throughout the entire thesis. Social regulation policies are instruments that ‘influence the functioning of markets and the behaviour of nongovernmental actors, with the goal of promoting welfare policy objectives or human rights’ (Halvorsen et al., 2017b, p. 14). The current thesis does not focus on redistributive policies, which aim to equalise the life chances for persons with disabilities (Tøssebro, 2016). These redistributive policies, although significant, fall outside the purview of this thesis because unlike social regulation policies, they do not remedy market failures (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Majone, 1993; Majone, 1994). Social regulations, such as antidiscrimination norms, are contrasted at the national level for Norway and India. Hence, policy reforms at the local, state and regional levels are not compared.

**Formal employment:** In the current thesis, employment is understood as a formal, contractual and legally binding agreement between two parties—the employer and employee—with stated job descriptions and expectations of compensation in return. This entails three aspects: The first concerns income generation because the employed individual is expected financial remuneration. The second concerns the production aspect, wherein goods and services are produced. The third concerns the recognition feature, wherein an employed individual obtains a sense of contributing to a cause (Sen, 2000 in Sapra, 2014, p. 9). Employment could entail self-employment, community-based livelihood activities and working in informal/casual labour market (Gregorius, 2014; Singal & Jain, 2012; World Health Organization, 2011). All these facets of employment are not covered. Only formal sector employment (e.g., work in public, private or nongovernmental sectors), which is bounded by formal contracts, is examined and compared.

**An understanding of youth, disabled youth and young adults with visual impairments:** Youth and young adults is a nebulous concept, which varies across historical, social, cultural, spatial and temporal contexts (Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011; Gregorius, 2014). The conceptualisation of disabled youth in the Norwegian context varies. According to the Norwegian government’s job strategy for persons with disabilities, disabled youth entails individuals who are below the age of 29 (Prop 1 S, (2011–2012)). However, prominent civil society organisations consider disabled people below the age of 36 as youth (Unge Funksjonshemmede, 2020). In a similar vein, the Norwegian Association for Blind and Partially Sighted assesses people below the age of 35 as young visually impaired members

(Norges Blindeforbund Ungdom, 2020). On a related note, according to the youth policies of the Indian government, youth or disabled can be divided into two categories: those belonging to the age group of 13–19 and those belonging to the age group of 20–35 (Singal & Jain, 2012, p. 168). Because the former category consists of adolescent youth and cannot readily access formal sector employment, the focus was placed on the latter category in the age group of 20–35 years. For the purpose of comparing labour market experiences, the young adults with visual impairments are those belonging to the 20–35 age group. Young adults with visual disabilities are understood as a pragmatic category, which here was bounded to align with the specific research objectives of the current thesis; this category could vary across other research studies or social realities.

**Locational boundaries:** Although social regulation reforms are contrasted for Norway and India at the country level, the employment experiences of blind and visually impaired youth are contextualised at the city level. The insights from young adults were secured from Oslo and Delhi because both are capital cities, they are close to the political power centres, they attract visually impaired youth from all over the country, and there is an active network of disability organisations within both cities. In addition, Delhi is emerging as a metropolis and, thus, is more comparable to Oslo. Both cities have populations of blind and visually impaired youth who could have a better likelihood of securing higher education and subsequently being employed in the formal sector.

### **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

This introductory chapter is followed by chapter 2, ‘Two Worlds Apart—Contextual Differences in Norway and India’; this chapter accentuates the glaring contextual differences at the country level for Norway and India. The magnitude of these differences facilitates the better contextualising of the social regulation policy convergence and the similarities of the employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments. Chapter 3, ‘Philosophical Ideas and Analytic Concepts’, elucidates the philosophy of pragmatism, which was instrumental throughout the current thesis. Moreover, it foregrounds the conceptual ideas located in the middle range, which include perspectives from different theoretical strands such as disability, discrimination and ableism, social regulations, policy reforms, youth transitions, resilience and social resilience. These perspectives have facilitated the comparison of the empirical data and writing of the research articles. Chapter 4, ‘Methodology’, explicates the different methods employed to answer the research questions. It outlines the data collection and data analysis across two different phases. Moreover, it points out a few ethical

considerations and study limitations that occurred while conducting this comparative Global North–South disability research. Chapter 5, ‘Summary of the Articles’, accentuates the key findings of the five research articles. Chapter 6, ‘Concluding Discussion’, offers the five working hypotheses and explores the interdisciplinary contribution made by the current thesis in the domains of welfare regime studies, social policy research, labour market studies, youth transition studies and disability studies. Finally, this chapter rounds off by stating how the comparative findings of the present thesis could be useful for different actors. The appendices entail ethical clearances from the Norwegian Data Protection Agency (NSD), topical guides and consent forms for experts and youth with visual disabilities, which is followed by the five research articles.



## **Chapter 2: Two Worlds Apart – Contextual Differences in Norway and India**

Norway and India are two worlds apart regarding their contextual factors. The two countries drastically vary in demographic, economic, social and cultural parameters, among others. Moreover, they are mediated by differing policy legacies and varying institutional arrangements (Chhabra, 2019, pp. 85–86). This chapter accentuates and contrasts a few contextual differences prevailing across Norway and India to place policy convergence and experiential similarities in sharper relief.

The chapter is divided into two broad sections. The first section discusses the general features associated with the labour market and welfare regimes in Norway and India. This juxtaposition sets the stage for the second section, which compares and contextualises the disability policies and institutions that influence the employment situation for disabled people.

### **2.1 Setting the stage**

This section entails a contrasting of the general features, nature of economy and type of welfare state regime prevailing in Norway and India. All these features cumulatively have a profound influence on the opportunities for the labour market inclusion of young adults with visual impairments.

#### **2.1.1 Features of the labour market and labour market institutions**

Norway has an advanced, industrialised economy, and the contributors to the Norwegian gross domestic product (GDP) include the service sector, which makes up 64 per cent of GDP, followed by manufacturing at 34 per cent and agriculture at 2 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2018, p. 34). Over the years, there has been a gradual shift away from farms and industrial units to business enterprises, private organisations, public institutions and retail shops. The country has one of the highest labour market participation rates among the working-age population (20–64) in Europe, at approximately 79.5 per cent (Eurostat, 2020), and there is a high degree of gender balance in the workforce, with women constituting 47 per cent of the workforce and men 53 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2018, p. 12).

The Norwegian labour market is predominantly formal, with strong employment protection regulations (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Vedeler, 2014a). Furthermore, there exists a congenial tripartite agreement between the state, employers' federations and labour unions, hence influencing the development and implementation of labour market policies (Engelstad, 2016; Halvorsen et al., 2016). The Norwegian state and its public authorities have periodically

intervened to reduce labour market imperfections and influence its smooth functioning (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Vedeler, 2014b).

A prime example of the Norwegian state's intervention is the Work Approach (*'Arbeidslinja'*), which was popularised in the 1990s. The Work Approach promotes 'self-sufficiency through work for as many as possible' (Drøpping et al., 2000, p. 48), and anyone belonging to the working-age population who is capable and willing to work must have the opportunity to participate in the labour market (Kleppe, 1999). The Work Approach creates a link between right and duty. To get something (e.g., cash benefits), you have to reciprocate and give something back (e.g., work)—at the very least, the Work Approach obliges individuals to participate in active labour market programmes, for instance, job training. In part, the Work Approach has been a dominant paradigm shaping labour market policies over the last few decades (Øverbye & Stjernø, 2012).

In contrast, India is a developing country with a predominantly agrarian economy, wherein approximately 50 per cent of the labour force is employed in agriculture, even though 'agriculture now accounts for only around 15 per cent of GDP' (Harriss & Törnquist, 2016, p. 38). However, the major contributors to India's GDP include the service sector and manufacturing. Large parts of the Indian economy are informal, unregulated and based in rural areas (Harris-White, 2003). A majority of the rural working-age population is engaged in agriculture and traditional industries, for example, handicrafts, and the unorganised sectors in urban areas tend to use self-employment to a high degree (Engelstad, 2016). Within the economy, the 'regular formal-sector jobs were 7.5 per cent of all employment. More than 90 per cent of jobs are casual, informal, or characterised by stark livelihood uncertainties' (Bardhan, 2016, p. 278).

The jobs in the informal or casual sector are unregulated and often form a part of the 'black economy', which constitutes approximately 40 per cent of the Indian economy (Harris-White, 2003, pp. 5-7). In contrast to the informal sector jobs, those within the public sector offer good employment protection and are regulated by a plethora of labour laws (Engelstad, 2016). The labour force participation rate within the formal economy is estimated to be around 59.8 per cent (OECD, 2020), and only a small percentage of this formal sector work force is represented through trade unions (Harris-White, 2003; Chandhoke, 2016). Within the public sector, collective bargaining between employers and employees is common; however, within

the informal sector, there is little or no space for collective bargaining, wage negotiation and trade union activities (Engelstad, 2016).

The Indian state and public authorities have actively intervened to regulate the labour market through protectionist policies. Until the 1990s, the economy was extremely regulated and, in large parts, insulated and protected from foreign competition and investments (Rudra, 2008). The government set quotas and issued permits to control the production of goods and services; this system to regulate the economy in a top-down manner was popularly understood as ‘Licence Permit Raj’ (Harriss & Törnquist, 2016, p. 50). This regulatory system allowed public authorities inordinate power over the functioning of the general market, which gave rise to bureaucratic red tape, rent-seeking through bribes and administrative corruption (Harris-White, 2003; Rudra, 2008). However, since the 1990s, the Indian economy has gone through a trend of liberalisation, wherein the formal sector of the economy has witnessed a strong neoliberal globalisation. A direct result has been that private sector organisations and multinational corporations competed with and complemented the well-established public sector. In turn, this contributed to the subsequent expansion of the formal sector (Bardhan, 2016; Harris-White, 2003).

### **2.1.2 The typology of welfare regimes: social democratic and protective**

One of the popular typologies concerning welfare regimes classifies the welfare state into three categories: the ‘liberal’, ‘corporatist’ and ‘social democratic’ regime models (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp. 26–27). This taxonomy is contingent on the various roles that the state, market and family play within society.<sup>9</sup> Norway has a social democratic welfare state renowned for its relatively homogenous and well-organised labour movement, institutionalised collective bargaining, high levels of employment participation and well-regulated labour markets (Halvorsen et al., 2016). The welfare regime is funded through high levels of taxation and offers universalistic social protection, which prevents the adverse impact of poverty and social exclusion, facilitating human capital accumulation (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Törnquist & Harris, 2016; Øverbye & Stjernø, 2012). The public expenditure on health care, education, welfare services and social benefits accounts for

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<sup>9</sup> Over the years, different adjectives have been attributed to the state, for instance, ‘welfare state, developmental state, positive state, rent-seeking state, predatory state, minimal state, crony state, administrative state, pluralist state, corporatist state, neoliberal state, and social-democratic state’ (Levi-Faur, 2014, p. 599). For a detailed and comprehensive discussion of the welfare state, its redistributive and regulatory features, its commodification, decommodification and recommodification functions and an understanding of the welfare state as a polymorphic institution, see Levi-Faur (2014).

the bulk of the welfare regime's costs (Statistics Norway, 2018). Estimates suggest that the social expenditure from the welfare state constitutes more than 50 per cent of the Norwegian GDP (Statistics Norway, 2018, p. 20). In Norway, the welfare regime plays a pivotal role because it offers social benefits and social services aimed at equalising life chances and promotes social inclusion (Tøssebro, 2016; Vedeler, 2014b).

The robustness of the Norwegian welfare regime could be assessed on three grounds. First, the country follows a social investment approach, and public authorities place a lot of emphasis on education. As a result, Norway has one of the highest expected years of schooling in the world, at 18.8 years for females and 17.4 years for males (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, p. 208). One of the salient features of Norway's social investment approach is that higher education is largely public and offered almost free of charge (Bussi et al., 2019, p. 143). This, in turn, becomes significant, because securing education opens pathways into gainful employment for disabled people (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014; Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2015).

Second, because the welfare regime is predicated on high taxes, the public authorities give a considerable focus on both vocational training and lifelong learning, allowing individuals to accumulate human capital (Hvinden et al., 2019). One of the core institutions in the Norwegian welfare regime is the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, which coordinates work rehabilitation, income maintenance welfare schemes and social services. The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration organises active labour market policies, such as work internships, to facilitate the entry of disabled people into the labour market. Furthermore, it offers social benefits, such as unemployment insurance, social assistance and disability pensions, and provides social services, such as facilitated transport and user-controlled personal assistance (Dyrstad et al., 2014; Meld. St. 33 (2015-2016); Vedeler, 2009).

Third, the country spends 4.3 per cent of its GDP on disability protection expenditure, which is one of the highest in the world (OECD, 2017). This relatively high social spending implies that the welfare regime offers generous social benefits in the form of disability pensions and social services (Halvorsen, et al., 2018).

Norway's comprehensive welfare regime is strengthened by the country's good governance and a high level of transparency and accountability within the public administration. The

country was ranked seventh out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perception Index in 2019 (Transparency International, 2019, p. 2). Furthermore, the success of the Norwegian welfare regime could be assessed by the fact that in 2019, it was ranked as number one among 189 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, p. 308), which measures a country's achievements by combining factors pertaining to life expectancy, educational attainment and income. In essence, the Norwegian welfare regime has been relatively successful in securing well-being for the vast majority of the country's population (Törnquist & Harriss, 2016; Halvorsen et al., 2016).

In contrast, the Indian welfare regime does not fall under the crystallised taxonomy of liberal, corporatist or social democratic welfare regimes. India is classified as a protective welfare state, wherein social policies are designed to safeguard the people from the harsh impact of poverty (Rudra, 2008, pp. 108–141). In addition, the state protects the rights of a few marginalised minority groups, such as disabled people (Engelstad, 2016). The welfare programmes entailing cash benefits, for example, old-age pensions, and those involving in-kind measures, for example, food distribution, are highly means tested<sup>10</sup>. The social security safety net system in India is grossly underdeveloped, as in the majority of developing countries (Mizunoya & Mitra, 2013). Moreover, the welfare regime in India has a limited focus on human capital development and social investments (World Bank, 2020). The public expenditure on health care and education is extremely low and is comparable to some poorer countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Harriss & Törnquist, 2016, p. 38). Estimates suggest that a meagre 2 per cent of its GDP goes to social expenditures, which is the lowest among emerging economies (OECD, 2016, p. 108).

There are five core aspects concerning the Indian protective welfare regime that are worth noting. First, the social benefits and social services provided by the welfare regime are not universal but are rather targeted towards the most marginalised sections in society (Harriss-White, 2003; Törnquist & Harriss, 2016). Furthermore, there is no centralised agency that coordinates the welfare needs of all citizens. Second, the protective welfare state redistributes opportunities, such as jobs, to specific group categories. A prime example is the employment

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<sup>10</sup> A means test is a criterion to determine whether an individual or family is eligible to secure social benefits and social services through a country's welfare regime. Means tests are used as a sifting device to determine who is deserving and who is undeserving (Esping-Andersen, 1990). If the individual or family have the requisite resources and means to get by, then they are not eligible or deserving to get government-sponsored social benefits and social services. In a means-tested welfare program, strict eligibility criteria are applied, with regards to resources, property or wealth of an individual or family. This determine their deservingness (Rudra, 2008).

quota scheme in the public sector, which redistributes employment opportunities to specific vulnerable groups (Engelstad, 2016). In addition, public authorities have historically yielded their power by giving licences and permits to employers, thereby redistributing opportunities in the general market and picking winners and losers (Rudra, 2008). Third, the welfare regime has not focused sufficiently on educational achievements among the population because the literacy rate among the youth remains poor and different surveys suggest that ‘the quality of the education is severely deficient’ (Engelstad, 2016, p. 225; Singal et al., 2011). The relatively poor educational achievements could be observed in the average number of expected years of schooling: for females, this is estimated to be 12.9 and for males 11.9 (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, p. 314). Although access to and enrolment in the school system has increased in recent years, educational outcomes vary drastically based on socioeconomic parameters (Engelstad, 2016; Singal, 2008; Singal et al., 2011). Fourth, notwithstanding the noble rhetoric of lifelong learning, skill development and vocational training initiatives, the welfare regime in India has failed to create an employable and skilled population (Bardhan, 2016; Sapra, 2014; Shenoy, 2011). Ironically, despite poor primary and secondary education and the failures of skill training development initiatives, India spends a considerable expenditure on privatised higher education, which is not accessible to many vulnerable groups (Engelstad, 2016, pp. 225–226). Fifth, the welfare regime has largely ignored the needs of persons with disabilities (Addlakha, 2013; Ghai, 2015; Singal, 2008; Sapra, 2014). A prime example is that in 2016, the Indian welfare regime allocated a dismal 0.0039 per cent of its GDP to social services and benefits targeted at disabled people (Salelkar, 2017).

In essence, the welfare regime in India protects the interests of the most vulnerable sections of society through antipoverty policies, targeted development schemes, food security measures and employment guarantees, to name a few (Harris-White, 2003, p. 37; Singal, 2008). However, the Indian state is plagued with challenges, such as low resource allocation, uncoordinated public expenditure, weak governance system, difficulties in service delivery and widespread corruption. The country ranked 80th out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2019, p. 2). Furthermore, the weakness within the Indian protective welfare regime could be assessed by the fact that the country ranked 129

among 189 countries on the Human Development Index, with mediocre outcomes concerning life expectancy, educational attainment and income<sup>11</sup>.

## **2.2 Contrasting the disability policy landscape and institutions**

The previous section primarily contrasted two broad aspects. The first was the labour markets, for example, the formal and regulated labour market in Norway, which was compared vis-à-vis the largely informal and unregulated in India. The second was welfare regimes, namely the social democratic and protective for Norway and India, respectively. Comparing the key features across these two aspects better facilitates an understanding of the stages of disability policy development and the types of salient institutions influencing the employment situation for disabled people.

### **2.2.1 Disability policy landscape**

To peruse the Norwegian disability policy landscape in detail is beyond the scope of the present thesis; nonetheless, there are three important policy trajectories worth pointing out. These disability policy trajectories offer a historical and contextual map of the disability policy landscape. The first trajectory of the disability policy landscape pertains to the strengthening of income maintenance schemes and redistributive measures. The second trajectory pertains to the normalisation and deinstitutionalisation reforms predicated on mainstreaming and inclusion, while the third pertains to the rise of social regulations.

**Strengthening redistribution:** First, the end of World War II in 1945 increased the number of people with disabilities across Europe; therefore, in Norway, all political parties became committed to develop a comprehensive legislative framework to cover important life contingencies, such as ‘sickness, disability, old age and unemployment’ (Drøpping et al., 2000; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Public report 22, 2001). Following these political developments, important landmark legislations included the National Insurance Scheme in 1966 and a generous sick pay scheme. These two legislations cumulatively strengthened the redistributive measures, such as the cash benefits and social services, which became a cornerstone of the Norwegian social democratic welfare regime.

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<sup>11</sup> Policy dossiers, country reports and statistical analysis from national and international agencies were used to compare and contrast figures, for example, employment rates and the amount of social protection spending. A diligent effort was made to harmonise the comparisons of the statistical figures from both the countries; however, a few of the statistical figures, such as employment rates, are not directly comparable between Norway and India because there might be definitional and computational differences. At any rate, all the statistical figures are employed as a heuristic tool to explicate the fact that these two countries are significantly different regarding questions concerning labour market and welfare regimes.

**Deinstitutionalisation reforms and mainstreaming:** Second, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Norway became a champion of deinstitutionalisation reforms predicated on equality, full participation and community-based living for people with intellectual and severe disabilities (Tøssebro, 2016, p. 115). Alongside Sweden, Norway closed down all its institutions, which contributed to the segregation and stigmatisation of people with cognitive and other severe disabilities (Tøssebro, 2016). This trend of ‘normalisation, deinstitutionalisation and decentralisation’ has been predominant in Norwegian disability policy since the 1960s (Tøssebro, 2013, p. 76) and has complemented the country’s redistributive measures.

**Adopting social regulations:** Third, alongside the deinstitutionalisation reforms in the 1990s, policy makers started to pivot from redistribution measures, such as social services and cash benefits, towards social regulations. This was in line with the European Disability Strategy from 1996, which gave primacy to antidiscrimination provisions and design for all principles (European Commission, 1996; Halvorsen et al., 2017a). Following this, since 2000, Norwegian disability policies have moved towards social regulation (Public Report 22, 2001; Tøssebro, 2016). Significant developments from this period include the enactment of antidiscrimination and accessibility legislation in 2009, which was amended in 2017. In addition to this landmark legislation, different legislative amendments to enhance the employment inclusion of disabled people were introduced to the Working Environment Act over the last two decades (Chhabra, 2019). Alongside these legislative developments, the country introduced voluntary social regulations, such as the Inclusive Working Life Agreement (Arnardóttir et al., 2018) and, more recently, the Inclusive Dugnad<sup>12</sup> (Østerud, 2020), here with the view to enhance the labour market participation of disabled people by persuading employers with moral suasion and informational sermons. In addition, the country adopted action plans concerning accessibility and universal design, which cover wide-ranging sectors such as transport, housing and information and communication technology (Tøssebro, 2016, p. 120).

Historically, government efforts over the past decades can be categorised into four strategies: first, changes in the design of welfare schemes; second, the reorganisation of the welfare

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<sup>12</sup> *Dugnad* is a popular Norwegian term that is concerned with collective responsibility entailing community participation. A *dugnad* effort entails a call for action, wherein community members volunteer to bring about a positive social change. The word emerged in Old Norse and can be translated into ‘help’ or ‘support’ (Østerud, 2020, p. 2).



administration; third, legislation to prevent discrimination and improve accessibility and create an inclusive work environment; and, fourth, cooperation with the social partners (prime examples include Inclusive Working Life Agreement and Inclusion Dugnad). The former two are associated with social redistribution measures, while the latter two signal a shift towards social regulations (Øverbye & Stjernø, 2012; Hansen & Svalund, 2007). Although the Norwegian social democratic welfare regime has successfully implemented social redistributive measures, such as social services and social benefits, social regulations are relatively underdeveloped and less enforced (Tøssebro, 2016).

In contrast, the overview of the disability policy landscape in India can be classified in three stages. The first stage is the era of state neglect and apathy towards the needs and demands of persons with disabilities. The second stage is punctuated by different nationwide reforms, catering to the themes of employment, education, accessibility and social security. The third stage is grounded in the UN CRPD principles, ushering in a new era of equality, non-discrimination and representation.

**Neglect and apathy:** The first stage encompasses the period of 1947, when India attained its independence, to the 1990s. Save for the Mental Health Act of 1987, which was concerned with the treatment and care of people with severe mental health impairments, there were no comprehensive nationwide policies protecting the rights of persons with disabilities (Ahmed, 2015; Kothari, 2012). The Indian government was callous and had an apathetic approach towards disability inclusion, despite the fact that disabled persons were obliquely protected by several articles in the Indian Constitution. A case in point is Article 41, 'Right to Work, Education and Public Assistance', which mandates that 'the Indian state shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want' (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015, p. 48). During the first decades after India's independence, the Indian state failed to offer cash benefits and social services to protect the welfare interests of disabled people, which resulted in their economic exclusion and social marginalisation (Ghai, 2015; Tiwari, 2008). In light of the state's neglect and apathy, disabled people and the organisations for disabled individuals, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, mobilised to fight for equality, full participation and inclusion (Chander, 2016), which partially led to the era of disability policy reforms.

**Legal recognition and legislative reforms:** The second stage could be classified as an era of recognition, beginning with the passage of the first nationwide legislation called the Persons with Disabilities Act from 1995. This act was based on the principles of equality and full and effective participation; it covered redistributive measures and outlined regulations in areas such as education, employment, accessibility and social security (Ahmed, 2015; Kothari, 2012; Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006b). Alongside the Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995, which was the cornerstone of the disability policies, the Indian government introduced the Rehabilitation Council of India Act in 1992, which was amended in 2000, and the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act in 1999 (Ahmed, 2015). Legislatively speaking, the 1990s was a major turning point in the disability policy landscape because the Indian state was nudged through domestic pressures, for example, disability rights movements, and international influences, for example, United Nations standard rules in 1993, to formulate and implement policies promoting equality and full participation (Bhambhani, 2018; Chhabra, 2021). The disability policy reforms of the 1990s marginally altered the rhetoric on disability inclusion but failed to impact the substantive reality of the vast majority of persons with disabilities in India (Ghai, 2015; Ghosh, 2016; Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006b; Singal, 2008; Tiwari 2008). The failure of the disability policy implementations subsequently ushered in the third stage of policy reforms.

**Non-discrimination and equal rights:** The third stage could be classified as an era of non-discrimination and representation. Globally, the latter half of 1990s was influenced by the movement ‘Nothing about us without us’ (Charlton, 1998; Waldschmidt et al., 2015). Disabled people and their organisations created transnational advocacy networks and gained a major victory with the adoption of the UN CRPD in 2006 (Heyer, 2015). Such policy developments coupled with the implementation failures associated with the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995 resulted in a renewed demand for new legislation based on the principles of non-discrimination and disability justice (Ahmed, 2015; Bhambhani, 2018). The sustained pressure from disability organisations and their international allies led to the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016. This new act was made to be in line with the principles, norms and procedures of UN CRPD. This act was a watershed moment in the development of the Indian disability policy system because for the first time, the ideas linked to reasonable accommodation, antidiscrimination provisions, equal opportunity policy and design for all principles are explicitly articulated (Chhabra, 2021).

Alongside the passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016, the Indian government implemented the Accessible India Campaign in 2015, which focused on enhancing the accessibility of buildings, public transport, websites and the general environment (Government of India, 2017), helping to enhance socioeconomic inclusion for persons with disabilities. Thus, this stage saw progressive rights-based development, wherein the ideas linked to equal opportunity, non-discrimination, accessibility and socio-political representation became a central feature of the disability policy system.

In essence, over the years, India has moved from a stage of apathy towards disabled people and has begun to recognise their legal rights. However, disability policy reforms on paper ought to be translated into substantive reforms ensuring material well-being and social inclusion for disabled people. Despite the recent positive policy developments, caution needs to be exercised to see the way in which the Indian state implements these policies because of its relatively poor historical track record of disability policy implementation coupled with the lack of political will, inadequate financial allocations and excessive bureaucracy (Singal, 2008). The government has already been critiqued for its sluggish implementation of the new disability policy reforms (Bhambhani, 2018; National Disability Network and National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017). Notwithstanding the critique, the disability policy trajectory landscape seems to be progressively evolving.

### **2.2.2 Salient institutions**

The process of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation entails a wide array of institutional actors (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Peters, 2016; Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016). One of the core features of the disability policy system entails the influence of institutional actors, which in part creates, transforms and perpetuates disability policy legacies (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Waldschmidt, 2009). Perusing all the institutions entailed in disability policy development and their implementation is beyond the scope of the current comparative study; nonetheless, a few major institutions for Norway and India are contrasted. These institutions are considered crucial because they directly or indirectly influence the labour market participation and social inclusion of disabled people.

In Norway, at the broad institutional level, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion coordinates the policies for disabled people. The Norwegian government follows ‘the principle of sector responsibility’ (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003, p. 296), which implies that there are no national laws exclusively framed for persons with disabilities. Following this

multisectoral responsibility outlook, the welfare of disabled people is secured through the involvement of a wide variety of public agencies dealing with education, healthcare, welfare benefits, transport and housing. The employment of disabled people does not fall neatly under disability or labour market policy; however, at an operational level, 'labour market policy is a state responsibility' (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015, p. 76), and there are three notable institutions, namely the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, the National Service for Special Needs Education and antidiscrimination ombudsman, that contribute towards the employment inclusion of people with disabilities.

First, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration is pivotal because it secures well-being and facilitates employment inclusion for disabled people (Bragstad, 2018; Dyrstad et al., 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Vedeler, 2009). Furthermore, it offers social protection benefits in the form of disability pensions, hence ensuring that disabled people who are unable to work have a social security safety net to rely on (Meld. St. 33 (2015-2016); Bragstad, 2015). Moreover, the Labour and Welfare Administration authorities organises social services, for instance, user-controlled personal assistance for disabled people (Halvorsen et al., 2018). All this, in conjunction with labour market programmes and work internships, is crucial for disabled people to accumulate human capital (Bussi et al., 2019; Dyrstad et al., 2014).

Second, for the purpose of education and rehabilitation, Norway has a national agency called the National Service for Special Needs Education that falls under the Directorate of Education, which complements the work efforts of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. Through its rehabilitation programmes, it facilitates disabled people to be active participants in education, work and community. The National Service for Special Needs Education has the expertise to deal with six types of disabilities, namely vision impairments, hearing impairments, deaf blindness, brain injuries, learning impairments and language and speech impairments, and it works in a multidisciplinary way to rehabilitate disabled people (Andersen & Skarholt, 2014).

Third, Norway established an independent and nationwide equality and antidiscrimination ombudsman in 2006, which aims to prevent discrimination and promote equality (Arnadóttir et al., 2018; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Among its other responsibilities, the ombudsman ensures that the Norwegian state follows its obligations, which are in line with the principles

and norms outlined by the UN CRPD (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015).

In addition to these national-level agencies, such as the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, the National Service for Special Needs Education and ombudsman, Norway has a broad network of disability organisations that have actively advocated for improving access to social benefits and social services (Halvorsen et al., 2018; Public report 22, 2001). Prime examples of nationwide disability organisations based in Oslo include *Norges Blindeforbund* (Norwegian Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted), *Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon* (Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People) and *Norges Handikapforbund* (Norwegian Association of the Disabled). Historically, disability organisations have fostered collaborative relations with public authorities (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009, p. 200), and they ‘hold a positive and benign view of the state’ (Whittle & Halvorsen, 2007, p. 194). However, since the early 2000s, some of these disability organisations have moved towards demanding both redistributive provisions and regulative protections for persons with disabilities (Public Report 22, 2001; Tøssebro, 2016).

In contrast, at a broad institutional level, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is accountable for the disability policies in India (O’Keefe, 2007, p. 21). In 2012, the ministry established the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities with the view to cater to the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015). Unlike in Norway, the Indian government formulates specific laws targeting disabled people. Prime examples of this include the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) (Bhambhani, 2018; Chhabra, 2021). In addition, specific institutions are concerned with the employment and rehabilitation of disabled people.

First, there is no well-funded, centralised, nationwide public employment agency in India that could administrate and regulate issues concerning employment inclusion or welfare rights for persons with disabilities. This stands in stark contrast to the presence and influence of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration within the Norwegian policy system.

Second, concerning vocational training and the rehabilitation of disabled people, specific institutions exist that could be functionally comparable to the National Service for Special Needs Education in Norway. In India, the National Council of Vocational Training sets aside

enrolment slots for persons with disabilities, and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities coordinates the activities of seven national institutes, which are in charge of vocational rehabilitation of disabled people. These include the National Institute for the Physically Handicapped, the National Institute for the Orthopedically Handicapped, the National Institute for Visually Handicapped, the National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped, the National Institute for Mentally Handicapped, the National Institute of Rehabilitation Training and Research and the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities. These seven institutes focus on rehabilitation, training and delivering assistive aids to persons with disabilities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015, p. 15). However, estimates suggest that only 1.5 percent and 3.6 percent of the people with disabilities in rural and urban areas, respectively, have received any form of training from these institutions (Singal, 2008, p. 13).

Third, because a vast majority of disabled people in India are engaged in earning livelihoods through self-employment activities (Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008; Singal & Jain, 2012), the government has created the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation, which promotes economic development activities and self-employment ventures for persons with disabilities (Ahmed, 2015, p. 226).

Fourth, the Indian government created an independent statutory authority in 1998 called the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, which aims to monitor the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act from 1995 and its subsequent replacement, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act from 2016. This office functions as a ‘watchdog body with the powers of a civil court’ (Ahmed, 2015, p. 264) and addresses grievances concerning discrimination, accessibility, equal opportunities and deprivation of rights (Kothari, 2012).

As with Norway, there are vibrant disability rights movements in India that have culminated in the establishment of nationwide organisations run by and representing the interests of persons with disabilities (Bhambhani, 2018). Prime examples that are based in Delhi include the National Association of the Blind (NAB), the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the National Centre for the Promotion of the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (NCPDEP). Often, these disability organisations engage in contentious political actions and confront the Indian government when it fails to implement disability policies (Chander, 2016); these organisations are supported by a benign legal court system and are predicated on

judicial activism culminating in legal pronouncements in favour of persons with disabilities (Ahmed, 2015). Thus, both in Norway and India, there exists a plethora of national institutions and disability organisations working to enhance the employment situation and social inclusion of disabled people.

### **2.3 Critical takeaways**

In this chapter, labour market conditions, welfare regimes, disability policy developments and institutional arrangements were thoroughly contrasted for Norway and India, here with the aim of contextualising the employment situation of disabled people in a more nuanced form. There are a few key takeaways worth highlighting. First, both countries have distinctive labour market conditions. In Norway, the labour market is formal and well regulated, while in India, the labour market is, broadly speaking, informal and unregulated, wherein most of the working-age population fails to participate within the formal labour market. Second, Norway has a comprehensive welfare regime that prioritises social investments and facilitates human capital accumulation, while India has a protective welfare regime that fails to undertake social investments and merely protects selective targeted groups. Third, both countries have distinctive points of departure regarding disability policy development; nonetheless, they have pivoted towards social regulation reforms over the last three decades. Fourth, both countries have disparate national institutions and disability organisations, which differently mediate the employment situation and social inclusion for disabled people.

Accentuating these contextual differences is vital to better comprehend the social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people that have been implemented in Norway and India since the 1990s. Furthermore, these stark differences facilitate an understanding of the employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi. Although these two countries are two worlds apart, their significant differences allow for placing the avenues of policy convergence and the experiential similarities in sharper relief.

## **Chapter 3: Philosophical Ideas and Analytic Concepts**

In order to contrast policies, institutions and lived experiences from two disparate countries, it is vital to flesh out the theoretical ideas and analytic concepts, which undergird this comparative research. This chapter elucidates my choice to utilise the philosophy of pragmatism. In addition, it also explains why I relied on the different conceptual ideas situated in what is called the middle range. Finally, it offers an overview of the perspectives concerning disability, discrimination, ableism, social regulation, policy reforms, youth transitions, resilience and social resilience, which facilitated in analysing the data and in writing and publishing the five research articles that constitute the present comparative thesis.

### **3.1 Pragmatism**

Throughout my research tenure, I have relied on the philosophy of pragmatism, wherein the choice of concepts and methods was contingent on the particular theme of inquiry or the given context, not necessarily on an a priori, well-articulated theoretical position (Baert, 2011; Bryant, 2009). It has been valuable for me for three reasons. The first concerns what theory is and how it is employed to understand reality and truth. The second concerns how knowledge is accumulated and how empirical and theoretical understanding is expanded. The third concerns how this accumulated knowledge is employed to achieve human emancipation.

#### **3.1.1 Producing useful knowledge**

Pragmatism has been associated with a production of knowledge that is useful, interpreting a reality that is contextual and understanding the truth that is not necessarily of a capital T, but a truth that works, one allowing for a more receptive, open and nondoctrinaire research outlook (Baert, 2004; Baert, 2005; Bryant, 2009; Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset, 2009). Pragmatism allows for synthesising diverse conceptual ideas and varying perspectives, as pragmatism is ‘a mediator and reconciler ... that “unstiffens” our theories. She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She is completely genial. She will entertain any hypothesis, she will consider any evidence’ (James, 2010, p. 59). Pragmatism enables theory to be employed in an instrumental manner to produce knowledge that is contextually conscious and theoretically sensitive (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). In addition, it facilitates a shift away from first principles, categories, necessary conditions and theoretical models, moving instead towards practical consequences and outcomes (Mjøset, 2006). In other words, it gives primacy to ‘practical cash-value’ (James, 2010, p. 41) of the theoretical ideas in consideration. Pragmatism reasserts the ‘so what?’ principle (Bryant,



2009, p. 15) concerning ideas and arguments associated with the nature of reality, truth and knowledge and reevaluates them in terms of their practical significance (James, 1911; James, 2010). In addition, it questions spectator theory of knowledge, arguing that produced knowledge cannot emerge from a neutral position outside history, culture, language and contextual considerations (Baert, 2011; Mjøset, 2009).

In the present thesis, I employ theoretical ideas in an eclectic, opportunistic and instrumental manner as a means to an end, here with the view of producing knowledge that is useful. I am cognisant that the term useful is value laden; however, through the current thesis, I want to present theoretically informed, contextually sensitive, contingent comparative findings that could be useful for a wide variety of members belonging to both scientific and non-scientific milieus.

### **3.1.2 Accumulating knowledge**

Pragmatism synthesises the elements of both rationalism and empiricism by relying on both the concepts and precepts in the pursuit of knowledge production (James, 2010, p. 13; James, 1911, p. 58)<sup>13</sup>. It avoids following the extremes, pure deduction or rabid induction, instead leaning on ‘middle-of-the-roadism’ (West, 1989, p. 57) to accumulate knowledge. It is compatible with the use of eclectic methods, giving primacy to an approach of abduction (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019) that simultaneously values theoretical sensitivity and empirical insights to undertake knowledge accumulation predicated on formulating contingent conjectures and generating working hypotheses (Bryant, 2009). Pragmatism aligns well with the concept of the local research frontier (Mjøset, 2006), wherein knowledge is accumulated in a piecemeal, bottom-up and grounded manner by securing a variety of insights from different stakeholders; this accumulation is significant for the community (Mjøset, 2009). Pragmatism became an intuitive choice because I had to rely on different methods to accumulate knowledge. I sifted through secondary sources of data, namely disability legislations, research articles, scientific books, country reports and statistical analyses (chapters 1 and 2). Furthermore, I gathered primary data by interviewing policy experts and youth with visual impairments. The comparative findings of the present comparative study

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<sup>13</sup> William James gives an excellent distinction between the rationalist and empiricist, wherein the former is called as ‘Tender-minded’ and the latter ‘Tough-minded’. The philosophy of pragmatism combines elements from both rationalism, which follows a deductive logic, and empiricism, which follows an inductive logic (James, 2010, pp. 13–14).

have been accumulated in a bottom-up and piecemeal manner (see chapter 4 on research methods).

### **3.1.3 Beyond predictions and explanations to a dialogue**

Pragmatism does not merely focus on offering explanations and predictions of social phenomena. Instead, it allows for meaningful understanding, social critique and emancipation (Baert, 2011; West, 1989). It bridges the gap between theory and practice and paves the way for a ‘dialogical encounter’ (Baert, 2005, p. 195), wherein the focus is not on refutation of an empirical argument or a theoretical idea but rather where the goal is to be receptive and open-minded and listen to and learn from perspectives with the view to expand one’s understanding (Mjøset, 2006, p. 759). It acknowledges ‘the social nature of the self and the communal aspect of any form of inquiry’ (Baert, 2005, p. 200), therefore fostering a more comprehensive scientific engagement (Baert, 2011).

One of the fundamental features of pragmatism is ‘meliorism’ (James, 2010, p. 196). Deriving from the Latin ‘*melior*’, meaning ‘better’, it implies that the world is inclined to and can become better with human effort. Pragmatism reiterates the idea that knowledge is an instrument that is useful for the subject to expand their understanding and contribute to social change (Bryant, 2009; Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset 2009; West, 1989). Throughout the current thesis, I have attempted to engage with the members of both the scientific community and those coming from the non-scientific milieu, here with the view to have a dialogue to effectuate positive change concerning employment inclusion for youth with visual impairments.

### **3.2. Middle-range theory and concepts**

During the current thesis, I did not focus on grand theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 156) or comprehensive sociological explanatory systems (Merton, 1968, pp. 48-53; Hedström & Udehn, 2011, p. 27). The ambition was rather modest—to instead lean on conceptual ideas located at the middle-range because such ideas resonated well with conducting ‘theoretically oriented empirical research’ (Merton, 1968, p. 56). Conceptual ideas at the middle range facilitate synthesising the elements of theoretical generality and empirical specificity within local research frontiers, thereby allowing for escaping from the pitfalls associated with high-level grand theories, which in turn maps well with the philosophy of pragmatism (Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset, 2009).

The analytic concepts situated at the middle range are a bridge between grand theories and raw empiricism (Hedström & Udehn, 2011; Merton, 1968, p. 44). They offer the best explanation provided thus far (Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset, 2009). Moreover, they are methodologically congenial with the logic of abduction because they ‘transcend sheer description or empirical generalization’ (Merton, 1968, p. 68) and result in knowledge production that is contingent, provisional and contextual (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Hedström & Udehn, 2011; Mjøset, 2006)<sup>14</sup>. By employing different concepts and eclectic methods and through immersive fieldwork, I made an attempt to probe, observe, understand and describe the policy reforms and employment experiences of youth with visual disabilities.

Following a bricolage outlook, I leaned on different concepts and theoretical ideas concerning disability, discrimination, ableism, social regulation, policy reforms, youth transitions and resilience. In a broad sense, these analytic concepts have facilitated understanding and exploring ‘the relation between purposeful subjects and prevailing structures, conscious human agents and social constraints’ (West, 1989, p. 10). It must be reiterated that no attempt is being made to force-fit any grand theories on the empirical data<sup>15</sup> because the current qualitative comparative study merely undertakes the task of generating working hypotheses and contingent empirical conjectures that remain to be vindicated or refuted.

### **3.2.1 Perspectives on disability**

One of the first assignments that I undertook in the early phase of the present thesis was to understand how disability is conceptualised in Norway and India within policy documents. In the infancy period of the research, I perceived that disability would be a relatively unproblematic concept. However, shortly, I realised that there was no single definition of disability or an idealised model<sup>16</sup> that can capture and represent the multilayeredness of the experiences encountered by disabled people. The initial research assignment came to fruition

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed overview of the theories and concepts located at the middle-range, see chapter 2, ‘On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range’, in Merton’s *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968).

<sup>15</sup> Walter Mignolo (2007) posits that the grand theoreticians, such as Marx, Freud, Lacan and Foucault, have resulted in creating their corresponding schools of thought, such as Marxism, Freudism, Lacanism and Foucauldianism. Such grand theories are often viewed as sacred texts and are exported to the Global South context. He offers not only critical perspectives on universal theories but also invites researchers to undertake epistemic disobedience and move beyond the Euro-centered thoughts (Greek and Latin legacies) (Mignolo, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> The word model is quite ambiguous and widely varies across context, purpose and utility. Models could be broadly classified as probing models, phenomenological models, computational models, developmental models, explanatory models, impoverished models, testing models, idealised models, theoretical models, scale models, heuristic models, caricature models, didactic models, fantasy models, toy models, imaginary models, mathematical models, substitute models, iconic models, formal models, analogue models and instrumental models (Lawson & Beckett, 2020, p. 16)

with the publication of a research article, wherein I trace the historical development of disability over the last five decades and compare and contrast the theoretical models.<sup>17</sup>

Over the years, disability has been defined in philanthropic, biomedical, sociological, economic and socio-political terms (Pothier & Devlin, 2006, p. 39). These diverse definitions not only offer different understandings, but also point towards the varying societal responses for disabled people, entailing religious charity, medical cure, community care, socioeconomic rights and welfare entitlements (Goodley, 2017).

In general, the definitions of disability could be mapped across theoretical models, which could be broadly classified into individual-based and society-based explanations or an intricate interplay of both (Shakespeare, 2014). The individual-based models could be subclassified into those offering moral- or medical-based explanations to understand the disability concept (Goodley, 2017, p.7; Pérez & Chhabra, 2019, p.11). For the vast majority of history, disability has been explained in moral terms; however, with the emergence of germ theory in the nineteenth century, medical-based explanations gained popularity (Stone, 1984, p. 92). In the moral model, the prevalence of a disability is understood as a result of transgressions of sins, moral lapse, religious failing or punishment from God, thereby offering a justification for philanthropic intervention, with the view to ameliorate the pain and suffering of disabled people (Ghai, 2015; Lid, 2012; Miles, 2002). While in the medical model, disability is synonymous with an individual's pathology, bodily deficit, functional limitation, personal inadequacy and deviance from the biological norm that has emerged out of physical, sensory and intellectual impairments (Oliver, 1990; Pothier & Devlin, 2006). In turn, this allows room for medical interventions with the aim of diagnosing, habilitating and rehabilitating disabled people and sorting them into administrative categories (Stone, 1984). Both the moral and medical models of disability are predicated on reductionist and essentialist explanations (Gustavsson, 2004; Nario-Redmond, 2019), giving primacy to an individual's impairment manifesting in the form of personal tragedy (Oliver, 1990); they conflate impairment with disability and downplay the influence of external factors, which open the

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<sup>17</sup> The essay that I wrote in 2016 was titled 'Definitions and Conceptualizations of Disability'. It was updated with more contemporary information, for instance, the popularity of the human rights model of disability, and it was subsequently translated into Spanish. I was coauthor of this research publication. The research article was titled: 'Modelos teóricos de discapacidad: un seguimiento del desarrollo histórico del concepto de discapacidad en las últimas cinco décadas' [Theoretical Models of Disability: Tracing the Historical Development of Disability Concept in the Last Five Decades] (Pérez & Chhabra, 2019).

pathway for society-based explanations to conceptualise disability (Goodley, 2017; Lawson & Beckett, 2020; Oliver, 1990).

The society-based explanations of disability have moved away from an individualised understanding of disability to focus on the sociological phenomena that result in the exclusion, marginalisation and subordination of disabled people (Lawson & Beckett, 2020; Pothier & Devlin, 2006). Within the social model, which emerged in Britain in the 1970s, disability is understood as a superstructure built on top of the individual's impairment, which results in their socioeconomic exclusion (Barnes, 1996; Oliver, 1990). The British social model posits that disability is created by society and that material, structural and institutional barriers can result in the oppression, discrimination and marginalisation of persons with impairments (Barnes et al., 2003; Gustavsson, 2004). This model emerged from the resistance trenches of disability rights activists, not from the rational theorising of academics (Barnes, 1996; Beckett & Campbell, 2015; Oliver, 1992; Stone & Priestley, 1996).

Over the past few decades, the British social model has been thoroughly critiqued because it gives inordinate attention to the societally created barriers, ignoring or even downplaying the influence of the individual's impairment on their psycho-emotional well-being (Thomas, 2006). In addition, it has overlooked the embodied experience of disablement resulting from impairment, which partly shapes the life choices of disabled people (Shakespeare, 2014). Notwithstanding the theoretical critique, the unintended consequences and its inadvertent misuse, the British social model has been widely employed as an oppositional device to mobilise disabled people's resistance against social injustice as a way to dismantle the disabling barriers and create an inclusive and enabling society (Beckett & Campbell, 2015).

Complementing the British social model, in the United States, the minority model emerged, which viewed disabled people as a marginalised category, akin to the people belonging to certain ethnic and racial minority groups (Hahn, 1985). The individual experiences of disabled people pertaining to sociocultural exclusion and economic marginalisation were collectivised because one of the major problems was disability-based prejudice, segregation and discrimination (Nario-Redmond, 2010; Nario-Redmond, 2019). Collectively articulating the interest of disabled people as an oppressed minority group paved the way for the world's first civil rights legislation, namely the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibited disability discrimination and stipulated equal rights to the disabled population (Charlton, 1998; Heyer, 2015; Schur et al., 2013).

While these transatlantic developments were taking place within the UK and the United States of America, a few countries in the Nordic region leaned on a variant of the theoretical construct, namely the Scandinavian, the gap or the relational model (Gustavsen, 2004; Tøssebro, 2004). In this model, disability is understood as a person-environment mismatch, which is situational, contextual and relative (Goodley, 2017, p. 17). This model balances the individual attributes and capabilities, on the one hand, with the societal demands and environmental barriers, on the other hand (Gustavsson, 2004).

The social model and its variants have been influential in undertaking disability rights advocacy and achieving socioeconomic emancipation through the legal recognition of a vast majority of disabled people around the world (Charlton, 1998; Heyer, 2015). A prime example is the adoption of the UN CRPD, wherein disability is understood as an evolving concept and part of human diversity, resulting out of ‘the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (United Nations, 2006, p. 1).

Taking the UN CRPD as a point of departure, in recent years the human rights model has been propagated, which is predicated on human dignity and promotes human flourishing. This model provides a broad framework that encompasses not only civil and political rights protected through antidiscrimination laws (negative rights), but also covers socioeconomic and cultural rights, for instance, redistribution through social services and cash benefits to equalise life chances for disabled people (positive rights) (for an overview of the human rights model of disability, see Degener, 2016, pp. 3–14; Degener, 2017, pp. 34–48; Lawson & Beckett, 2020, pp. 13–15; Pérez & Chhabra, 2019, pp. 17–19). The human rights model offers a broad universal and rights-oriented framework to combat discrimination and promote the welfare and inclusion of disabled people<sup>18</sup>. However, these theoretical models, namely, the British social model, the American minority model, the Scandinavian relational or gap model and the human rights model, are all largely predicated on social science perspectives (Waldschmidt, 2017), and at times, they all overlook the cultural specificity associated with understandings of the disability concept and the disabled persons’ experiences.

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<sup>18</sup> A few scholars have argued that the human rights model is a progressive improvement of the social model on disability, while others have pointed that it complements it. The social model has disability as its subject matter and is descriptive in nature, while the human rights model has disability laws and disability policies as its subject matter and is prescriptive in nature. For a succinct and nuanced discussion of the complementarity between the two models, see Lawson and Beckett (2020).

Over the past few decades, there has been a linguistic turn, which has popularised the understanding of disability through a sociocultural, constructionist framework emerging from the humanities (Goodley, 2017; Gustavsson, 2004; Nario-Redmond, 2019). The cultural model of disability does not accentuate a firm distinction between impairment and disability but instead views disability as a product of the ideologies, narratives, language and culture (Waldschmidt, 2017, pp. 19–27). Through the cultural model, disability is seen as a metaphorical crutch or cultural trope for those who are regarded as able-bodied, and it problematises the discourse on the simplistic normative dichotomy of healthy/unhealthy, productive/unproductive, normalcy/abnormality, ablebodiedness/disablement and species typical/species deviant (Goodley, 2017). Moreover, the cultural model points towards the prevalence of ableism/disablism percolating in society, allowing for the exploration of disability-based stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination and the problems associated with the stigmatisation, cultural marginalisation and attitudinal barriers encountered by disabled people (Campbell, 2009; Campbell, 2018; Goodley, 2014; Goodley, 2017; Nario-Redmond, 2019).

All these theoretical models have been formulated to conceptualise the disability definitions and experiences of disablement. However, it is aptly clear that no singular model captures and represents the multilayeredness of the disability concept. Furthermore, it should be noted that these theoretical models have been developed in the countries belonging to the Global North and have been exported to those in the Global South (Grech & Soldatic, 2016; Meekosha, 2008; Meekosha, 2011). The adoption and force fitting of these theoretical models to understand and conceptualise the lived realities of people with impairments in the Global South has been thoroughly critiqued (Ghai, 2001; Ghai, 2015; Gregorius, 2014; Meekosha 2008; Meekosha, 2011; Singal, 2008; Singal 2010; Sapra, 2014). Moreover, there has been growing demand to broadly reconceptualise disability definitions and construct new theoretical models that could be contextually sensitive and to represent the issues associated with embodied experiences, economic exclusion and sociocultural marginalisation encountered by people with disabilities in the Global South (Addlakha, 2013; Campbell, 2009; Chaudhry, 2017; Ghai, 2018; Ghosh, 2016). Notwithstanding the incisive decolonising critique concerning disability definitions, theoretical models and methodology to conduct disability research, there has been a growing consensus not to treat disability as a homogenous, monolithic and universal category but instead to engage in a Global North–

South dialogue to better understand and conceptualise its ever-evolving contours. The present thesis is an effort to initiate a cross-national interdisciplinary dialogue.

### **3.2.2 Perspectives on discrimination and ableism**

The current thesis foregrounds the attitudinal barriers manifesting in the form of discrimination, which contributes to the socioeconomic exclusion of disabled people. In a broad sense, discrimination occurs when two identical cases are treated differently due to conditions that ought not be relevant (Becker, 1971); this entails ‘differential treatment’ and ‘disparate impact’, wherein the individuals from specific groups are unduly favoured or advantaged compared with those from other groups (Pager & Shephard, 2008, p. 182). Following the UN CRPD, disability discrimination is understood as ‘any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field’ (United Nations, 2006, p. 4). Disabled people encounter discrimination from sociocultural prejudice in different walks of life (Ghai, 2018; Goodley, 2014). Disability-based discrimination predicated on prejudice, stereotypes and negative attitudes in the labour market is one of the primary foci for the present thesis.

Employers act as gatekeepers and determine who remains in and who is left out in the labour market (Bruyère et al., 2004; Saleh & Bruyère, 2018; Schur et al., 2005; Schur et al., 2013); they can engage in disability-based discrimination and reject disabled people outright based on prejudice and negative evaluation (Ameri et al., 2018; Dali, 2018). Moreover, they could categorise disabled individuals with social stereotypes, thereby assigning group identities and barring their entry into the labour market (Heyer, 2015; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Schur et al., 2013)<sup>19</sup>.

The attitudinal barriers manifesting in the form of disability-discrimination could be explored through the concept of ableism (Nario-Redmond, 2019; Scuro, 2017) or a relatively similar

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<sup>19</sup> It must be noted that first, there is a growing interest and fragmentary data available to explore disability-based discrimination in the labour market through different field studies. Nonetheless, the results have to be interpreted with caution because proving disability discrimination in the labour market is less straightforward than what it seems (Ameri et al., 2018; Bruyère et al., 2004; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). Second, over and above disability-based prejudice, employers could discriminate against disabled people based on factors such as productivity concerns, the high cost of recruiting and retaining disabled employees, low social acceptability, incompatibility with organisational culture and low bargaining power among disabled people, to name a few (Dali, 2018; Schur et al., 2005; Schur et al., 2013, pp. 69–70).



term, disablism (Campbell, 2009; Chhabra, 2020d; Goodley, 2017; Miller et al., 2004; Thomas, 2007). In a broad sense, ableism is understood as ‘prejudice and discrimination towards individuals simply because they are classified as disabled—regardless of whether their impairments are physical or mental, visible or invisible’ (Nario-Redmond, 2019, p. 6). Disablism is construed as ‘discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others’ (Miller et al., 2004, p. 9). It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to parse out the historical development or the present usage of the ableism/disablism concept to explore the issues of disability discrimination<sup>20</sup> (Daniels, 2020; Nario-Redmond, 2019). However, fundamentally, both of these concepts point towards the unequal and unfair treatment encountered by disabled people on account of their presumed or actual impairments (Campbell, 2009; Campbell, 2018; Goodley, 2014).

Within social psychology, ableism and prejudice against disabled people could be understood through three interconnected elements: affect, which entails emotional responses or attitudinal reactions, such as pity, fear or disgust; behaviour, which involves actions and practices towards others, for instance, avoiding disabled people on the street; and cognition, which entails beliefs and stereotypes, for example, saying that disabled people are weak, incompetent and dependent (Nario-Redmond, 2019, p. 6). A stereotype could be construed as ‘a set of attributes used to characterise a group and its members’ (Nario-Redmond, 2019, p. 15), and it could be used as a sifting mechanism. The social stereotypes facilitate creating and perpetuating the idea of a serviceable other and sorting individuals into in-groups and out-groups (Nario-Redmond, 2010, p. 485). For instance, disabled people are not necessarily part of the in-group within the labour market because they are not construed as an ‘ideal, typical or universal worker’ (Foster & Wass, 2012, p. 706). Within the labour market, which is predicated on able-bodied norms, disabled people are often created as a marginalised other placed in the periphery vis-à-vis the normal or nondisabled that constitutes the centre (Goodley, 2014). Thus, normal and able-bodied individuals could employ disability-based prejudices and stereotypes, thereby explicitly or implicitly excluding disabled people from the

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<sup>20</sup> The process of ableism implies a ‘favouritism of abilities’ (Wolbring, 2008), wherein individuals in a social group who possess specific abilities, such as being independent, productive and competent, are regarded to be better off compared with disabled individuals, who are perceived to lack such abilities and, consequently, are socially devalued (Daniels, 2020, p. 38). Here, disablism could be construed as ‘the social beliefs and actions that oppress/exclude/disadvantage people with impairments’ (Thomas, 2007, p. 13). This socioeconomic disadvantage is brought about by members of the nondisabled by erecting disabling barriers.

Owing to space constraints, I am deliberately refraining from further elucidation of the ableism/disablism concepts in detail. However, for a nuanced discussion of these intertwined concepts, see Daniels (2020, pp. 43–44) and Goodley (2014).

sociocultural milieu (Dali, 2018; Goodley, 2014; Mik-Meyer, 2016) by subjugating them to the tyranny of normalcy (Daniels, 2020, p. 39).

At the bottom of the sociocultural prejudices and stereotypes that contribute to the othering process of disabled people, one will find the persistence of attitudes, which could be understood as ‘relatively enduring, global evaluations about a person, group, idea, or issue’ (Nario-Redmond, 2019, p. 17). Frequently, disabled people are ascribed ableist attitudes, such as dependent, incompetent, asexual, weak, passive, unattractive and heroic (Goodley, 2017; Nario-Redmond, 2010). Broadly speaking, these ableist attitudes could be classified into pejorative stereotypes, which entail negative evaluations and derogatory judgements; for instance, disabled people are deemed passive, dependent, visually repulsive, helpless, pathetic, incompetent or tragic victims (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2010; Oliver, 1990). Alternatively, the ableist attitudes could be viewed in a positive light as brave, courageous, plucky and heroic. The latter are tantamount to inspirational porn, wherein disabled people are viewed as extraordinary objects for the gratification of the nondisabled society (Nario-Redmond, 2019, p. 186). Thus, the attitudes could be both positive and negative. For instance, employers could positively attribute disabled employees as more reliable and grateful or negatively assess them as incompetent and unproductive merely on account of their impairment (Schur et al., 2013). Furthermore, attitudes could be both global and specific. A case in point is to understand employers’ and global attitudes towards disabled people and specific attitudes towards disabled workers (Hernandez et al., 2000, p. 5; Ju et al., 2013, p. 114). For instance, employers might be supportive of the general proposition that equal opportunities should be available to disabled people within the labour market; however, the said employers might not be keen on formulating specific policies to encourage the employment of disabled people within their respective organisations. In other words, employers generally express positive attitudes and willingness to hire job-seekers with impairments, yet this might not translate into actual recruitment (for an overview of employers’ positive/negative attitudes concerning disabled people, see Burke et al., 2013; Hernandez et al., 2000; Ju et al., 2013; Unger, 2002).

In essence, the literature on ableism accentuates three aspects: first, the disabling society might foster ableist beliefs, processes and practices, which gives primacy to a particular kind of individual who is a normative standard, corporally perfect, the species typical and fully human (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2019). Second, ableism problematizes the simplistic

dichotomy of healthy/unhealthy, functioning/dysfunctioning, abled/disabled, normal/abnormal and productive/unproductive, with the view of displacing the normative category of an able-bodied individual and supplanting it with the temporarily able-bodied person (Goodley, 2014; Goodley, 2017). Third, ableism points towards negative attitudes, ignorant behaviour and spurious assumptions concerning disabled people as tragic victims or inspiring heroes, which are created and perpetuated through hegemonic ideologies, popular narratives and cultural discourses (Campbell, 2018; Chhabra, 2020d; Goodley, 2017; Wolbring, 2008). This, in turn, opens the avenues for disability-based discrimination not only in the labour market, but also in general society.

The state-of-the-art on disability discrimination and ableism suggests that it is important to compare the experiences of disabled people and policies to prevent disability discrimination across countries. In the current thesis, I foreground experiences of discrimination from the perspective of a few qualified youth with visual impairments and the social regulation policies aimed at preventing or reducing the prevalence of disability discrimination in the two selected countries.

### **3.2.3 Perspectives on social regulations**

Governments formulate and implement different public policy instruments with the aim to ‘wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect of social change’ (Bemelmans-Vidéc, 1998, p. 3). They can exercise coercive, remunerative and normative power to influence actors and alter their behaviour (Etzioni, 1975, p. 50). The governments’ policy instruments could be broadly divided into two categories: redistributive policy measures, which consist largely of ‘income redistribution and provision of merit goods’ (Majone, 1993, pp. 163-167), and regulative policy measures, which consist of legislation stipulating the specific obligations to rectify market failures (Levi-Faur, 2014; Benishi & Levi-Faur, 2020; Majone, 1994).

Within disability policy systems, governments implement social protective policies that entail redistributive measures, such as cash benefits and social services, and social regulation policies, such as antidiscrimination laws, to equalise the life chances for disabled people (Halvorsen et al., 2017b). Over the years, many governments across the world have legally assessed disabled people as a specific minority category or protected subgroup who should be shielded from the perverse effects of individual and institutionalised discrimination and ableism (Charlton, 1998; Goodley, 2017; Heyer, 2015; Nario-Redmond, 2019; Schur et al.,

2013) because disabled individuals often languish at the bottom of the social hierarchies or are placed at the last rungs of the economic ladder (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Ghai, 2018). To achieve the objective of a more open, inclusive and accessible society, governments employ social regulation policies to circumscribe the negative influence of ableist attitudes and discriminatory behaviour.

Social regulations could be broadly construed as a triad entailing regulations, economical means and information, which are popularly understood as the taxonomy of *sticks*, *carrots* and *sermons* (Vedung, 1998, p. 30), which the governments employ to influence the behaviour of the public (Halvorsen et al., 2017b). These three policy instruments are placed on the continuum of legitimate coercion, wherein sticks are the most coercive, economical means are relatively less coercive, and information sharing and moral persuasion strategies are the least coercive instruments in enforcing control and compliance and inspiring desired behavioural change (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998).

First, regulations (sticks) are policy measures implemented to ‘influence people by means of formulated rules and directives which mandate receivers to act in accordance with what is ordered in these rules and directives’ (Vedung, 1998, p. 31). Prime examples of regulations include antidiscrimination legislations and accessibility norms. Such legal and industry standards influence the behaviour of actors in the labour market (Majone, 1993); they are used to stipulate norms, outline acceptable behaviour or restrict activities in societies (Lemaire, 1998). Often, coercive instruments, such as sanctions and legislations, create a sense of alienation among individuals/groups who are controlled by the said instruments. Therefore, the effectiveness of regulatory instruments is contingent on legitimacy in the eyes of the public and on social consensus (Vedung, 1998).

Second, economic means (carrots) are policy instruments that involve ‘either the handing out or the taking away of material resources, be they in cash or in kind’ (Vedung, 1998, p. 32). Examples of economic means in cash entail financial subsidies, grants, fees and charges. Examples of such measures include free health care, free education and services; these instruments are used by the government to incentivise and motivate the actors within the public to alter their behaviour, here with the assumption that individuals and groups are rational and calculative actors. Economic means constitute a relatively moderate policy instrument to enforce desired compliance when compared with coercive regulations (Bemelman-Videc et al., 1998).

Third, information and moral suasion instruments (sermons) are policy instruments that entail ‘transfer of knowledge, the communication of reasoned argument, and persuasion to influence the behaviour of actors’ (Vedung, 1998, p. 33). Through information exchange and moral suasion, the government aim to provide not only objective knowledge, but also to allude to judgements concerning practices, behaviour and phenomena. The government offers normative recommendations on how citizens ought to behave (Vedung, 1998). Information exchange could entail public awareness campaigns. These moral instruments are the most lenient and least coercive policy instruments that governments can employ to achieve desired societal change.

Social regulatory policies entailing legislations, incentives and moral appeals allow governments to exercise coercive, remunerative and normative power (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998). Their effectiveness will be contingent on the congruence between the type of policy instrument selected and the nature of involvement of the target group members (Etzioni, 1975). The involvement can vary based on the trust level between the government and the target group. First, in the case of low trust, the government will tend to implement coercive legislative means to achieve compliance, but by doing so it could alienate individuals and groups. Second, in the case of moderate trust, the government fosters reciprocal relationships to stimulate calculative individuals and target group members to move towards the desired behaviour. Third, in the case of high trust, governments could persuade citizens through moral appeals and achieve compliance in this way (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998; Etzioni, 1975).

The relationship between government interventions and the involvement of the target group members could be exemplified through the social regulatory policy instruments implemented to influence the behaviour of employers, here with the view of reducing labour market imperfections or rectifying market failure. The government could nudge employers through antidiscrimination legislation, which might force them to create more inclusive recruitment and retention policies and accommodate the needs of disabled workers. Although this might alienate a few employers, it still sets a normative standard to equalise employment opportunities in the labour market. Alternatively, the government can offer financial incentives in the form of wage subsidies to the calculative employers to encourage them to recruit more disabled people. Finally, the government could engage in knowledge sharing and information exchange programmes, urging employers to be more socially responsible,

corporate citizens (Chhabra, 2019; Schur et al., 2013). All these social regulatory policy instruments progressively move away from coercion to nudge employers and alter their behaviour towards the recruitment of disabled people and create a more inclusive labour market (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009).

In the current thesis, I use this stream of literature to compare the social regulation policies aimed at reducing the employment gap for persons with disabilities in Norway and India and to explore how the regulatory disability policies have developed since the 1990s (see research article I). To better understand these policy reforms, I identify the factors that have contributed to these developments.

### **3.2.4 Perspectives on policy reforms**

The policy reforms within a country are a complex and multilayered process contingent on different factors that entail the elements of learning, inspiration, emulation, persuasion and coercion (Dobbin et al., 2007; Goodman & Jinks, 2004; Knill, 2005). Countries can undertake policy reforms owing to the trend of policy convergence. In a broad sense, policy convergence could be understood as the growing similarity of policies over time (Heichel et al., 2005; Holzinger & Knill, 2005) and policy convergence could take place at different levels. For instance, policies could become similar at the level of policy goals, content, instrument, outcomes and style (Bennett, 1991). A trend of policy convergence could nudge the countries towards a race to the top (Heichel et al., 2005, p. 824), wherein countries adopt similar policies to achieve the highest regulatory standard, thereby making their policies aligned with social and cultural understandings of appropriateness (Lenschow et al., 2005). Examples entail environmental protection rules and antidiscrimination policies. Policy convergence could result from exogenous factors, for example, the influence of supranational treaty obligations, endogenous pressures, for example, domestic social movements, or their complex interplay (see an overview of factors triggering policy reforms in Heichel et al., 2005; Holzinger & Knill, 2005, p. 780; Knill, 2005, p. 771).

The policy reforms in a country are largely shaped by the policy context, which entails the historical, legal and political settings and organisational structures prevailing in the country (Lemaire, 1998, p. 61). In addition, policy reforms are mediated and implemented via institutions, or the specific social structures that facilitate the shaping and reshaping of the norms, values, roles and expectations in society (Turner, 1997). While analysing a country, it

might seem that the policy context is relatively stable and that the institutional arrangements are enduring over the course of its history (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Policies and institutions might be bounded by path dependency, wherein what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time. In general, the path-dependent trajectory of policies and institutions could be attributed to self-reinforcing sequences, wherein the initial steps in a specific direction result in further movement in the same direction, making it difficult or impossible over time to change course or reverse direction (Mahoney, 2000, p. 512). Unyielding policy legacies and rigid institutional arrangements might point towards the potency of self-reinforcing historical sequences of priorities, actions, events and outcomes (Peters, 2016). Nonetheless, evidence of policy reforms and institutional change points towards the possibilities of learning, reversal, branching out or transformation (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Turner, 1997). Policy reforms and institutional change could be punctuated by either incremental or radical alteration, which can be ushered in by a wide variety of policy actors (Goodman & Jinks, 2004; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016). The said reforms could be understood through the processes of ‘displacement, layering, drift, and conversion’ (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. 15).

Displacement refers to the introduction of new rules and replacement of old ones. Taken-for-granted processes and practices are questioned and replaced by new models. The process of displacement may take place abruptly or in a gradual way, wherein policies and institutions could be changed by agents who are “losers” under the old system’ (Mahoney & Thelen 2010, p. 16). New policies and institutions supersede and replace the existing ones. Policy and institutional displacement are triggered by *insurrectionaries*. These are policy actors who are dissatisfied with the institutional status quo and work towards the elimination of the institution and its emergent replacement.

Layering involves the situation when new rules are introduced as amendments, revisions and additions over and above and alongside old rules. Institutions are not radically replaced, but alterations take place, which changes the structure. The layers of new policies, rules and agents result in a gradual institutional change. Policy and institutional change are triggered by *subversives*. These policy actors are change agents who are not interested in radical displacement of old norms but gradually alter the institution; they work within the

institutional system and follow its expectations. Nonetheless, they change the policy systems and institutional arrangements in a piecemeal manner.

Drift entails changes in the external conditions and exogenous factors that alter the impact of an institution. Policy/institutional actors might be complacent and not react to the external change, which ultimately alters the nature of the institution. Policy and institutional change could be triggered by *symbionts*; these are the policy actors who can exploit the gap between the rule and its practice, thereby bringing about desired change.

Conversion refers to the process wherein institutions do not fundamentally change but are redeployed to serve new demands. Institutions are given new goals and are authorised with new mandates. Actors can exploit the ambiguity and utilise the institutions to achieve new purposes. Policy and institutional conversion can be triggered through *opportunists*; these are policy actors who are not burdened by institutional continuity and who have vague preferences. They can exploit and preserve the institution because there exists an ambiguity within the interpretation and implementation of institutional rules (for an overview of policy actors bringing institutional change, see Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, pp. 16–27; Van der Heijden, 2010).

Policy and institutional change could be brought about in a top-down manner, wherein exogenous factors from above could influence the policy and institutional trajectory. Alternatively, such change could result in bottom-up pressures entailing endogenous factors from below or their intricate interplay (Waldschmidt et al., 2017). Transnational and national advocacy coalitions contribute to policy reforms (Goodman & Jinks, 2004). Such advocacy coalitions constitute ‘policy actors who have similar policy core beliefs and who coordinate their behavior in a variety of ways to influence government decisions’ (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 22). The advocacy coalition framework has been successfully employed by disparate policy actors to build coalitions on similar beliefs and policy goals, mobilise resources, navigate contentious political actions, undertake the cross-pollination of policy learning, influence the process of policy formulation and effectuate policy change. Individuals and group members belonging to the advocacy coalitions can exploit the opportunities for policy change by leaning on their combined resources and circumnavigating or confronting the institutional constraints. Both national and transnational advocacy networks are becoming



a potent force for ushering in policy reforms and institutional change<sup>21</sup> (for a detailed description on the efficacy, utility and assumptions associated with the advocacy coalition framework, see Weible & Jenkins-Smith (2016, pp. 15–34), and for an overview of the utilisation of this advocacy framework around the world, see Pierce et al. (2017)). The insights obtained from the policy reforms and institutional change literature facilitated the contrasting of the disability policy systems prevailing across Norway and India. These ideas were crucial in understanding the insights from expert interviews and in writing research article II.

### **3.2.5 Perspectives on youth transitions**

Over the past few decades, youth transitions have been a vital and interdisciplinary concept to explore the issues of labour market precariousness among the youth population (Bradley & Devadason, 2008; Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011; Hvinden et al., 2019). At a general level, transitions refer to an intermediary stage within a young person's life, interconnecting childhood and adulthood, and it entails the developmental stages, for instance, puberty, key events, such as graduating from high school, and rites of passage, for example, religious confirmation. However, over the years, the meaning and experience of being a youth and their transition to adulthood have significantly changed (Stokes et al., 2013). Youth transitions can be classified in many ways, for instance, a movement from school to work (labour market transition), from family of origin to family of destination (domestic transition) and from childhood home to independent living (housing transition) (Coles, 2018). These youth transitions are interconnected and interlocking and are not unidirectional and necessarily linear but could instead be protracted and divergent<sup>22</sup> (Furlong et al., 2011). Not only do youth transitions vary across historical, social, cultural and spatial contexts, but the term 'youth' is also fraught with complexity. As a result, rather than conceiving of youth as a

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<sup>21</sup> Members of these transnational advocacy networks who operate in the human rights arena could wield power through shaming and shunning on the one hand and back-patting and public approval on the other hand (Goodman & Jinks, 2004, p. 641). Furthermore, these members could act as norm entrepreneurs who could (a) signal their own commitment to change (b) create coalitions (c) make defiance of the norms and (d) make compliance with new norms seem or be more beneficial (Sunstein, 1996 in Goodman & Jinks, 2004, p. 636). They could contribute to popularising and internationalising progressive human rights-oriented norms, such as antidiscrimination.

<sup>22</sup> Over the decades, different metaphors have been used to symbolise youth transitions. They were categorised 'first as niches in the 1960s and then pathways in the 1970s, as trajectories in the 1980s, before moving on to the more reflexive and post-structuralist metaphor of navigation in the 1990s' (see Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005, p. 202). In the recent years, new metaphors, such as structured individualisation, have become popular to understand youth transitions (Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011).

specific and clear category, a more nebulous and porous term—young adults—has become popular (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 356).

Among the youth transitions, the one entailing the transition from school to work is the most widely researched transition phase (Bynner et al., 2018) because gainful employment is an important marker to signal skill acquisition, economic independence, adulthood and full citizenship (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). In recent years, the school-to-work transition among young adults has become chequered because of the changes within the labour market conditions, prolonged post school education and general delays in marriage and family formation (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005). For instance, young adults do not automatically secure employment and become economically independent after finishing school.

Nonetheless, they may still have moved out from the family of origin, had a successful domestic transition and started an independent household. However, young adults might have to move back to their parents in case they fail to secure employment or become economically independent (Hvinden et al., 2019). Essentially, these young adults are undergoing nonlinear, reversible, or arrested, extended, or on hold transitions (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 359-360).

Discussing the complexity of youth transitions is beyond the scope of the current thesis; however, it is useful to keep in mind what we know from the general youth transition literature when examining the experiences of youth with disabilities. Young adults do encounter precariousness while entering the labour market, which complicates the school-to-work transition. This labour market precariousness encountered by young adults could be broadly attributed to two trends. First, there is a growing popularisation of an individualisation trend, wherein young adults are expected to be independent navigators and informed negotiators who have the requisite drive, resourcefulness and life management skills to manage or circumnavigate the employment uncertainties prevailing in the labour market (France & Roberts 2015; Furlong et al., 2011; Roberts, 2018). Second, there is a trend towards labour market flexibilisation, wherein young adults are expected to take part-time and temporary jobs, have restricted employment protection and face a high risk of expulsion during economic downturns or recessions (Hvinden et al., 2019; Walther, 2006). Thus, young adults have to encounter individualisation trends, wherein they are expected to take sole responsibility for their fate, while the labour markets foster precariousness through processes and practices of flexibilisation, which constricts their capabilities and thwarts the process of becoming adults (Bradley & Devadason, 2008, pp. 130-133). The labour market transitions

for young adults are becoming more convoluted and complex, resulting in economic marginalisation and sociocultural exclusion (Hvinden et al., 2019).

Within the youth transition research, there is ample evidence pointing towards the difficulties encountered by young adults to secure gainful employment and seamlessly and successfully transition into the labour market (Bradley & Devadason, 2008; Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011; Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005; Hvinden et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2013). However, there are lacunas within youth studies research concerning the labour market transition among disabled youth (Gregorius, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008; Singal & Jain 2012). The present thesis contributes to covering this gap in the literature. The insights obtained from the youth transition literature facilitated contrasting the barrier perceptions and experiences of young adults with visual disabilities (see articles III and IV). In chapter 6, I will discuss how the comparative findings contribute to the youth transition literature.

### **3.2.6 Perspectives on resilience and social resilience**

During the present thesis, I became interested in the capacity of young adults with visual disabilities to not only cope with adversities, but also transform and improve their opportunities for participation in society. Earlier, we observed that ableist attitudes such as passive pawns, tragic victims, plucky heroes and resilient people are employed to categorise disabled people (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2010). The emerging literature on resilience offers a useful point of departure to better understand the ableist attitudes and positive stereotypes concerning disabled youth. Resilience, which derives from the Latin verb '*resilire*', meaning to leap or spring back; to rebound, recoil (Wright & Masten, 2015, p. 4), has been applied in disparate fields, such as biology, economics, psychology, ecology, anthropology and social policy (Theron et al., 2015). In recent years, resilience has offered a conceptual framework to understand and compare youth transitions and labour market precariousness (Hvinden et al., 2019).

Historically, within youth transition research, the concept of resilience has followed 'four waves' (Hart et al., 2016, pp. 1–2). The first wave gives primacy to the unique individual characteristics that enable the person to overcome external adversities. The second wave explores the significance of familial, educational and communitive resources as protective factors to circumscribe the negative outcomes associated with vulnerability (Murray, 2003). The third wave incorporates the micro and meso levels through the lens of culture (Ungar,

2008). The fourth wave follows an ecological framework grounded in bio-psycho-social explanations (Wright & Masten, 2015). Broadly speaking, these four waves could offer an understanding of resilience, one that commences from individual-based explanations and gradually moves towards social-based explanations, finally accentuating their complex and multilayered interplay (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Theron et al., 2015).

Within the individual-based explanations, resilience entails a person's capacity to bounce back from adverse, stressful, unfortunate and vulnerable situations. Resilient individuals are often associated with possessing protective, psychosocial attributes such as a positive self-concept, high self-esteem, greater degree of self-efficacy, a strong sense of self-determination and an internal locus of control (King et al., 2003; Murray, 2003).

In the psychology literature, first, self-concept entails the manner in which individuals perceive, accept and describe themselves. An individual's idea of self is contingent on general social interactions and conscious contemplation. Second, self-esteem refers to the process in which an individual evaluates themselves in relation to others, and this is associated with the sense of worthiness that they feel. Third, self-efficacy refers to the individual's perception and capacity to deal with the demands made by their environment and the challenges they face (for an overview of these psychosocial attributes, see King et al., 2003, pp. 93–94).

Fourth, a related concept, self-determination, refers to the skills, knowledge and beliefs that allow a person to behave in a goal-directed, self-regulated and autonomous way (Field et al., 1998; Field et al., 2003). Fifth, internal locus of control entails an individual's attitudes and beliefs concerning who or what causal factor is responsible for outcomes or consequences. Resilient individuals seem to possess an internal locus of control, wherein they regard future outcomes to be contingent on individual choices, actions and behaviour, not on extraneous circumstances, such as providence or other people (Rotter, 1966).

In essence, such individual-based explanations point towards the prevalence of these psychosocial features, which are partly crucial to fend off adversities, accumulate human capital and secure desired well-being (King et al., 2003). However, this reductionist, individual-centred and outcome-oriented understanding of resilience has been thoroughly critiqued (Ungar, 2008; Wright & Masten, 2015; Theron et al., 2015) and has given way to a more holistic, context-dependent and process-oriented understanding (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Murray, 2003).

The social-based explanations of resilience are predicated on the fact that individuals are not operating in a vacuum and that there are external factors that enable individuals by fostering their resilience. Members belonging to the family, school and community are evaluated as crucial because they not only support vulnerable individuals, but also enable them to cope with and adapt to adversities (Murray 2003, p. 22; Shah, 2016; Singal et al., 2011; Stokes et al., 2013; Wright & Masten, 2015, p. 6). It is important to note that what constitutes youth and what is understood as social institutions, such as communities, are not homogenous terms. They substantially vary across sociocultural boundaries (Gregorius, 2014). The institutional enablers fostering resilience could differ quite significantly depending on the social norms, cultural practices and nature of the labour market because the definitions and understandings associated with risks, mediating factors, and positive outcomes could drastically diverge across country contexts (Hvinden et al., 2019; Theron et al., 2015; Ungar, 2008)<sup>23</sup>. At any rate, institutional enablers and environmental factors mediate or circumscribe the opportunities and choices that an individual has and facilitate in fostering resilience (Wright & Masten, 2015). This concept of resilience has been broadened over the past few years, and the term social resilience has been employed, which points towards an interlinkage between an individual's coping, adaptive and transformative capacities and how they operate within the sociocultural context (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Social resilience enables an individual to cope with not only present risks, but also adapt to future risks and adversities, helping them collectively transform their social reality. First, coping capacities enable individuals to absorb immediate risks by mobilising the resources proximally available. After the individual encounters adversity, their coping capacity enables them to mitigate the immediate and negative consequences of risk and adversity they encounter and restore well-being. Second, the adapting capacity entails the individual being proactive and anticipating and preventing the future occurrence of risks and adversities. This capacity allows individuals to adjust today so that present and future well-being becomes likely. Third, transformative capacities require individuals to raise their socio-political consciousness. Individuals are moral agents who could actively partake in civil society organisations, and through sustained action and representation, they can create social institutions that enable their individual well-being, simultaneously creating a robust society that reduces the possibility of future crises. This concept of social resilience offers a critical

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<sup>23</sup> Thus, context was added as a crucial dimension to understand and explicate resilience across geographies (Global North and South) and societies (Western and non-Western) (see chapter 2).

and normative framework within youth research to comprehend the significance of both individual protective factors and context-specific institutional enablers (Bussi et al., 2019). Furthermore, it offers dynamic and multilayered explanations (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013) that encompass the influence of protective factors at the individual, relational, community and cultural levels to overcome adversities, accumulate human capital and secure well-being (Bussi et al., 2019; Theron et al., 2015; Ungar, 2008).

Disability is often associated with adversity. As a result, disabled individuals who can manage and successfully overcome the risks emerging out of their impairment, sociocultural exclusion and economic marginalisation are considered inspiring, courageous and heroic (King et al., 2003; Nario-Redmond, 2019). Often, positive psychosocial attributes or flattering stereotypes are ascribed to these disabled individuals, and they are labelled as resilient and empowered (Nario-Redmond, 2010). However, it ought to be noted that their success in overcoming adversity is contingent on different contextual factors; these factors become critical for disabled youth, who encounter a greater deal of precariousness (Bussi et al., 2019; Gregorius, 2014). Youth with disabilities lean on different institutions that foster resilience, facilitating them to overcome risks and contributing to securing their well-being (King et al., 2003). The positive role of these different institutional enablers cannot be overstated (Shah, 2016; Singal et al., 2011; Singal & Jain, 2012; Stokes, et al., 2013). However, there is no singular, positive psychosocial attribute, nor any specific social institution, that could foster resilience among disabled youth across different countries. It should be reiterated that the ideas associated with autonomy, choice, failure, vulnerability, risk and resilience vary significantly for the disabled youth belonging to different sociocultural contexts (Gregorius, 2014; Stokes et al., 2013; Theron et al., 2015; Ungar, 2008). Therefore, the concepts of resilience and social resilience need to be judiciously employed. The insights obtained from this specific strand of literature contributed in the writing of research article IV in this present thesis.

### **3.3. Exploring the scope of meliorism: top-down and bottom-up interventions**

Throughout the present comparative study, I have firmly relied on the philosophy of pragmatism and employed different concepts located in the middle-range (Merton, 1968; Mjøset, 2009), which entail disability, discrimination and ableism, social regulations, policy reforms, youth transitions and resilience. Within the philosophy of pragmatism, meliorism is a fundamental feature. It implies a belief that the world can become better through human intervention (James, 2010). In the context of the current thesis, the labour markets could be made more open, inclusive, accessible and enlightened by combatting disability-based

discrimination and ableism. The present thesis accentuates two trends, namely social regulatory policy reforms from the top and social resilient youth actions from below, that show the interventions and factors associated with combatting discrimination and realising meliorism in the labour market.

It has been widely accepted that the creation of an open, inclusive, accessible and enlightened labour market is a good in and of itself and a goal worth pursuing (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Heyer, 2015; Heymann et al., 2014; Schur et al., 2013; United Nations, 2006). In pursuit of this goal, many governments could undertake policy reforms and implement social regulatory instruments, such as antidiscrimination legislations and accessibility norms, with the view of enhancing the employment inclusion of vulnerable groups (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014; Waldschmidt, 2009). The adoption of government interventions, such as social regulations, could open pathways to reduce the labour market imperfections manifesting in the form of disability-based discrimination and ableism. These top-down government interventions should be adopted with the view to realise meliorism in the labour market.

Complementing these government interventions, disabled people and their organisations have been at the forefront of social movements to fight for their human rights concerning equal treatment and full and effective participation (Charlton, 1998; Ghai, 2018; Oliver, 1990; Shapiro, 1993). Although disabled people have encountered ableist attitudes and disabling barriers that have resulted in their economic exclusion, cultural othering and social marginalisation (Campbell, 2018; Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2010; Wolbring, 2008), they have still engaged in self-advocacy efforts and peaceful and contentious collective actions (Heyer, 2015; Waldschmidt et al., 2015). Their efforts have culminated in transnational advocacy networks and grassroots mobilisation (Waldschmidt et al., 2017) to combat disability-based discrimination and ableism. Over the past few decades, disabled people and their organisations have contributed to fostering social resilience among the contemporary crop of disabled youth, who are relatively better equipped to undertake individual and collective actions to cope with, adapt to and transform their labour market realities (Bussi et al., 2019). Thus, the socially resilient actions and efforts from below could partially contribute to the realisation of meliorism in the labour market.

The current thesis is predicated on different perspectives from diverse theoretical strands. These eclectic perspectives have acted as an intermediary between grand theories and rabid empiricism. They have facilitated an arrival at theoretically informed, empirically grounded,

contextually sensitive and contingent comparative insights. This, in turn, has cumulatively assisted in answering the overarching research question.



## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

A research methodology is concerned with accumulating, analysing, interpreting, evaluating and disseminating knowledge. This chapter elucidates the different elements of methodology that I employed throughout the course of the present thesis. To begin with, I briefly point out the ideas associated with the case study research, the selection of cases and the criteria to assess the findings. Moving forward, I detail the eclectic methods employed to undertake data collection and discuss the process of data analysis. In addition, a few challenges associated with the data collection and its analysis across the two phases are discussed. Thereafter, I point out a few ethical considerations and the study limitations.

### **4.1 Comparative case study method**

The current comparative research is based on a qualitative case study methodology. Case study research allows for an in-depth analysis of a contemporary phenomenon in its natural and real-world context (Yin, 1989, p. 23; Yin, 2012, p. 4). It entails a dialogue between theoretical ideas and multiple sources of evidence (Ragin & Amoroso, 2018). Historically, the comparative case study method has, among others, been employed with the view to contrast political systems, welfare regimes and institutional arrangements (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990; George & Bennett, 2005; Heidenheimer et al., 1990; Mahoney, 2000; Skocpol & Somers, 1980). In addition, it further facilitates in comparing and contrasting the lived experiences of individuals, producing contextually oriented, rich empirical findings (Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset, 2009). Within comparative case study research, qualitative case studies become especially valuable when theoretical propositions and empirical research are at an early stage of development. Moreover, such research could facilitate enhancing our understanding, hone our assertions and contribute to knowledge accumulation (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 1995).

I employed a comparative, qualitative case study method to generate working hypotheses and offer analytical generalisations (Bryant, 2009; Yin, 1989; Yin, 2012) and to foster a ‘dialogical encounter’ (Baert, 2005, p. 195)<sup>24</sup>. The aim in adopting this method was rather modest because I did not wish to provide hard causal explanations or offer precise predictions of social phenomena (Mjøset, 2006). Moreover, I consciously moved away from falsifying

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<sup>24</sup> Over the course of the current dissertation, I engaged in a dialogue with members from both scientific and nonscientific milieu. In addition to the publication of research articles, I wrote multiple opinion pieces in newspapers, delivered open lectures, organised and monitored panel discussions and gave workshops on themes such as ableism, diversity, employment inclusion, universal design and disability justice. The purpose of fostering this dialogical encounter was to raise consciousness among a diverse set of actors through broad academic engagements.

theories (George & Bennett, 2005) and exporting idealised typologies or theoretical constructs from the Global North to the Global South (Meekosha, 2008; Meekosha, 2011; Grech & Soldatic, 2016). Thus, by following the qualitative comparative case study method, I am trying to understand and describe a social phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224; Stake, 1995), which might facilitate the expansion of the contours of comparative disability research and youth studies.

#### **4.1.1 Case selection**

In the current thesis, the research focus is on understanding a limited number of cases, such as the social regulation reforms in Norway and India that have taken place since the early 1990s, and analysing labour market phenomena concerning the employment inclusion of visually impaired youth. Case selection is done in a non-random intentional way closely tied to the concept of social regulation policies and its worldwide development over the past few decades, on the one hand (Heyer, 2015), and the precarious employment situation of youth with visual disabilities globally, on the other hand (Chhabra, 2020a; Wolffe & Spungin, 2002). The selection of these cases relies on where the outcome of interest occurred (George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007), as the research goal is a better understanding of particular outcomes (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006, p. 239). This comparative research is predicated on exploring different units of analysis (Yin, 2012, p. 6). In the early stages, the unit of analysis or cases were the social regulation subsystem within the general milieu of the disability policy systems prevailing in Norway and India. Later on, the unit of analysis or cases were young adults with visual disabilities within the broad category of disabled youth who were employed or in the process of securing employment in Oslo and Delhi. The unit of analysis or cases within this comparative research are duly delimited by two steps.

First, I exclusively focused on social regulation policies from the early 1990s because the literature review indicated that prior to this period, there were no nationwide regulations aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India. Second, I focused on young adults with visual impairments in the age group of 20–35 who are employed or actively seeking gainful employment in Oslo and Delhi. By placing restrictions on the type of disability policies, the youth participants' age group, type of disability and geography, I was able to specify the cases and delimit the units of analysis for comparison. Initially, I selected the case of Norway and India for the following three reasons:

- First, Norway and India could intuitively exemplify the most different or least similar cases (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 50; Gerring, 2007, p. 139) because of the significant contextual differences prevailing across these two countries (see chapter 2). I was quite keen to employ the most different case design during the formative period of the current research project. However, the research design was tweaked owing to multiple challenges associated with the most different case comparison methods<sup>25</sup> (George & Bennet 2005; Lieberson, 1991; Lieberson, 1994; Ragin, 1987).
- Second, the cases of Norway and India became part of my research foci because I was born in India and have been living and working in Norway for several years. My biography and life experiences gave me an intimate familiarity with these two country contexts. In addition, being a job-seeker and worker with a visual impairment partly kindled my research interests to explore the employment situation for young adults with visual impairments. My case selection strategy maps well with the notion of ‘*wertbeziehung*’<sup>26</sup> (Merton, 1972, p. 16), wherein my social location, value orientation and research interests determined the problems of investigation.
- Third, the dearth of comparative disability research entailing social regulation policies (Halvorsen et al., 2017a) and youth experiences (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018) from the Global North and Global South partly facilitated the selection of cases from Norway and India. Thus, the case selection was done in a purposive and pragmatic manner that was aligned with my research objectives and research interest.

#### 4.1.2 The four criteria to assess this qualitative case study

Qualitative case studies are significantly different from randomised control experiments and quantitative studies; therefore, their research findings need to be assessed with different criteria (Mjøset, 2006; Mjøset, 2009, p. 5; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012). One way to assess the

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<sup>25</sup> A most different case design, alternatively understood as a method of agreement, was proposed by John Stuart Mill with the view to compare and contrast the influence of common explanatory factors across two dissimilar cases that significantly vary. This comparative research has focused on contrasting the commonalities across the social regulation system and the labour market experiences from two very different contextual settings prevailing in Norway and India. Therefore, in the earlier stages of research, broadly speaking, the most different case study research design was partially explored to systematise the research design. However, it was subsequently abandoned because this comparative design was hard to operationalise and has serious limitations, mainly because it did not ‘allow for probabilistic theories, interaction effects, measurement errors, or even the presence of more than one cause’ (Lieberson, 1991, p. 318). For an overview of the difficulties with the most different comparative cases research design or John Stuart Mill’s method of agreement, see Gerring (2007, p. 141), George and Bennett (2005, p. 51) and Ragin (1987, p. 37).

<sup>26</sup> *Wertbeziehung* is a German term popularised by Rickert and Weber. It implies that an individual does not operate in an objective, neutral position outside history, culture and society, and an individual researcher’s value orientation and social location could determine their research interest, which in turn could influence the process of selecting and analysing research problems to study (Merton, 1972).

findings of the current thesis is to measure them against four criteria: *credibility*, *originality*, *resonance and usefulness* (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, p. 463; Charmaz, 2008, p. 28). These criteria are aligned with the logic of abductive reasoning, the employment of eclectic methods and the philosophy of pragmatism (Mjøset, 2006).

First, the *credibility* of the present thesis could be judged by the fact that I have published five peer-reviewed research articles across different international journals. These articles were based on a wide-ranging mix of data collection techniques, for example, policy review and semi-structured interviews with policy experts and young adults with visual disabilities. Over the course of the data collection and analysis process, I gained in-depth familiarity with the research topic and engaged in collecting and analysing the data from multiple evidentiary sources (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). In turn, this enhances the credibility of the current comparative research. However, credibility rests in the eye of the beholder; therefore, let the reader of the five research articles and the accompanying thesis assess if the collected and analysed data—and the subsequent interpreted findings—fulfil the credibility criterion.

Second, concerning the criterion of *originality*, this comparative research is novel on multiple fronts because for the first time, a study contrasts the disability policies and employment experiences of young adults from Norway and India. Based on original data collected through policy review and semi-structured, qualitative interviews, the present study challenges the normative assumptions associated with Global North–South disability research. It offers new and original insights concerning policy convergence, employment barriers and successful employment narratives ascribed by young adults with visual disabilities, which seem to transcend the Global North–South divide. This, in turn, pushes the envelope of comparative disability research and comparative youth studies.

Third, the current thesis offers an element of *resonance*, as articles I and II provide cross-national perspectives on policy convergence and could resonate with the policy makers who are engaged in policy formulation and implementation. The empirically oriented articles III and IV offer analytical and interpretative insights concerning the underexplored employment narratives of young adults with visual impairments, which could resonate with the employment experiences of disabled youth or youth in general. Finally, article V offers critical and the reflexive insights associated with conducting cross-national disability research. This could resonate with researchers investigating marginal groups.

Fourth, the present thesis has been predicated on the philosophy of pragmatism, here with the aim to produce knowledge that is *useful* (Baert, 2006; Bryant, 2009; James, 2010; Mjøset, 2006). It offers useful perspectives for policy makers, members of disability organisations, public employment agency officials, employers, social workers and young adults with visual impairments to better understand the expanding contours of disability policy developments, disability rights, employment barriers and the labour market inclusion of disabled youth. Finally, the current thesis fosters an interdisciplinary Global North–South dialogue, which is much needed across disability research and youth studies (Gregorius, 2014; Singal, 2008; Singal, 2010). Thus, cumulatively, the current thesis is useful for a wide variety of actors because it challenges the normative assumptions within comparative disability research, offers empirical conjectures and generates working hypotheses. These four criteria are focused on social justice (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2008, p. 27-28) and promote the idea of meliorism (James, 2010), which implies that the world could become better through human intervention. Moreover, these four criteria correspond with the philosophy of pragmatism, which provides a broad framework to strive towards social critique and human emancipation (Baert, 2011; West, 1989).

#### **4.2 Two phases of research**

The current thesis was divided into two phases. In the first phase, the research focus was to describe and compare social regulatory systems at the country level. Moving forward, in the second phase, the research focus was on understanding the employment narratives of visually impaired youth from Oslo and Delhi. The data collection and analysis strategy for each phase is distinctive, corresponding with the research objectives. Broadly speaking, the data collection process entails a policy and literature review coupled with semi-structured qualitative interviews.

The present thesis is predicated on the logic of abduction, which entails a simultaneous reliance on previously established theoretical ideas (deduction) and empirical data obtained from the field (induction) (Bryant, 2009; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The empirical findings are theoretically sensitised (Mjøset, 2006).

Before conducting the fieldwork, I secured all ethical clearances in Norway (see Appendix 1 for the research project reference number (51653)). In addition, I formulated separate, semi-structured topical guides with a relatively similar point of departure to interview policy experts and young adults with visual disabilities in Norway and India (see Appendices 2–4).

Prior to commencing any interviews, I sought voluntary consent by administering consent forms for experts and youth participants (see Appendices 5 and 6).

#### **4.2.1 First phase**

In the first phase, the data collection and analysis consisted of a policy review and expert interviews. Within comparative case study research, documentary information and historical archival evidence can offer valuable facts while contrasting cases (Stakes, 1995, Yin, 1989; Yin, 2012). Therefore, I reviewed and analysed different policy documents (15 from Norway and 10 from India). The policy review entailed government white papers, shadow reports made by civil society and academic literature on the theme of social regulation policies commencing in the 1990s.

The reviewed policy documents were analysed based on a qualitative content analysis combining the steps of summarising, explicating and categorising (Mayring, 2000). The logic of abduction (Bryant, 2009; Mjøset, 2006) was employed to summarise the content, situate the documents in their historical legal and institutional context and categorise the data along the lines of three dimensions: regulative sticks, financial carrots and informative sermons (Vedung, 1998). For a detailed description of criteria for policy review and the method employed for the policy analysis, see article I (Chhabra, 2019, pp. 88–92).

To complement the policy review and analysis, which was based on secondary sources of data, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with policy experts. Within case study research, qualitative interviews are regarded as an important evidentiary source (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012). During interviews, key informants can share ‘facts of a matter, opinions about events, and their own insights into certain occurrences’ (Yin, 1989, p. 88). The key informants in the current thesis were the policy experts who possess ‘technical, process and interpretative knowledge’ (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 55) concerning the formulation and implementation of disability policies.

Between March 2017 and January 2018, I conducted 25 semi-structured, face-to-face expert interviews: 11 in Norway and 14 in India, with an almost equal gender representation. All interviews in Norway were conducted in Oslo, except for one, where the expert could not travel to Oslo. Therefore, I visited Trondheim for this interview. All interviews in India were conducted in person in Delhi, except for one participant, who could not meet in person.

Therefore, the interview was conducted via Skype. See the detailed characteristics of the experts and their work profiles in article II (Chhabra, 2021, pp. 33–34).

To recruit the policy experts, I engaged in a snowball sampling method (Goldstein, 2002, p. 671; Littig, 2009, p. 103; Werning Rivera et al., 2002, p. 683) and followed multiple strategies: for example, I leveraged official networks, directly contacting the authors of important policy dossiers, and I participated in disability conferences. All this cumulatively triggered a chain of recommendations, which facilitated the recruitment of policy experts who represented different institutions. The sample included government representatives, the heads of disabled people's organisations, disability rights activists, academic researchers, employers' federations' members and antidiscrimination agency officials.

The policy experts were interviewed based on semi-structured, topical guides with relatively similar points of departure. Topics, such as the work history of the expert, employment situation for disabled people, types of disability policies, institutions involved in disability policy formulation and implementation, the influence of factors affecting policy reforms and innovative government policies enhancing employment inclusion for disabled people, constituted the topical guide (see Appendices 2 and 3). The qualitative data collected from the expert interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. While analysing the expert interviews, the focus was on 'thematic units that is passages with similar topics which are scattered about the interviews' (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 35). The data from each interview were manually coded and condensed into categories derived from the topical guide (Tracy, 2013). Subsequently, these categories were clustered into comparable themes across the interviews. Common themes were contrasted for both countries. For an overview of the experts who were interviewed and the data collection and analysis process, see article II (Chhabra, 2021, pp. 33–34).

In the first phase, the data collection was predicated on multiple evidentiary sources, and different strategies were used for the data analysis. Article I involved a review of the policy documents obtained from secondary sources, and the policy analysis was done based on a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). Article II entailed data from primary sources, namely expert interviews. The qualitative and empirical findings were thematically analysed (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). These two articles partly facilitated data triangulation (Hammersley, 2008) and established the 'converging lines of inquiry' (Yin, 1989, p. 97). By relying on and analysing different sets of data, I could explore the process of social regulation reforms from

different angles (Hammersley, 2008); therefore, I was able to arrive at previously unexplored comparative findings that are linked to social regulation policy convergence. The process of data collection and analysis was not always seamless; thus, it is important to note a few challenges that I encountered.

First, reviewing and comparing policy documents in Norway and India was challenging because the countries follow different policy styles. Norway has adopted a mainstream approach and the principle of sector responsibility (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003), which entails that there are no specific laws targeting people with disabilities (Vedeler, 2014b). On the contrary, the Indian government has enacted specific laws targeting people with disabilities (Bhambhani, 2018). However, Norwegian documents were easier to access because all of them were available at the government portal. Other than the two legislative acts, it was more challenging reviewing the Indian policy documents, for example, the shadow reports, which were not stored in a specific repository. Therefore, slightly different approaches corresponding to country-specific policy legacies had to be adopted to conduct the policy review and analysis.

Second, there were specific challenges while conducting the policy review in Norway because many of the official documents were written in Norwegian. This led to translation challenges, considerably slowing the interpretation process. An example is the Norwegian public report 'From Users to Citizens' (Public report 22, 2001), which was an important document aiming to realise the rights of persons with disabilities; this indicated a shift towards social regulation reforms in the early 2000s. In this document, the Norwegian word '*likestilling*', which means equality, was translated into 'gender equality' by google translate. This example is illustrative of the need to carefully translate, understand and interpret the official Norwegian documents. This problem was partially circumvented by Norwegian reading and writing assistants, who were well-versed with the language and, therefore, could fill out the translation lacunas. Language and translation challenges are common issues in cross-national disability research involving countries wherein English is not the primary language of communication (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2018). In contrast, the policy documents in India are written in dual languages (English and Hindi). Therefore, understanding and interpreting them was relatively easy.

Third, the data collection process for the case studies can sometimes be less straightforward because of the complexities of the real world (Yin, 2012). The data collection and analysis



process was not always linear. There were instances where the evidence obtained from policy documents and historical records preceded the expert interviews, while at other moments, expert interviews shed light on important facts, leading me to retrace and take two steps back and consult the policy documents, laws and provisions in a new light. Therefore, the twin strategy of conducting policy review and expert interviews often overlapped because the policy experts suggested certain policy documents that were initially not reviewed.

Fourth, although I recruited experts through a snowball sampling method, I often encountered multiple barriers, for example, gaining access to the policy experts (Berry, 2002; Goldstein, 2002), building trust and rapport with them (Mikecz, 2012) and convincing them to give a couple of hours of their time for the interview. These barriers were acutely experienced during the data collection process in India, which was conducted between late October 2017 and mid-January 2018. The Indian experts followed a hierarchical approach, predicated on trust deficit, thereby creating access barriers. Gaining access to the experts involved an iterative element of surprise and dismay; for instance, some experts who were previously contacted and who agreed for the interview postponed and cancelled, while others who were approached after convincing and cajoling their secretaries, agreed to partake in a spontaneous interview. To negotiate the access barrier, I often relied on the strategy of ‘getting in the door’ (Goldstein, 2002, p. 669) to engage with prospective experts in India. In addition, in the correspondence before the interview, I was signalling to the experts or their secretaries about my knowledgeability (Mikecz, 2012, p. 482) to gain their trust and convince them to participate in the interview. Moreover, positioning the current thesis in a cross-national frame, I communicated to the experts that their participation would be valuable because the research product, such as research articles, would be published in international journals. I employed the ‘Norwegian card’ periodically, for example, communicating that I was working and living in Oslo, using a Norwegian phone number and the official university email address from Oslo and relying predominantly on the English language in my oral and written communication. All this cumulatively led to the perception that I was an innocuous, vision-impaired foreigner in India. At times, this perception allowed me to overcome these initial access barriers because some secretaries and experts were curious about and positively predisposed towards a comparative study involving Norway and India. To gain access and build trust and rapport with the experts, I pragmatically opened the Norwegian card and tossed the Indian coin when the situation demanded it. These eclectic means were indispensable for conducting interviews with policy experts.

In contrast, interviewing experts in the Norwegian context was rather straightforward. If the experts agreed to partake in the interview, they agreed. There was limited hierarchical distance between me as a doctoral fellow and the interviewed experts because Norwegian society is predicated on egalitarian values, and there seems to be a trust surplus. Few experts perceived me as an innocuous, visually impaired foreigner who had to explain the contours of Norwegian disability policies and describe the institutional landscape thoroughly. Indeed, this positionality coupled with my curiosity for and knowledge about the disability policy system in Norway often led to long interviews, thereby culminating in rich, contextual insights.

#### **4.2.2 Second phase**

In the second phase of data collection, I conducted 29 face-to-face interviews with young adults with visual impairments, 12 in Oslo and 17 in Delhi, from November 2017 to June 2018. The qualitative interviews were deliberately chosen as a data collection strategy because there are relatively limited comparative Global North–South studies discussing lived perspectives of people with disabilities (Ghai, 2001; Grech & Soldatic, 2016; Meekosha, 2008; Meekosha, 2011; Singal, 2010). Furthermore, in-depth qualitative interviews can offer ‘a privileged access to people’s basic experience of the lived world’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 32). I employed semi-structured experience-centred narrative interviews to solicit the perspectives from young adults with visual disabilities. In a broad sense, the human being can be construed of as a ‘story-telling animal’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 204). By employing narrative interviews, I was able to capture the employment stories of visually impaired youth in Oslo and Delhi concerning the barriers they had encountered and the factors enabling them to secure employment. Experience-centred narratives are temporally and spatially flexible (Squire, 2008) because they are based on salient events, such as finding a first job or experiences such as being discriminated against in the job interview.

I employed a topical guide (see Appendix 4) that broadly explored aspects such as the interviewed participants’ biographies, experiences at the previous and current workplaces, employment barriers, experiences of participation in employment programmes and the work rehabilitation activities of disabled people’s organisations and the factors contributing to employment success. The topical guides were not used as a straitjacket but rather as a springboard to engage in an open and flexible dialogue with the youth participants concerning their employment history, labour market precariousness and success factors.

The youth participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019, p. 318), and the criteria were to select participants who could offer information-rich employment narratives, who belonged to the age group of 20–35 years old and who worked or were seeking employment in Delhi and Oslo. To begin with, the youth participants in Delhi were interviewed between November 2017 and January 2018; thereafter, their counterparts in Oslo were interviewed between February and June 2018. To gain access to the youth participants in Delhi, I contacted a couple of prominent disability organisations offering work training and employment rehabilitation programmes for people with disabilities. In the first phase, I interviewed a few policy experts who had worked as leaders of disability organisations; they facilitated quick access to the potential pool of youth participants. Most of the youth had secured gainful employment in Delhi, while there were a few who were in the process of doing so. I built rapport with the participants by treating them ‘as a friend or a guest in one’s home’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 146). In a way, it was easier to gain familiarity with the youth participants because I shared a common biological constraint and a few overlapping biographical features. The youth participants could relate their intimate experiences to me in full confidence, and this led to the collection of thick, descriptive narratives (Chhabra, 2020b).

A similar pattern of data collection was followed in Norway. I contacted a prominent organisation that deals with the issues of blind and partially sighted people; this organisation facilitated in gaining access to the potential pool of youth participants. Before commencing the interviews, voluntary consent was obtained from all the participants. All the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The characteristics of the youth participants and their work profiles are discussed in the method sections in articles III (Chhabra, 2020a, p. 8) and IV (Chhabra, 2020c, pp. 5–6) and in the section ‘The Research Project and my Positionality’ of article V (Chhabra, 2020b, p. 309).

Over the years, a thematic analysis has been successfully employed in impairment, health and well-being research to provide a comprehensive picture of the data set or to focus on prominent themes or defining aspects from the qualitative material (Braun & Clarke, 2014). A thematic analysis is a type of qualitative method used to identify, analyse and interpret ‘patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data’ (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). A theme ‘captures something important about the data in relation to the research question’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), and often, there are repetitive patterns strewn across the

qualitative data set. A thematic analysis entails six steps: (1) gaining familiarity with the data; (2) systematically coding the qualitative material; (3) searching for themes; (4) refining the themes; (5) defining and labelling the themes; and (6) writing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

During the thematic analysis, I secured familiarity with the interviews by listening and relistening to the transcripts with my text-to-speech screen-reader<sup>27</sup>. I moved back and forth between the field observations and notes, which I took immediately after the interview, and with the raw data of the transcripts. The field observations and notes immensely facilitated the initial analysis because I was able to distil out broadly relevant passages directly concerning the employment narratives of youth participants. I subsequently undertook the manual coding of specific employment-related passages (Tracy, 2013) and searched for common themes and repetitive patterns. The process of coding facilitated mapping the empirical data on the conceptual landscape and inductively generated novel insights from the empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I refined the initial codes into two broad categories: employment barriers encountered and factors facilitating employment inclusion. The similarities and differences between these broad categories were subsequently traced across the employment narratives from Oslo and Delhi. Finally, I returned again to the raw data of the full transcripts to verify that the codes and themes reflected the categories and were not misplaced out of their country-specific contexts.

I organised the data concerning employment barriers into two broad groups: supply-side and demand-side barriers. Thereafter, I exclusively focused on a specific demand-side barrier, namely employers' discrimination. Furthermore, to classify the factors that enabled the participants to secure employment, I used a simple heuristic of individual attributes, efforts and actions, on the one hand, and the structural factors, enablers and support mechanisms, on the other hand. The classification of employment barriers and success factors was predicated on abductive logic (Bryant, 2009; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mjøset, 2006), wherein the raw qualitative data obtained from the field were duly sensitised with conceptual ideas, which were reviewed during and after the fieldwork. The second phase culminated with the writing of articles III, IV and V.

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<sup>27</sup> I employ a popular screen-reading software called as JAWS (Job Access with Speech) to read and write.

While conducting the interviews with the youth participants in Oslo and Delhi and analysing the qualitative data, I encountered a few challenges worth mentioning. First, experience-based interviews capture the events and narratives that are reflected upon and retrospectively retold (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Squire, 2008). The youth participants preferred to narrate certain events/experiences over others. For example, a few narratives were more focused on labour market precariousness, while others were focused on the factors leading to their employment success. Different youth participants emphasised differing aspects within their employment narratives. Furthermore, the youth participants might have engaged, knowingly or unknowingly, in narrating a partial picture, not a holistic account, because of careless errors, myopia or prejudice.<sup>28</sup> The narratives could stand the risk of being too parochial and exaggerated in their significance. In addition, the individuals narrating their experiences could engage in special pleading, selective narration of events, and their accounts could be plagued with errors (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Polletta et al., 2011; Sandberg, 2010; Squire, 2008). Therefore, it was important to systematically tease out and analyse the recurring themes (Brown & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Brown, 2017; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Furthermore, the question of my researcher's positionality and social location vis-à-vis the youth participants influenced how and what kind of narratives were being told. Thus, no attempt was made to assert any external validity (Mjøset, 2006; Squire, 2008) or argue for the statistical representativeness of the empirical findings (Yin, 2012). It should be reiterated that the employment narratives of the youth participants do not reflect objective reality; thus, the empirical findings grounded in youths' narratives should be interpreted with caution. Therefore, during the data collection and analysis process, I had to make a constant effort to nurture healthy scepticism. I critically questioned the youth participants and analytically distanced myself from them while immersing but not becoming overwhelmed by their employment narratives.

Second, in qualitative research, the researcher's positionality influences the data collection because the researcher is not a tabula rasa. Initially, I assessed myself and was perceived by the youth participants as an insider. In turn, this facilitated gaining quick access, building rapport with the youth participants and arriving at an empathic understanding, which

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<sup>28</sup> The empiricist David Hume was partly sceptical towards individual testimonies because there might be errors emerging out of human vanity, innate passions, popular superstitions, false beliefs and lapse of memory: '[T]here is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind, when a man feels the pain of excessive heat, or the pleasure of moderate warmth, and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this sensation, or anticipates it by his imagination. These faculties may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses; but they never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment [...] When we reflect on our past sentiments and affections, our thought is a faithful mirror, and copies its objects truly; but the colours which it employs are faint and dull, in comparison of those in which our original perceptions were clothed' (1999, p. 96).

culminated in thick and authentic descriptions of intimate experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Fay, 1996; Merton, 1972). Nonetheless, it led to a blurring of the boundaries of me as a researcher and the youth participants, which made data collection an arduous task.

Third, not all the youth participants in Delhi and Oslo treated me as an insider. Some of them ended up ‘othering’ me on the vectors of gender, class, level of education, language skills and nationality. This othering process led to specific challenges concerning data collection because my biographical features did not perfectly overlap with the participants in both Norway and India (Chhabra, 2020b).

Fourth, because of my biography and immersion within the research topic, I was partially able to intuitively grasp the employment barriers of youth with visual disabilities and understand the factors contributing to their employment success. However, some employment narratives were emotionally charged and rather overwhelming because of the harrowing labour market precariousness. At times, it was difficult to distance myself while listening to the audio recordings. However, after the audio files were transcribed and I started listening and relistening to the files through my text-to-speech screen-reading software, the synthetic voice allowed me to gain some emotional distance from the intimate and sensitive employment narratives. The field notes immediately taken after the interviews helped in contextualising the qualitative data and getting the transcripts, and coded passages read out by a reading assistant allowed me to gain a critical analytic distance.

In essence, throughout the data collection and analysis phase, I straddled research boundaries, with one foot placed as an insider and the other as an outsider. I occupied the hyphenated dynamic space (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) and realised that I was an in-betweener (Chaudhry, 2017; Crossley et al., 2016) or a sociological stranger (Hellawell, 2006), who simultaneously experienced nearness and distance throughout the course of the qualitative fieldwork. Article V discusses the complex issues surrounding researcher positionality and identity and the mechanisms in which I tried to circumnavigate them.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations and study limitations**

#### **4.3.1. Ethical considerations**

Before commencing the data collection and analysis, as a first step, I secured ethical clearance from the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research in January 2017 (see Appendix 1). Prior to conducting the interviews, I secured written, voluntary and informed consent from all the participants (see Appendices 5 and 6 for the sampled consent forms). The notion of

informed consent 'is grounded primarily on the principle of individual autonomy and secondarily on that of beneficence' (Marzano, 2012, p. 443). These principles respect people's capacities to make decisions independently, serve their self-determination and are meant to avoid harming the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Before starting an interview, I informed the participants about the purpose of the current comparative study, described the background leading to my decision to research this theme and gave them the absolute freedom to withdraw their consent at any given point. In addition, I promised full confidentiality and anonymity while publishing the research articles and thesis.

While carrying out the expert interviews in Delhi, I encountered some challenges, wherein a few experts were sceptical about signing the consent form, and they did not want to be quoted directly, especially when they presented critical perspectives linked to the government's failures concerning the implementation of disability policies. At times, during and after the interview, I had to reassure the sceptical experts that a qualitative interview merely is part of a comparative case study and that the identities would be duly anonymised and their perspectives would be used in a way that would not land them in hot waters. Unlike the disability experts in Delhi, those in Oslo readily signed the consent form before the interviews commenced.

While interviewing the young adults with visual impairments, a different set of ethical challenges appeared. Because there was a blurring of the research boundaries, some of them expected me to show solidarity with their political interests and demands, play the role of a mentor who could help them secure employment or expected me to be a friend and socialise with them beyond the interview period. I made a conscious attempt to nurture relationships based on reciprocity with the study participants and avoid the pitfall of being perceived as an exploitative researcher (Barnes, 1996; Barnes, 2003; Barnes, 2009; Oliver, 1992) engaged in a parasitical relationship (Stone & Priestly, 1996). However, it was difficult to have fully reciprocal relationships because the youth participants in Delhi often expected more from me before, during and after the interview, assessing me to be more socioeconomically privileged. Although the consent forms categorically stated that 'the voluntary participation in the interviews means that you will not be paid or compensated in cash or kind', I had to grapple with misplaced expectations because some of them expected me to help them secure jobs or gain material advantages. Listening to the vulnerable life experiences of youth participants

from Delhi took a psycho-emotional toll on me because I could witness my general privilege compared with the youth participants.

Unlike the youth participants in Delhi, those in Oslo were more concerned about the issue of data privacy and participant confidentiality. The first youth participant who was interviewed decided to withdraw from the study, owing to a profound sense of concern for confidentiality. The youth participant realised that some deeply intimate life experiences had been shared with me and was fearful that biographical experiences might be divulged in the social events where our paths might cross in the future. In line with the ethical principle of beneficence (Marzano, 2012), the participants' request for privacy and confidentiality was fully respected, and all acquired information was duly removed. I have discussed a few critical reflections concerning ethical dilemmas in the fifth article (Chhabra, 2020b) and the means through which I tried to circumvent them. As a principle, I ensured that all participants were at ease during the interview, and I cautiously treaded on sensitive themes and gave them ample time and opportunity to freely express themselves.

Because the current thesis is firmly grounded in the philosophy of pragmatism, it should be reiterated that I prioritised truthfulness, not absolute truth. I relied on being prudent and was guided by practical wisdom because the interviewing process entails unpredictability and ambiguity, and no specific ethical or moral authority can circumvent cross-cultural uncertainties (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 100). At all times, I consciously ensured that I kept the best interests of the study participants in mind and adhered to a high standard of integrity while accumulating and disseminating the data throughout the thesis.

#### **4.3.2 Study limitations**

Over and above a few challenges associated with the data collection and analysis during the first and second phase and the ethical conundrums that I encountered, there are a few general study limitations that I will discuss in a bit a more detail.

**The problem of policy convergence.** To understand policy convergence, a specific definition of convergence is employed, one that merely points towards the tendencies of policies to become similar over time (Heichel et al., 2005). Policy convergence could take place at multiple levels, that is, in the goals, content, instrument, outcomes and style (Bennett, 1991). In article I, I have focused primarily on the former two—goals and content—so the latter ones concerning policy implementation and outcomes are not explored. It must be stated that



evaluating policy implementation and outcomes is more important to measure substantive developments, such as the realisation of disability rights (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Heyer, 2015; Waddington et al., 2017; Waldschmidt, 2009). Furthermore, both Norway and India follow distinctive policy legacies, resulting in varied institutions and differentiated policy outcomes. Norway has a better track record of implementing disability policies (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009), while India has a chequered history regarding disability policy implementation (Bhambhani, 2018; Ghai, 2015). One should cautiously interpret findings concerning policy convergence. One method to show if policy convergence holds weight would be to trace if there are similarities within policy implementations, which results in positive substantive changes for the lived realities of people with disabilities across Norway and India. In essence, divergent policy legacies and differing policy implementation track records culminating in substantially varying policy outcomes need to be kept in the background while assessing the recent trend towards social regulation policy convergence.

**Equifinality issue.** In article II, I propose two factors—the international harmonisation trend and grassroots mobilisation pressure—contributing to the adoption of social regulation reforms. In addition, article IV points out a few individual and institutional protective factors that foster social resilience and contribute to labour market success for a few qualified young adults with visual disabilities. However, I fully acknowledge the significance of equifinality, which points towards the prevalence of multiple causal paths<sup>29</sup> (Ragin, 1987). Furthermore, the problem of interaction effects (Lieberson, 1991; Lieberson, 1994), which points towards the intricate interconnectedness of different factors, makes it difficult to parse out specific influences and, hence, to reach the desired outcome. I would like to refrain from reaching large conclusions based on the analysis of a few cases that were purposively sampled (George & Bennett, 2005; Ragin & Amoroso, 2018)<sup>30</sup>. The present thesis does not offer any hard causal explanations or predictive expositions, which seem to operate universally across Norway and India, but rather provides theoretically informed and empirically grounded

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<sup>29</sup> The question of asserting the cause and effect can be rather complicated because first, a correlation does not naturally imply a causation. Second, there are some causes that are entirely uniform and constant in producing specific effects, while there are other causes resulting in effects that are uncertain. Thus, any empirical inquiry warrants a probabilistic outlook (Hume, 1999, pp. 111, 115, 132).

<sup>30</sup> The problem of drawing big conclusions based on a small N sample size is well discussed (Lieberson, 1991; Lieberson, 1994). Furthermore, there are tremendous difficulties associated with the law of small numbers, which implies that researchers could deliberately or inadvertently place too much faith in the results emerging out of small samples, hence grossly overestimating the replicability of such results. This could influence the selection of samples, analytical process and interpretation of findings (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974, pp. 1125–26).

contingent conjectures and working hypotheses (Yin, 2012), which should be refuted or vindicated.

**Focus on demand-side employment barriers.** Article III deliberately focuses on accentuating the problems associated with a specific demand-side employment barrier, for instance, employers' discrimination emerging out of ableist proclivities, popular stereotypes, spurious assumptions and misconceptions (Nario-Redmond, 2019). However, the employment exclusion of disabled youth can result out of either demand-side or supply-side employment barriers or their intricate interplay (Frøyland et al., 2019; Schur et al., 2013). Disabled youth could lack adequate education and job-related skills (Gregorius, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014; Sapra, 2014). Furthermore, supply-side factors such as health considerations, productivity requirements, intensity of work and the functional limitations intrinsically resulting out of individuals' impairment could inhibit labour market participation (Shakespeare, 2014). At any rate, I do not want to downplay the influence of supply-side factors, for instance, a lack of education, the restrictions emerging out of health impairments and the individual's life choices, for instance, to voluntarily opt out from the labour market.<sup>31</sup> However, the present thesis has merely tried to accentuate a specific demand-side barrier, for example, employers' discrimination, which is relatively underexplored within disability research in general (Ameri et al., 2018; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Jones & Wass, 2013; Vedeler, 2014b). Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to demand-side barriers within comparative disability research (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). Therefore, the constricted research focus on the barrier of employers' discrimination is partially warranted. However, it should be noted that employers could discriminate against recruiting disabled youth on the grounds of cost concerns, productivity expectations and social considerations. All these sociological explanations, although vital, were not discussed.

**Urban-centric research.** Articles III and IV focus on giving voice to the employment narratives of youth with vision impairments from Norway and India. However, I have primarily focused on employment-centred narratives of a few qualified young adults with

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<sup>31</sup> Securing gainful employment is not the be all and end all. Youth with disabilities should have the opportunity to become active citizens, wherein they could have a sense of "security, autonomy and influence" (Halvorsen et al., 2018, p. 3) over their life choices and career trajectories. Governments could frame redistributive public policies to give financial security to the disabled youth. A prime example is income maintenance benefits. Furthermore, a mix of redistributive and regulatory public policies could strengthen autonomy among disabled youth. A prime example is user-controlled personal assistant. Finally, governments should ensure that disabled youth could exercise influence through community participation. A prime example is disabled youth establishing interest groups and advocacy associations (Halvorsen et al., 2018).

visual disabilities who are based in Oslo and Delhi. Furthermore, the vast majority of the study participants had completed higher education, for example, bachelor programmes, and were working in the formal sector (governmental, private and nongovernmental organisations). Proverbially speaking, within the Indian context, their employment perspectives could be perceived as those coming from the cream of the crop, while in the Norwegian context, they might be suggestive of belonging to snowflakes on the tip of the iceberg, implying that the experiential accounts of the qualified young adults with visual impairments from who participated in the study are relatively privileged. The vast majority of youth with visual impairments in the countries in the Global South are not able to conclude their education, let alone secure employment (Gregorius, 2014; Singal 2008, Singal & Jain, 2012). In addition, young adults with visual impairments in countries in the Global North are often pushed onto social benefits or disability pensions (Berge, 2007; Connors et al., 2014; Nordvik, 2008; Opinion, 2018; Shaw et al., 2007). Thus, the employment narratives juxtaposed within this comparative study might be accused of being too elitist and urban-centric and not corresponding with the lived realities or employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments on a global scale. It must be accentuated that many of the qualified young adults with visual disabilities who participated encountered discrimination from employers, bouts of premature labour market exit and threats of permanent exclusion. If this seems to be a labour market reality for a few qualified blind and visually impaired youth from Oslo and Delhi, then it could be cautiously inferred that the vast majority of youth with visual impairments who generally encounter severe socioeconomic marginalisation might face even more labour market precariousness. The present study has merely focused on voicing the perspectives of a few qualified young adults with visual impairments who are relatively more socioeconomically privileged. There is an urgent need to focus on understanding the employment experiences and lived realities of the vast majority of blind and visually impaired youth.

## **Chapter 5: Summary of the Research Articles**

The current thesis consists of five research articles. In the first article, I describe the similarities within the social regulation reforms that are aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India since the early 1990s. After establishing that there is social regulation policy convergence taking place in these two countries, in the second article, I explicate the impact of two factors that are contributing to such convergence: the top-down influence of international treaties and the bottom-up pressure of grassroots mobilisation efforts.

Moving forward, I gradually switch from comparing social regulation policies at the country level to contrasting the employment narratives of a few qualified youth with visual disabilities from Oslo and Delhi. In article III, I describe the barrier perceptions linked to employers' discrimination as expressed by youth participants in Oslo and Delhi. After presenting the similarities of these barrier perceptions, in article IV, I contrast a few individual factors and institutional enablers that facilitate qualified young adults with visual impairments to secure employment in Oslo and Delhi. Finally, in article V, I critically reflect on my researcher positionality as an in-betweener and offer some critical and reflexive perspectives on the research process.

### **Article I: Two Worlds, Too Apart to Converge? A Comparison of Social Regulation Policies Aimed at the Employment of Disabled People in Norway and India**

*Author: Gagan Chhabra*

*Published in: Alter European Journal of Disability Research, 2019, vol. 13, issue 3, 83–100.*

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is to compare social regulation policies designed to influence the employment of disabled people in Norway and India and explore the degree of convergence within the policy goals and content.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The article relies on evidence from secondary data sources, such as legislations, country reports and policy dossiers, here dating back to the early 1990s. Twenty-five policy documents (15 from Norway and 10 from India) were reviewed by following a qualitative content analysis method. The taxonomy of the regulations, economical means and information strategies—popularly understood as ‘sticks, carrots and sermons’ grounded in institutional theory—was employed as an analytical tool to trace social regulation policy convergence.

**Findings** – Within the disability policy systems, social regulation reforms entailing legislations, economic means and information or persuasion strategies have become popular across developed countries. However, this article demonstrated that social regulation reforms concerning the employment of disabled people are not only popular in a developed country like Norway but also in a developing country such as India. The findings from the policy review analysis indicate that starting from the 1990s, social regulations, such as antidiscrimination norms, financial incentives and persuasion strategies, were prevalent within the disability policy system in Norway and India. This social regulation policy convergence is peculiar because these two countries are mediated by different contextual factors and are driven by different policy legacies and institutional arrangements. Social regulation reforms converge at the level of goals and content across two divergent countries. There seems to be growing evidence pointing towards a genuine globalisation of social regulation reforms.

**Originality/value** – Prior to this publication, within the domain of disability research, there existed no comparative studies that compared the disability policies across two significantly different countries such as Norway and India. Norway has predominantly been compared with rich, industrialised, developed countries from the Global North, while India has largely been compared with low, middle-income, developing and industrialising countries from the Global South. Thus, this article is unique because it expands the contours of comparative disability policy research in general and cross-national social regulation research in particular. The article is useful for, first, the policy makers who are interested in understanding disability policy development through a cross-national perspective and, second, for researchers who are keen to undertake Global North–South disability research.

**Article II: Two Factors, One Direction Towards Social Regulation Policy Convergence: Learning from Policy Experts in Norway and India**

*Author: Gagan Chhabra*

*Published in: Alter, European Journal of Disability Research, 2021, vol. 15, issue 1, 29–45*

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is to explore a few underlying factors contributing to the social regulation policy convergence taking place in Norway and India, dating back to the early 1990s, with the aim of better understanding the influence of the exogenous and/or endogenous factors and their intricate interplay.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article is based on 25 expert interviews, 11 from Norway and 14 from India. The insights from policy experts are placed in policy convergence

literature and institutional theory. The qualitative data obtained from the expert interviews are thematically analysed.

**Findings** – The findings from the expert interviews indicate two significant trends contributing to social regulation policy convergence in Norway and India. The first is concerned with the top-down influence of international treaties, such as European Union directives, which have shaped the policy developments entailing social regulations in Norway, and the United Nations instruments, which have hastened the adoption of social regulations in India. The second trend is concerned with the grassroots mobilisation of disabled people and their organisations from below, which has led to the popularisation of social regulations in both Norway and India. The comparative findings indicate that common factors, such as international treaties and the grassroots mobilisation of disabled people and their organisations, have contributed to social regulation policy convergence, and the influence of these common factors transcends the Global North–South divide.

**Originality/value** – This article is based on original data, wherein for the first time, insights from disability policy experts belonging to significantly different policy and institutional contexts in Norway and India are contrasted. The article contributes to the ever-expanding field of the social regulation policy research and comparative disability studies. The findings could be useful for, first, researchers interested in policy reforms and analysing institutional change and those who are interested in Global North–South comparative perspectives. Second, the article can be useful for policy makers who want to understand the policy formulation process, the issues of path dependency among institutions, the evolving role of policy actors and the factors influencing disability policy adoption across dissimilar country contexts. Third, the article may be useful for disabled people and disability organisations that are part of national and international advocacy networks. These emerging policy actors could better appreciate the efficacy of disability rights movement and understand the increasing adoption of social regulation reforms in a worldwide context.

### **Article III: Turning a Blind Eye to Employers' Discrimination? Attitudinal Barrier Perceptions of Vision-Impaired Youth from Oslo and Delhi**

*Author: Gagan Chhabra*

*Published in: Disability & Society, 2020.*

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is to compare the barrier perceptions of qualified young adults with visual impairments and how these are associated with employers' discrimination,

with the view to better understand the perverse influence of disability-based discrimination prevailing within the labour market in Oslo and Delhi.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article is based on insights from qualitative interviews with 29 youth participants (12 from Oslo and 17 from Delhi). The youth insights concerning employers' discrimination are placed within the broad rubric of social model approach and the specific concept of disablism/ableism. The qualitative data are thematically analysed.

**Findings** – Although the labour market contexts vary significantly in Oslo and Delhi and social regulations mediate the said labour markets, similar barrier perceptions linked to employers' discrimination were shared by qualified young adults with visual impairments. Employers seem to hold ableist attitudes and misconceptions concerning the capabilities and work capacity of youth with visual disabilities. Moreover, employers operate under spurious assumptions concerning the participants' visual impairment. The labour market in Norway is not as open, inclusive and enlightened, as employers' discrimination seems to be a factor precluding employment inclusion of a few qualified visually impaired youths. In addition, the employers operating in the labour market in Delhi overtly or covertly engage in discrimination, hence resulting in the employment exclusion of a few youths with visual impairments. The comparative findings indicate that youth with visual impairments seem to encounter employment precariousness and are placed in the back of the labour market queue.

**Originality/value** – This article is based on original qualitative data, wherein hitherto underexplored employment narratives of young adults with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi are contrasted. The article contributes to the Global North–South research, where there is a dearth of comparative research giving primacy to the lived realities and employment perspectives of disabled youth from developed and developing countries. Furthermore, perspectives from disabled youth are sidelined within the broad field of youth studies. Therefore, this article uniquely contributes to the domain of comparative youth studies. The findings are useful for, first, policy makers who are concerned with the formulation and the implementation of social regulation policies, such as antidiscrimination norms, so that they can better comprehend the labour market failures manifesting in the form of ableist proclivities and disability-based discrimination. Second, the article is useful for social workers, welfare administrators and public employment officials who could be more conscious about barriers encountered by the visually impaired youth and their career aspirations. Third, based on the insights from this article, the members of disability

organisations could create knowledge-sharing manuals and organise bias-trainings and sensitisation workshops to combat ableist attitudes and discrimination prevailing in the labour market against blind and visually impaired youth. Fourth, prospective employers could formulate inclusive recruitment practices and policies and not engage in direct or indirect forms of discrimination against qualified youth with visual impairments.

#### **Article IV: Social Resilience in the Labour Market: Learning from Young Adults With Visual Impairments in Oslo and Delhi**

*Author: Gagan Chhabra*

*Published in: YOUNG: Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 2020.*

**Purpose** – This article explores the influence of some individual and institutional protective factors that could facilitate the employment inclusion of qualified young adults with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article is based on experiential insights secured from qualitative interviews with 29 youth participants (12 from Oslo and 17 from Delhi). The youth perspectives are grounded in the three dimensions of social resilience linked to the individual's coping, adaptive and transformative capacities and the institutional enablers that mediate these capacities. The narratives concerning successful experiences within the labour market are thematically analysed.

**Findings** – The comparative findings indicate that a few qualified youth with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi demonstrate similar individual protective factors. They actively use and master assistive technology to cope with the risk of immediate unemployment. In addition, they undertake active networking across personal and social networks to learn more about labour market realities and better adapt to future employment adversities. Finally, they participate in volunteering activities within disability organisations and engage in collective advocacy to raise social consciousness of key issues, thereby transforming labour market conditions not only for themselves, but also for other members of the visually impaired community.

Along with the common individual protective factors, the findings suggest that disability organisations, through their job training, rehabilitation workshops, volunteering or paid work opportunities, are an important institutional enabler, in part contributing to the labour market success of a few qualified visually impaired youth in both Oslo and Delhi.



The findings also point out that public employment agencies are pivotal in securing assistive devices and work internships, which partially contribute to the employment success of qualified young adults with visual impairments in Oslo. However, in Delhi, disability organisations partly substitute in for the role of public employment agencies.

The comparative findings indicate that youth with visual impairments are resourceful agents, not passive actors, and if given appropriate support through institutional enablers, they could participate and succeed in the labour markets in Oslo and Delhi.

**Originality/value** – This article is based on original qualitative data, wherein previously underexplored employment narratives of youth with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi are contrasted. The article contributes to the burgeoning field of youth studies, labour market transitions and comparative disability research, as research comparing positive employment perspectives of disabled youth across developed and developing countries is few and far between.

The article is useful on multiple fronts. First, researchers could gain Global North–South perspectives concerning the theme of social resilience among young adults with visual impairments. Moreover, they could better comprehend a few of the critical success factors leading to their labour market inclusion. Second, officials from public employment agencies and members of disability organisations could secure valuable insights concerning the employment measures that could lead to the labour market inclusion of blind and visually impaired youth. Third, the findings could be valuable for youth with visual impairments who encounter severe labour market precariousness; they might discover a few factors that foster individual competence and social resilience, which could enable in combatting employment adversity and open potential pathways to gainful employment.

**Article V: Insider, Outsider or an In-betweener? Epistemological Reflections of a Legally Blind Researcher on Conducting Cross-national Disability Research**

*Author: Gagan Chhabra*

*Published in: Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 2020.*

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is to offer critical and reflexive perspectives on the researcher’s identity, with the aim of discussing the complex epistemological issues that occur while conducting cross-national disability research.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article is based on the insights obtained from a qualitative field study conducted between November 2017 and June 2018, wherein 29 young adults with visual impairments were interviewed in Delhi and Oslo. The article relies on critical and reflexive observations, field notes and youth perspectives. The findings are based on concepts from sociology such as insiders, outsiders, in-betweeners and the insider–outsider continua.

**Findings** – The article brings to the surface three findings emerging out of the fieldwork. First, there exists an insider–outsider continua, and researchers seem to be insiders in some aspects and outsiders in others while conducting qualitative social research. Therefore, instead of labelling the researcher as either an insider or outsider, it could be epistemologically valuable to discuss the ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ of the researcher. Second, the researcher’s identity is multilayered, contingent on his or her biological factors, biographical experiences and social location. It is problematic to exclusively identify and predominantly rely on a specific identity marker, such as disability status. The intersectional nature of a researcher’s identity coupled with group heterogeneity could add additional layers of complexity as the researcher conducts qualitative research. Third, for researchers who intend to conduct qualitative Global North–South comparative research, adherence to a stringent insider–outsider researcher’s position is not feasible because of the distinctive issues associated with material inequalities and power inequities.

Thus, the critical and reflexive findings problematise the simplistic sociological dichotomy of insider–outsider within the disability research milieu, inviting qualitative researchers to adopt the fluid position of being an in-betweener. This in-betweener position can allow the researcher to incorporate biographical complexities and multilayered identities more freely at the different stages of the research process.

**Originality/value** – This article is based on theoretically informed and critically reflexive empirical insights gathered as a part of this original study. This article revisits the insider–outsider debate within social research in general and disability research in particular, and it could contribute with important epistemological insights for conducting comparative disability research. The article offers first-person perspectives, which could be useful for, first, researchers who consider themselves insiders based on common identity markers, for instance, race, gender, sexual orientation and impairment status. It underscores the advantages and surfaces the fault lines while conducting insider research. Second, the article could also

be useful for researchers who assess themselves as value-neutral and objective outsiders because, as it accentuates the problems associated with common identity markers and overlapping biographical experiences, which further complicates doing qualitative social research. Third, it could offer useful perspectives to researchers who evaluate themselves as in-betweeners and who cautiously walk on the tightrope of simultaneously being an insider and outsider.

## **Chapter 6: Concluding Discussion**

Work is valuable for the individual and society. For the former, work facilitates gaining economic security, building social networks, achieving autonomy and realising human dignity (Schur et al., 2013). For the latter, work is valuable because it contributes to the public exchequer and promotes community cohesion, social inclusion and human flourishing (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Hansen & Svalund, 2007). However, not all individuals who are qualified, able and willing to work secure gainful employment in the labour market, which is fraught with imperfections (Bruyère & VanLooy, 2014; Frøyland et al., 2019; Mont, 2004; Vedeler, 2014b). A case in point is young adults with visual disabilities who encounter a plethora of employment barriers, hence resulting in their premature exit or permanent exclusion from the labour market (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Connors et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2007). This perennial problem prevails across the contexts of developed and developing countries because globally, youth with visual disabilities encounter significant labour market precariousness (Chhabra, 2020a; Gregorius, 2014). A specific employment barrier that exacerbates their labour market participation and is relatively underdiscussed is disability-based discrimination grounded in ableism or disablism in the labour market. Over the past few years, there have been two notable trends linked to discrimination in the labour market. The first concerns UN CRPD Article 27, ‘Work and Employment’, which demands governments around the world to create open, inclusive and accessible labour markets (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Heyer, 2015; Heymann et al., 2014; May-Simera & Kamundia, 2005; United Nations, 2006; Waldschmidt, 2009). The second concerns the general expectation among the disabled youth population who wish to participate in a labour market that is non-discriminatory and become autonomous, productive and contributory members in their respective societies (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Hvinden et al., 2019; Sapra, 2014; Singal & Jain, 2012; Unge Funksjonshemmede, 2016). In light of these broad trends, the present comparative study has explored government interventions and youth actions undertaken to combat discrimination and achieve employment inclusion across two disparate countries: Norway and India. The thesis asks and answers the following overarching research question:

*What are the avenues of convergence within government policies aimed at promoting employment inclusion and the similarities among the employment experiences of youth with visual impairments in Norway and India?*

The present thesis and its accompanying five research articles offer relatively underexplored insights concerning the social regulation reforms aimed at the employment inclusion of disabled people taking place in Norway and India since the 1990s. Moreover, it foregrounds the underreported employment perspectives of youth with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi.

By leaning on pragmatism and eclectic perspectives from diverse theoretical strands, the current thesis accentuates the persistent problem of labour market exclusion encountered by young adults with visual disabilities in Norway and India. Their employment exclusion is partly aggravated by ableism in the labour market, which creates avenues to realise meliorism (James, 2010, p. 196). Meliorism is concerned with the fundamental belief that the world can become better through human effort, and in the context of this thesis, the governments across Norway and India have adopted social regulation policies, such as antidiscrimination norms, which have facilitated lowering the barrier of discrimination, contributing to the creation of an open and inclusive labour market. In addition, young adults with visual disabilities in Oslo and Delhi are keen to secure employment through individual and collective action and overcome the barrier of ableism prevailing in the labour market. Thus, social regulatory reforms in the form of government interventions from the top and from socially resilient youth actions from below contribute to the realisation of meliorism within the labour market.

### **6.1 The five working hypotheses**

The point of departure for the present thesis is in tracing avenues of policy convergence and similarities within the employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments from Norway and India. Consequently, this thesis has leaned on the philosophy of pragmatism (Baert, 2005), momentarily setting aside the large contextual differences prevailing across Norway and India, here with the view to arrive at theoretically informed, empirically grounded, contextually sensitive and contingent working hypotheses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Mjøset, 2006; Yin, 2012). The working hypotheses, which have been generated as a part of the current thesis, are predicated on multifold perspectives emerging from policy analysis, interviews with policy experts and visually impaired youth and critical, reflexive observations from the field. First, by leaning on the review and analysis of policy dossiers and disability literature and soliciting descriptive accounts from policy experts, I could accentuate the avenues of convergence within social regulation policies and the two similar factors contributing to this convergence. Second, by securing employment perspectives from qualified young adults with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi, I could foreground the

similar barrier perceptions associated with employers' discrimination and their common insights regarding what may work to secure gainful employment. Third, during an immersive and challenging field study in Oslo and Delhi, I identified a few limitations concerning the researchers' positionality of being an insider or outsider and realised that I am an in-betweener, which mediated my understanding and analysis of the youths' perspectives.

The five research articles in this thesis are based on distinctive conceptual ideas, employ eclectic methods and offer context-specific and contingent analytic generalisations. Based on these research articles, there are five working hypotheses that should be vindicated or refuted by conducting more qualitative and quantitative Global North–South disability research:

- First, there is a genuine globalisation of social regulation policy convergence, wherein social regulation policy goals and content concerning the employment of persons with disabilities are becoming similar across developed countries, such as Norway, and developing countries, such as India.
- Second, not only is there globalisation concerning social regulation policy convergence, but there are also common factors, namely international treaties and grassroots mobilisation efforts that are contributing to the said policy convergence in Norway and India.
- Third, despite social regulation policies, such as antidiscrimination norms regulating the labour market, some qualified young adults with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi encounter employers' discrimination, implying that labour markets are not as open, inclusive and enlightened as one would expect.
- Fourth, most young adults with visual impairments are placed in the back of the labour market queue in Oslo and Delhi, and a few of these qualified visually impaired youths are able to secure gainful employment by leaning on similar individual, protective factors and institutional enablers, hence implying that youth with visual impairments are not passive actors but resourceful agents.
- Fifth, a rigid insider–outsider researcher's positionality and identity is epistemologically difficult to sustain while conducting cross-national qualitative disability research; therefore, it is prudent to place oneself as an in-betweener to arrive at a nuanced understanding of the qualitative perspectives.

It is vital to reiterate that this qualitative, comparative study does not offer any universal laws, predictive or explanatory arguments or any statistical generalisations that claim to function under all conditions or in all situations across these two countries. From the get-go, the aim has been more modest—to offer a theoretically informed and empirically grounded analysis concerning social regulation policy convergence and the similarities of the employment perspectives shared by youth with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi. Thus, the five working hypotheses have to be viewed as an instrument, which commences a dialogical encounter across the members belonging to the scientific and non-scientific milieu (Baert, 2005). These hypotheses could contribute towards sparking a much-needed Global North–South conversation across comparative disability research and youth studies.

## **6.2 Contributions of the study**

The philosophy of pragmatism—coupled with the conceptual ideas located at the middle-range (Hedström & Udehn, 2011; Merton, 1968; Mjøset, 2006)—offers a stable theoretical foundation for the current thesis. It has an interdisciplinary point of departure and contributes to the domains of welfare regimes, social policy, the labour market, youth transitions and disability studies.

### **6.2.1 Contributions to welfare regime studies**

The state has a complex array of regulatory and redistributive instruments at its disposal, and these intertwined policy instruments facilitate governance and welfare (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998; Levi-Faur, 2014). The governments across many countries could organise and subdivide the disability policy system into three interrelated and mutually complimenting subsystems, namely social regulations, social benefits and social services (Halvorsen et al., 2017b; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Prime examples of social regulations entail antidiscrimination norms, while social benefits and social services involve disability pensions and user-controlled personal assistance (Halvorsen et al., 2018). In rich, developed and industrialised countries such as Norway, redistributive policies entailing generous social benefits and comprehensive social services form a cornerstone of its social democratic welfare state regime (Halvorsen et al., 2016). These redistributive policies are aimed at securing human flourishing through social investments (Bussi et al., 2019; Dyrstad et al., 2014); they are implemented through welfare administrators who place disabled individuals in the category of ‘the need-based system’ (Stone, 1984, p. 18), thereby offering them protection through social security safety nets and disability pensions. Historically, Norway has been one of the highest spenders when it comes to disability protection measures (Halvorsen et al.,

2018; OECD, 2017; Vedeler, 2014b). These redistributive policies, although necessary, are not sufficient regarding securing the labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as blind and visually impaired individuals (Andersen & Skarholt, 2014; Lunde, 1994; Proba, 2012). Different studies have demonstrated that blind and visually impaired people in general and young adults with visual impairments in particular are offered income maintenance benefits and are encouraged to take disability pensions in lieu of gainful employment (Berge, 2007; Lorentsen & Berge, 2011; Nordvik, 2008; Opinion, 2018). Thus, generous redistribution measures exist that do not necessarily rectify labour market imperfections in the form of ableism. In turn, this opens avenues for the adoption and implementation of social regulations.

The welfare regime in India stands in stark contrast to the one prevailing in Norway (Törnquist & Harriss, 2016). It has a protective welfare state that fails to offer substantive redistributive benefits and social services to vast swaths of its population (Rudra, 2008). The Indian welfare regime merely protects the interests of select vulnerable groups. For instance, in the absence of generous and universal financial transfers in the form of income maintenance benefits and disability pensions, the state redistributes employment opportunities for specific groups, such as disabled individuals, through employment quotas in the public sector (Engelstad, 2016). Social redistributive policies offering safety nets 'are rarely available in developing countries' (Mizunoya & Mitra, 2013, p. 30), and India is no exception. In addition to the inadequacy of resource allocation to the said redistributive measures, the protective welfare regime is plagued by a plethora of shortcomings, such as poor service delivery, bureaucratic red tape and limited accountability (Harriss-White, 2003). Furthermore, this system undertakes insufficient social investments through education, reducing the possibilities for human capital accumulation (Bardhan, 2016; Singal et al., 2011; Singal & Jain, 2012). It should be reiterated that in the Indian context, the material and welfare interests of the vast majority of disabled people have largely been sidelined (Ghai, 2015; Ghosh, 2016; Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006a; Singal, 2008; Tiwari, 2008), and the welfare regime has often looked the other way and not sufficiently catered to the livelihood opportunities and employment prospects for blind and visually impaired people (Chhabra, 2020a; Singal & Jain, 2012). In light of the state's general apathy towards disabled people and the protective nature of the welfare regime in India, the welfare needs of disabled people are catered to by family and community members (Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008; Singal et al., 2011; Singal & Jain, 2012). Unlike Norway, the formalised system constituting social workers and



welfare administrators has a rather limited influence on the lives and careers of blind and visually impaired people. Therefore, in the absence of state-sponsored welfare benefits and social services, the question of securing gainful employment becomes more pressing.

The current thesis contributes to the welfare regime literature in three ways. First, the welfare regime typologies produced in the Global North (social democratic, corporatist and liberal (Esping-Andersen, 1990)) have failed to adequately capture and correspond to the complexity of welfare regimes in the Global South. By juxtaposing two significantly different countries, such as Norway and India, the features of their welfare regimes could be placed in a sharper relief, and the policies linked to disability protection could be understood in a global context.

Second, despite the fact that the Norwegian welfare regime offers generous social benefits and social services (Dyrstad et al., 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden 2009; Hansen & Svalund, 2007; Vedeler, 2009), the labour market reality for qualified blind and visually impaired youth remains relatively precarious, as many of them encounter premature or permanent exclusion on account of discrimination (Berge, 2007; Nordvik, 2008; Opinion, 2018). These youths seem to have more ready access to income maintenance benefits and disability pensions instead of gainful employment. Therefore, the present thesis accentuates that redistributive policies, although necessary, might not be sufficient to achieve employment inclusion for youth with visual disabilities. As a result, this invites welfare administrators and policy makers to proactively explore and utilise social regulations from their policy toolbox.

Third, the protective welfare regime in India does not offer universal and generous redistributive transfers, such as income maintenance benefits and disability pensions; instead, it targets resources to select favoured groups (Rudra, 2008). Moreover, the state has not widely practised the social investment approach, which facilitates human capital accumulation (Törnquist & Harriss, 2016). Therefore, in the Indian context, securing employment becomes a necessity for young adults with disabilities in the absence of robust social protection policies. The current thesis encourages policy makers and welfare administrators to be cognisant of the grim labour market realities, which could contribute to the economic deprivation of young adults with visual disabilities and which could strengthen the state's redistributive measures to secure the socioeconomic well-being of youth with disabilities.

### **6.2.2 Contribution to the social policy research**

Since the early 2000s, there has been a burgeoning of comparative disability research, wherein redistributive policies and social regulation instruments have been contrasted across countries from the Global North (Heymann et al., 2014; Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003; Waldschmidt, 2009). Moreover, social regulation policy convergence and divergence regarding the labour market inclusion of disabled people has been studied across the developed world (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Hvinden, 2003), and there is an increased interest in understanding the efficacy of social regulatory policy instruments (Halvorsen et al., 2016). By predominantly comparing countries from the Global North, an assertion has been put forward that there has been a growing globalisation of social regulatory policy reforms (Waldschmidt et al., 2017). This internationalising proclivity within disability research points to the broad trend in policy convergence suggesting a race to the top (Heichel et al., 2005, p. 824; Lenschow et al., 2005; Rudra, 2008), wherein countries are framing similar progressive policies, such as antidiscrimination norms (Heyer, 2014; Heymann et al., 2014; Waldschmidt, 2009). By tracing the points of convergence within social regulation policy reforms that are taking place in Norway and India since the early 1990s, the current thesis finds evidence of a race to the top and a genuine globalisation of said policy reforms, which seems to transcend the Global North–South divide.

Moreover, the social regulation policy convergence across Norway and India raises questions concerning the evolving role of policy actors and institutions (Peters & Zittoun, 2016). The present thesis problematizes the trend of path dependency and rigid policy legacies (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Peters, 2016), pointing towards the existence of a new emergent space that is brought about by, first, the influence of supranational institutions and multilateral agencies through international treaty obligations (Bennett, 1991; Knill, 2005) and, second, by advocacy coalitions, which tend to employ peaceful tactics and contentious political actions (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016). The influence of these institutional actors contributes to the disability policy reforms taking place in Norway and India.

The current thesis surfaces a growing trend towards international harmonisation (Holzinger & Knill, 2005), one brought about by multilateral agencies, such as the United Nations, and supranational agencies, such as the European Union. The international treaties of these organisations nudge the governments from Norway and India to adopt social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people (Chhabra, 2021). Complimenting this trend of international harmonisation, there has been a global mass mobilisation of disabled

people, which has positively influenced the trajectory of disability policy reforms (Charlton, 1998; Waldschmidt et al., 2015). Thus, the emergent space that is allowing for policy reforms is mediated by international agencies, on the one hand, and is influenced by disability organisations and transnational advocacy networks, on the other hand, which have systematically popularised antidiscrimination norms and social regulations across the world (Heyer, 2015; Waldschmidt et al., 2017).

The present thesis contributes to the domain of social policy research in three ways. First, within disability policies, there has been a globalisation of social regulations, such as antidiscrimination norms in the labour market across developed countries (Heymann et al., 2014; Waldschmidt et al., 2017). The current thesis provides more evidence concerning the globalisation of social regulations and the race to the top by contrasting two countries, which are two worlds apart.

Second, policies and institutions are widely expected to follow a path-dependent trajectory, here mediated by self-reinforcing sequences (Mahoney, 2000), wherein the initial steps in a specific direction bring about further movement in the same direction, making it problematic and less likely to change course over time (Peters, 2016). The current thesis challenges the ideas associated with institutional path dependency, constricting policy legacies and the influence of contextual factors, which predetermine a country's policy trajectory.

Third, in the human rights arena, international agencies and transnational networks have become popular when it comes to ushering in policy reforms (Goodman & Jinks, 2004; Lenschow, 2005). The current thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of policy actors, such as multilateral agencies, supranational organisations, transnational advocacy networks and disability organisations. These actors have created new avenues to bring about unexpected disability policy reforms in far flung countries, such as Norway and India. Thus, by comparing the social regulation policy developments aimed at the employment of disabled people in two disparate countries, the present thesis makes a direct contribution to expanding the contours of Global North–South disability policy research.

### **6.2.3 Contribution to the labour market studies**

Not every disabled individual who is qualified, willing and able to work secures gainful employment because their employment prospects are mediated by supply-side and demand-side factors (Frøyland et al., 2019; Mizunoya & Mitra, 2013; Mont, 2004; Schur et al., 2013).

Disabled youth encounter severe labour market precariousness, and to enhance their employment inclusion, governments have paid an inordinate amount of attention to the supply-side factors and active labour market policies (Hansen & Svalund, 2007; Hvinden et al., 2019). These factors include job trainings, which are designed to make young adults with disabilities ready to participate in the employment arena (Dyrstad et al., 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014; Vedeler, 2014b). However, relatively little attention has been given to the demand-side factors and employment barriers, here manifesting in the form of disability-based discrimination, which constricts labour market participation among disabled youth (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Roggero et al., 2006; Unge Funksjonshemmede, 2016; Vedeler, 2014a). Both Norway and India have ratified and signed the UN CRPD (Chhabra, 2019) and are bound by the requirements stipulated in Article 27, 'Work and Employment'. As a result, there is a general expectation within the disabled youth population that the labour markets in Norway and India are open, inclusive, accessible and enlightened and that anyone who is qualified, able and willing to work can secure gainful employment. Furthermore, both countries have adopted legal frameworks to implement social regulatory policies to prevent discrimination in the labour market. Nonetheless, qualified youth with visual impairments seem to encounter ableist proclivities, spurious assumptions and harmful misconceptions, placing them in the back of the labour market queue in Oslo and Delhi (Chhabra, 2020a).

The present thesis contributes to labour market studies in three ways. First, there is a persistent focus on enhancing young adults' skills and qualifications through individualised labour market interventions (Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014). However, this lopsided focus on supply-side and individual factors results in relative neglect of the influence of the demand-side and structural factors. Demand-side employment barriers might hinder labour market inclusion for youth in general and disabled youth in particular because the latter might encounter more labour market precariousness owing to additional employment barriers, such as discrimination and the inaccessibility of the general environment (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Vedeler, 2014b). Therefore, the current thesis accentuates the influence of demand-side factors contributing to labour market exclusion, which are beyond the control of an individual's choice and circumstance.

Second, within the labour market research, relatively little attention has been given to the issues linked to employers' negative attitudes and disability-based discrimination, which can greatly affect the employment inclusion of persons with disabilities (Ameri et al., 2018; Jones

& Wass, 2013; Ju et al., 2013; Hansen & Svalund, 2007; Vedeler, 2014a). Therefore, there is a need to foreground the experiences and perceptions linked to employers' discrimination of disabled people. The present thesis directly contributes to the labour market research by comparing the negative experiences associated with employers' discrimination encountered by blind and visually impaired youth from Oslo and Delhi.

Third, discrimination in the labour market could be grounded in ableism, wherein disabled people could be labelled with outdated stereotypes or be subjugated to spurious assumptions and unfounded misconceptions (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2019). As a gatekeeper, employers might not view young adults with visual disabilities as ideal, typical and universal workers (Foster & Wass, 2012). Employers' ableist attitudes, evaluations and assumptions could exacerbate the problem of young adults with visual disabilities' employment exclusion. The current thesis in part places a much-needed spotlight on the perverse influence of ableism, disablism and attitudinal barriers that has been prevailing in the labour market and that affects the employment prospects for youth with visual disabilities in Oslo and Delhi. The attitudinal barriers fuelled by ableism, which operate in implicit or explicit forms, could contribute to individual or institutional discrimination. In turn, this could result in labour market imperfections. These demand-side barriers, if not duly addressed, might have a negative influence on the employment inclusion of other vulnerable groups as well.

#### **6.2.4 Contribution to youth transition studies**

Young adults seem to witness unprecedented employment precariousness, which is exacerbated by their increasingly nonlinear, chaotic and protracted transitions into the labour market (Bynner et al., 2018; Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005; Hvinden et al., 2019). The problem of labour market precariousness among the youth population has been attributed to two trends within youth studies. The first concerns an inclination towards individualisation, wherein young adults are expected to be independent negotiators, autonomous navigators and conscious career planners who ought to overcome the uncertainties and employment risks in the labour market (Bradley & Devadason, 2008; Bynner et al., 2018; Furlong et al., 2011; France & Roberts, 2015). In other words, young adults are expected to be the captains of their ships within the labour market. The second concerns the labour market's flexibilisation pressure, wherein young adults encounter a greater risk of being entrapped in flexible or temporary contracts; here, they might be expected to take on low-paid and unskilled jobs, and in periods of economic recession, they are often the first to be dismissed and last to be recruited (Hvinden et al., 2019; Walther, 2006). These two trends indicate that labour market

transitions are complex not only for young adults in a developing country such as India (Bardhan, 2016; Singal & Jain, 2012), but also for youth across developed countries such as Norway (Hvinden et al., 2019).

To date, across many societies, the transition from school to work is regarded as an important benchmark and rite of passage to adulthood, and often, disabled youth, who encounter severe labour market precariousness on account of additional employment barriers, persistently remain economically excluded and, as a result, culturally othered and socially marginalised (Gregorius, 2014; Singal, 2008). The limited participation or permanent exclusion of disabled youth from the labour market partially creates and perpetuates stereotypical and ableist ideas that they are incompetent, incapable, passive and vulnerable (King et al., 2003; Sapra, 2014). All these factors cumulatively fracture and complicate their transition into adulthood and full citizenship (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). Although disabled youth, when viewed through the prism of ableism, could be assessed as passive, dependent, incompetent, incapable and voiceless, not only can they articulate their interests, but they can also aggregate them through collective action (Bussi et al., 2019; Singal et al., 2011; Singal & Jain, 2012). This implies that these disabled youth are not merely passive actors or personal tragedies but that they are resourceful individuals and agents of change.

The current thesis foregrounds not only the barriers of employers' discrimination, but also the social resilient efforts that economically liberate qualified young adults with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi; it accentuates that not only can these youths cope with or adapt to the labour market risks but also collectively work towards transforming their labour market realities in Norway and India. They can secure employment rights and effectuate social change (Chhabra, 2020c). Contrary to the popular stereotypes, negative evaluations and ableist attitudes, a few qualified young adults with visual impairments in Oslo and Delhi were able to foster social resilience through individual protective factors and institutional enablers, thereby achieving a relatively less fractured labour market transition.

The current thesis makes the following contributions within youth transition studies. First, within the literature focusing on youth transition research, the perspectives of disabled youth have predominantly been overlooked (Bussi et al., 2019). Furthermore, youth studies have not sufficiently focused on the lived perspectives of youth with disabilities from countries belonging to the Global South (Gregorius, 2014; Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008). By comparing the employment perspectives of young adults with visual disabilities from two disparate

country contexts, such as Norway and India, the present thesis adds to the expanding interdisciplinary dialogue between youth studies and disability research.

Second, although young adults with visual impairments encounter labour market precariousness manifesting in the form of employers' ableist attitudes and discrimination (Crudden et al., 1998; La Grow & Daye, 2005; McDonnall, 2019; Wollfe & Spungin, 2002), they are nonetheless resourceful agents who can cope with and adapt to labour market risks. Furthermore, they can articulate and aggregate their interests to transform the reality of the labour market. Often, the social resilient efforts, resourcefulness and capabilities of disabled youth are overlooked. Thus, this comparative study moves beyond the sole discussion of employment barriers and brings to the surface the protective factors that contribute to successful youth transitions.

Third, social resilience has to be understood as a complex interplay of individual and institutional factors (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013), hence contributing to overcoming adversity, accumulating human capital and allowing for seamless youth transitions (Bussi et al., 2019). The opportunities of youth undergoing a labour market transition are mediated by institutional and contextual factors, and the role of these factors is pivotal for disabled youth (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2017; King et al., 2003). The present thesis foregrounds the resilient insights of blind and visually impaired youth that have positively contributed to their labour market transitions. This encourages not evaluating disabled youth in general and young adults with visual disabilities in particular either as inspiring heroes or tragic victims when they succeed or fail in the labour market, respectively (Nario-Redmond, 2019), but instead to assess them as young individuals who aspire to participate in the labour market on equal terms and who might encounter complex youth transitions.

### **6.2.5 Contribution to disability studies**

For many millennia, persons with disabilities have been socioculturally 'othered' and have constituted the margins of society across the world (Ghai, 2018; Goodley, 2017). They frequently encounter ableist attitudes, spurious animus and the soft bigotry of low expectations, which victimises or valorises them (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2010; Nario-Redmond, 2019; Oliver, 1990; Shapiro, 1993). Over the last two decades, considerable strides have been taken to realise the human rights of persons with disabilities, helping them achieve full and effective participation (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Heymann et al., 2014; Lawson & Beckett, 2020; Waldschmidt et al., 2015). A prime example is the ratification of the UN

CRPD by a vast majority of countries in the world (Waldschmidt et al., 2017). In addition, there has been a proliferation of disability studies within academia (Addlakha, 2013; Ghai, 2018; Grech & Soldatic, 2016) and a greater consciousness of the themes of non-discrimination, equal opportunities and disability inclusion in society (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Heyer, 2015; Waldschmidt, 2009).

Notwithstanding these progressive developments, which have positively influenced the realisation of disability rights and justice (Degener, 2016; Degener, 2017; Lawson, 2005), there are a few disconcerting trends. On the one hand, disability research has been predominantly preoccupied with Eurocentric and Americentric proclivities (Grech, 2012; Grech & Goodley, 2012; Meekosha, 2008; Meekosha, 2011; Miles, 2003), while on the other hand, the policy developments and lived perspectives of disabled people in the countries in the Global South have been largely overlooked (Addlakha, 2013; Ghai, 2001; Ghai 2012; Gregorius, 2014; Singal, 2010). This lopsided focus within disability research on people, policies, perspectives and countries in the Global North is rather ironic because the vast majority of people with disabilities live in the Global South (World Health Organization, 2011) and encounter a greater deal of material inequity and social exclusion.

Attempts have been made to expand the contours of comparative disability research by soliciting lived perspectives from the Global South (Grech & Soldatic, 2016). However, comparative Global North–South disability research still seems to be in its infancy as the governing logic has been to compare policies, institutions and perspectives across countries that are more alike and that have had a longer research legacy. In other words, comparative disability research involving developed countries is a path chosen, as it is the path well-trodden.

In the broad rubric of disability research, youth with disabilities often fall through the cracks, as the predominant focus remains on catering to the needs and expectations of the general category of persons with disabilities or the specific category of children with disabilities (Gregorius, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Sapra, 2014; Singal, 2008). Moreover, the perspectives of disabled youth also seem to get largely overlooked within youth studies and comparative Global North–South studies (Groce, 2004; Singal, 2010). Consequently, disabled youth in general—and those coming from developing countries in particular—are placed at the periphery of the margin. Disabled youth frequently have to encounter ableist attributes, such as dependent, weak, passive, cautious, incapable, unproductive and childlike, which stands



in stark contrast to the attributes given to young people, such as independent, strong, active, entrepreneurial, capable, productive and mature. The latter group are often regarded as the future of tomorrow, while the former fail to gain access to requisite education, have trouble building skills and are burdened by the long legacy of sociocultural pejorative norms (Groce, 2004; Gregorius, 2014; Goldin, 2015; Singal, 2008; United Nations, 2010).

Members of nondisabled society could politely condone ableist attitudes and erect disabling barriers, which might potentially preclude disabled youth from participation in the labour market. The prevalence of attitudinal barriers, such as disability-based discrimination, could find justification in either a medicalised discourse, which equates disability with impairment, deficit and pathology, or through the metaphorical crutch of ablebodiedness, which creates the dichotomies of functioning/dysfunctioning, productive/unproductive and species typical/species deviant (Campbell, 2018; Goodley, 2017; Wolbring, 2008). With relative ease, employers in the labour market and members of general society can look the other way regarding ableist attitudes, spurious assumptions and ingrained misconceptions when it comes to disabled youth that have been created and perpetuated throughout history. Across the rich, industrialised and developed countries in the Global North, the governments' social redistributive policies, such as income maintenance benefits and disability pensions, could give a convenient refuge to the disabled youth (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018), while their counterparts in the developing countries from the Global South would be protected by the members of their family and extended community members (Gregorius, 2014; Singal et al., 2011). Thus, disabled youth tend to prematurely exit or find permanent exclusion from the labour market on account of discrimination grounded in ableism.

The current thesis contributes to disability studies in three ways. First, comparative disability research has long focused on rich, developed and industrialised countries in the Global North (Grech & Goodley, 2012; Grech, 2012; Grech & Soldatic, 2017; Meekosha, 2008; Meekosha, 2011). Therefore, by comparing policies, institutions and lived perspectives from two significantly dissimilar countries, such as Norway and India, this thesis contributes to the ever-expanding field of Global North–South disability research.

Second, in disability research, the perspectives of youth with disabilities have been sidelined (Gregorius, 2014; Singal, 2008). The present thesis foregrounds theoretically informed and empirically grounded perspectives from one of the most marginalised groups within the

labour market—young adults with visual disabilities—thereby reducing their peripherality within comparative youth studies and disability research.

Third, discrimination grounded in ableism is a pernicious problem, which can easily transcend the Global North–South divide (Campbell, 2018; Goodley, 2014). This comparative study has followed an interdisciplinary approach to explore the perverse and exclusionary effect of discrimination on the employment inclusion of young adults with visual disabilities from Oslo and Delhi. This has allowed for a more nuanced and critical understanding of sociocultural norms, expectations, attitudes and behaviours, which could contribute to a more robust dialogue on ableism in the labour market in Norway and India.

### **6.3 What's in it for you?**

The current thesis is firmly grounded on the tenets of pragmatism, here with the aim to produce knowledge that is useful, engage in a dialogue that transcends the Global North–South divide and offer theoretically informed contextually sensitive contingent comparative insights. The present thesis accentuates the perennial problem of discrimination grounded in ableism, which results in the employment exclusion of young adults with visual disabilities in Norway and India. In the twenty-first century, discrimination predicated on disability is assessed to be morally unconscionable, legally untenable, economically reprehensible and socially despicable. Consequently, governments have intervened through social regulatory policies to create a level playing field for everyone who is qualified, willing and able to participate in the labour market. Along with this, young people undertake individual and collective actions to cope with and adapt to employment adversities, transforming their labour market reality. Labour markets are supposed to be open, inclusive, accessible and enlightened and not condone or perpetuate ableist attitudes and disability-based discrimination.

The current thesis and the accompanying research articles might be useful for a diverse set of actors. First, it opens avenues for inspiration, learning, emulation and refutation for researchers interested in comparative perspectives transcending the Global North–South divide. Second, it offers comparative insights for policy makers who are interested in cross-national disability developments. Third, it provides perspectives for social service providers to be more conscious about the employment barriers, such as disability-based discrimination and ableism, encountered by young adults with visual impairments and the capabilities they possess. Fourth, it might raise the consciousness of employers who are keen to be socially responsible and who want to build inclusive organisations that value disability as a genuine

part of diversity. Fifth, it presents conceptual ideas, such as ableism and social resilience, so that the members of disability organisations could engage in individual and collective actions to advocate for employment inclusion for disabled youth. Finally, it foregrounds a few critical success factors that might assist young adults with visual impairments who are struggling with labour market exclusion to overcome their adversity and secure gainful employment.

We need an inclusive dialogue and collaborative outlook to make labour markets work for everyone who is qualified, able and willing to work. This thesis could be viewed as an instrument to foster collaboration and collective action, so that we do not turn a blind eye to disability-based discrimination and ableism, but rather strive towards realising meliorism in the labour market.

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## Appendix 1: The Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research (NSD): Research confirmation



Rune Halvorsen  
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Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass  
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Vår dato: 20.01.2017

Vår ref: 51653 / 3 / LW

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 18.12.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

51653                      *Social Regulatory Policy: a New Way Forward? A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Policies, Institutions and Employment Experiences of Youth with visual disabilities*  
*Behandlingsansvarlig*    *Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, ved institusjonens øverste leder*  
*Daglig ansvarlig*        *Rune Halvorsen*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.08.2019, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Ida Jansen Jondahl

Kontaktperson: Ida Jansen Jondahl tlf. 55 58 30 19

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSD's rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

“Social Regulatory Policy: a New Way Forward? A Comparative Analysis of Labour  
Market Policies, Institutions and Employment Experiences of Youth with visual  
disabilities”

Ref.no 51653

NSD has assessed the change registered on 10.10.2019.

The research period has been extended until 31.12.2020.

Please note that in case of further extensions, it may be necessary to inform the sample.

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date in order to  
determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the rest of the project!

Contact person at NSD: Gry Henriksen

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)



## **Appendix 2: Topical guide for experts interviews Norway**

### **Guide for Interviewing Experts**

In this study, we are interested in labour market policies and institutions that effect the employment outcomes for youth with disabilities in Norway and India. In particular, we aim to map the policy context in both the countries and understand recent policy reforms, which influence the employment prospects for youth with disabilities. We want to explore social regulation policies, which aim to influence the functioning of the labour market and the behaviour of employers through legislation, financial incentives or persuasion strategies.

Government legislations, policies and agreements such as *Discrimination and Accessibility Act* (2009/2014), *Job Strategy for People with Disability* (2012) and *Inclusive Working Life (IA) Agreement* (2014/18) from Norway and *Persons with Disability Act* (1995) and *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act* (2016) from India, among others, are analysed in order to understand whether some of these legislations and policies have been more successful than the others in promoting labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities. In addition, the impact of government interventions such as quotas, wage subsidies, tax incentives, non-discrimination provisions and reasonable accommodation measures on the employment prospects of disabled youth in general, and youth with visual disabilities in particular are reviewed.

In this interview, we want to learn from your knowledge and experience. The experts whom we talk to, represent a diverse group such as members of Disabled People's Organizations, local-regional-national government, academia and employers. Your informed insights are important to better understand how the policies to promote employment are working at the moment and the scope for their improvement. The topical interview guide presented below is not a straight jacket but is rather a springboard, which will facilitate in a theme-based dialogue with you. In this interview we welcome you to relate your views.

### **1. Background information:**

1a. How did you get engaged in the disability sector (research/politics/policy implementation)?

1b. How long have you been working within the field of disability?

### **2. Mapping the policy context:**

2a. First, to get started, how would you describe the labour market situation for youth with disabilities today?

2b. What do you consider to be the most important policy reforms in the last couple of decades when it comes to policy measures to promote labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities? Why?

2c. Norway has adopted new and more non-discrimination legislations and provisions. What are the reasons for this policy reform? Why did it happen? What would you consider to be the most important driving forces?

2d. In your opinion, what are the most salient disability policies which help youth with disabilities find paid work today?

2e. In your experience, what are the most significant barriers which youth with disabilities encounter when they are entering the labour market?

2f. In your view, what are the most important policy instruments, legal provisions, schemes and programmes from the government, which help youth with disabilities overcome barriers today?

2g. Do you think that recent government policies and legislations have reduced the barriers?

- If yes, explain how.
- If no, what should the government do to facilitate youth with disabilities to find paid work?

2h. Do you think that any service, benefit and institution prevents the labour market participation of youth with disabilities? If yes, how and why?

2i. According to your experience, which services, resources and institutions are most vital for youth with disabilities to find paid work? Why?

### **3. More about social regulation policy:**

3a. In your experience, which of the following government initiatives may improve labour market outcomes for youth with disabilities in your country?

- Employment quota schemes;

- Anti-discrimination policies;
- Wage subsidies and tax incentives;
- Accessibility regulations (reasonable accommodation duties);
- Voluntary agreements (Inclusive Working Life agreement);
- Any other?

3b. Do you have employment quota schemes for youth with disabilities in your country?

- If yes, how does the scheme work? Is it successful? Why? Why not? How could it work better?
- If no, why is it not adopted yet in your country?

3c. How would you evaluate the non-discrimination legislation? Has it been successful? What are the challenges? How could it become more effective in helping disabled youth find paid work?

3d. How has the disability movement assessed the non-discrimination legislation? Have they supported or advocated the reforms? If yes, how? If not, why?

3e. Does the government offer wage subsidies and/or tax incentives to the employers to recruit youth with disabilities in your country?

- If yes, which subsidies and/or tax incentives work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better in incentivising employers?
- If no, why are they not adopted in your country?

3f. Do you have law that ensures accessibility and offers reasonable accommodation at work place for disabled youth in your country?

- If yes, how do accessibility norms and reasonable accommodation duties work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better so that more disabled youth can get into paid work?
- If no, why are they not adopted in your country?

3g. Do you have any other government laws/policies/strategies that may increase the chance of disabled youth to find paid work in your country? How do they work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better?

3h. In relation to the employment of disabled youth, which factors influence the implementation of the following?

- - National Strategy for People with Disabilities (2012) (Norway)
- - Discrimination and Accessibility Act (2009/2014) (Norway)
- - Employment Provision of Persons with Disability Act (1995) (India)
- - The Rights of Persons with Disability Act (2016) (India)

3h. Can you describe some strengths or weaknesses of the present social regulation policies in your country?

#### **4. Assessment and recommendations:**

4a. Can you describe any innovative practices and/or success stories where a government policy promoted labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities?

4b. Can you describe any practices and/or case where a government policy prevented labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities?

4c. In your experience, what role should private and public employers play in the implementation of social regulation policies?

4d. Has the adoption of the UN CRPD influenced the policies to promote labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities? If yes, how? If no, why?

4e. How would you assess the recent policy reforms pertaining to the employment of youth with disabilities in light of UNCRPD (Article 27)?

4f. To what extent does Norway consult with disabled people's organisations about disability policy reforms? Have there been any changes in the consultations the last couple of decades?

Has the adoption of the CRPD had any impact on the dialogue between the government and disabled people's organisations?

4g. To what extent is Norway working together with other countries and supranational organisations on the issue of promoting labour market inclusion of persons/yotuh with disabilities?

4h. If you could design or change any specific government policy targeted for the employment of youth with disabilities, what would that be? How would you implement it?

#### **5. Concluding points**

5a. Any concluding comments or suggestion you would like to share?

5b. Anything else you would like to comment on, which we have not talked about so far?

## **Appendix 3: Topical guide for experts interviews India**

### **Guide for Interviewing Experts**

In this study, we are interested in labour market policies and institutions that effect the employment outcomes for youth with disabilities in Norway and India. In particular, we aim to map the policy context in both the countries and understand recent policy reforms, which influence the employment prospects for youth with disabilities. We want to explore social regulation policies, which aim to influence the functioning of the labour market and the behaviour of employers through legislation, financial incentives or persuasion strategies.

Government legislations, policies and agreements such as *Discrimination and Accessibility Act* (2009/2014), *Job Strategy for People with Disability* (2012) and *Inclusive Working Life (IA) Agreement* (2014/18) from Norway and *Persons with Disability Act* (1995) and *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act* (2016) from India, among others, are analysed in order to understand whether some of these legislations and policies have been more successful than the others in promoting labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities. In addition, the impact of government interventions such as quotas, wage subsidies, tax incentives, non-discrimination provisions and reasonable accommodation measures on the employment prospects of disabled youth in general, and youth with visual disabilities in particular are reviewed.

In this interview, we want to learn from your knowledge and experience. The experts whom we talk to, represent a diverse group such as members of Disabled People's Organizations, local-regional-national government, academia and employers. Your informed insights are important to better understand how the policies to promote employment are working at the moment and the scope for their improvement. The topical interview guide presented below is not a straight jacket but is rather a springboard, which will facilitate in a theme-based dialogue with you. In this interview we welcome you to relate your views.

### **1. Background information:**

1a. How did you get engaged in the disability sector (research/politics/policy implementation)?

1b. How long have you been working within the field of disability?

### **2. Mapping the policy context:**

2a. First, to get started, how would you describe the labour market situation for youth with disabilities today?

2b. What do you consider to be the most important policy reforms in the last couple of decades when it comes to policy measures to promote labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities? Why?

2c. India has adopted equality and rights-based legislation and provisions (PwD Act, 1995 and RPD Act, 2016). What are the reasons for this policy reform? Why did it happen? What would you consider to be the most important driving forces?

2d. In your opinion, what are the most salient disability policies which help youth with disabilities find paid work today?

2e. In your experience, what are the most significant barriers which youth with disabilities encounter when they are entering the labour market?

2f. In your view, what are the most important policy instruments, legal provisions, schemes and programmes from the government, which help youth with disabilities overcome barriers today?

2g. Do you think that recent government policies and legislations have reduced the barriers? o If yes, explain how.

o If no, what should the government do to facilitate youth with disabilities to find paid work?

2h. Do you think that any service, benefit and institution prevents the labour market participation of youth with disabilities? If yes, how and why?

2i. According to your experience, which services, resources and institutions are most vital for youth with disabilities to find paid work? Why?

### **3. More about social regulation policy:**

3a. In your experience, which of the following government initiatives may improve labour market outcomes for youth with disabilities in your country?

- o Employment quota schemes;
- o Anti-discrimination policies;
- o Wage subsidies and tax incentives;
- o Accessibility regulations (reasonable accommodation duties);
- o Voluntary agreements;
- o Any other?

3b. Employment quotas: How does the scheme work? Is it successful? Why? Why not? How could it work better to get more disabled youth into the labour market?

3c. How would you evaluate the RPD Act, 2016? Has it been successful? What are the challenges? How could it become more effective in helping disabled youth find paid work? 3d. How has the disability movement assessed the non-discrimination legislative provision? Have they supported or advocated the reforms? If yes, how? If not, why?

3e. Does the government offer wage subsidies and/or tax incentives to the employers to recruit youth with disabilities in your country?

- If yes, which subsidies and/or tax incentives work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better in incentivising employers?
- If no, why are they not adopted in your country?

3f. Do you have a law that ensures accessibility and offers reasonable accommodation at the work place for disabled youth in your country?

- If yes, how do accessibility norms and reasonable accommodation duties work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better so that more disabled youth can get into paid work?
- If no, why are they not adopted in your country?

3g. Do you have any other government laws/policies/strategies that may increase the chance of disabled youth to find paid work in your country? How do they work? Are they successful initiatives? Why? Why not? How could they work better?

3h. Can you describe some strengths or weaknesses of the present social regulation policies in your country?

#### **4. Assessment and recommendations:**

4a. Can you describe any innovative practices and/or success stories where a government policy promoted labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities?

4b. Can you describe any practices and/or case where a government policy prevented labour market inclusion for youth with disabilities?

4c. In your experience, what role should private and public employers play in the implementation of social regulation policies?

4d. Has the adoption of the UN CRPD influenced the policies to promote labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities? If yes, how? If no, why?

4e. How would you assess the recent policy reforms pertaining to the employment of youth with disabilities in light of UN CRPD (Article 27)?

4f. To what extent does the Indian Government consult with disabled people's organisations about disability policy reforms? Have there been any changes in the consultations the last couple of decades? Has the adoption of the CRPD had any impact on the dialogue between the government and disabled people's organisations?

4g. To what extent is the Indian Government working together with other countries and supranational organisations on the issue of promoting labour market inclusion of persons/youth with disabilities?

4h. If you could design or change any specific government policy targeted for the employment of youth with disabilities, what would that be? How would you implement it?

## **5. Concluding points**

5a. Any concluding comments or suggestion you would like to share?

5b. Anything else you would like to comment on, which we have not talked about so far?



## **Appendix 4: Topical guide for interviewing youth with visual disabilities**

### **Guide for Interviewing Youth with Visual Disabilities**

In this PhD study, we are interested in assessing the impact of government policies on the employment prospects of youth with disabilities in Norway and India. In particular, we are keen to understand the employment experiences of youth with visual disabilities. By documenting their experiences we hope to achieve a clearer picture of the practical impact of the policy measures. Moreover, we aim to explore the resistance and coping strategies which youth with visual disabilities use in order to get paid work.

We want to focus on the possibilities that youth with visual disabilities have when they enter the labour market and the manner in which they negotiate employment barriers in both the countries. In addition, by comparing and contrasting the employment experiences of youth with visual disabilities in Norway and India we hope to gain better understanding of the recent labour market policy reforms.

In this interview, we would like to hear your views and learn from your employment experiences. Moreover, we are keen to listen to what you understand as the critical success factors that helped you gain paid work. We welcome you to share your successful stories and challenging struggles in finding paid work.

## **1. Background information:**

1a. Briefly introduce your self (age, educational background, individual strengths, aspirations about work).

1b. Tell me about the education and occupation of your parents.

1c. How do you explain your visual disability-impairment? What is the impact of the disability in your day to day functioning and working life?

## **2. Experiences at the current work place**

2a. Start by telling me about your current job

- Overall assessment – describe type of work, full time/part time, working conditions (regular work contract/ placement/ wage subsidy scheme);
- How would you describe your relation with the employer (director, management, nearest superior) (e.g. much/little contact/supportive relation or not)?
- How would you describe your relation with your co-workers?
- (If relevant: How would you describe your relation with subordinates (employees)?

2b. Does your employer accommodate your special needs at the work place?

- By providing assistive technology;
- Flexibility of working hours and/or work tasks;
- Any other accommodation facilities?

## **3. Experiences with getting the current position:**

3a. How did you get your current job? (Through own initiative, social network, public employment service, private recruitment company or other).

3b. Share some experiences from your job interview (if any).

3c. Was your disability an issue?

## **4. Experiences with other work before the current position:**

4a. How would you compare your previous experiences with the current job?

4b. Why did you change work?

4c. Before you found this current job, did you work in

- Voluntary sector (NGO, DPO);
- Internships;
- Traineeship program;
- Supported employment and/or sheltered employment with part or full wage subsidies.
- Any other

4d. If yes, did it help you to find your current job? How? Why?

4e. Which difficulties or barriers related to disability did you find in your previous work experience, discrimination, physical, attitudinal, productivity, external-internal, etc.)?

### **5. Experience of barriers in getting paid work:**

5a. What have been the main difficulties in getting paid work?

5b. How did you overcome these difficulties?

### **6. Experiences with public services:**

6a. Have you been helped by employment agencies and/or labour-welfare organisations (social services) to find paid work?

- If yes, how was your experience dealing with these officials?
- If any, describe some challenges which you faced while dealing with the officials from employment agencies and/or labour-welfare organizations (social services)

### **7. Experience with and perception of social regulations and disability policies:**

7a. Are you aware of any government policies/law/provisions which have helped youth with visual disability, directly or indirectly, to find paid work? If yes, which are those policies/law/provisions?

7b. Have you experience from any of the following:

- Discrimination or unfair treatment (lack of protection against discrimination);
- Unjustified dismissal or unreasonable working conditions (lack of protection from employment or work environment legislation);
- The employer failed to provide reasonable accommodation (lack of appropriate adjustments in the work situation);
- Unable to get a job because public authorities could/would pay the employer for part of my wage (wage subsidy schemes);

- Unable to get a job because the employer had/ did not have any employment quotas or obligation to hire me or provide training opportunities.

7c. Do you believe government policies such as quota schemes, non-discrimination rules and related provisions reduce barriers/difficulties and are of importance for the employment of youth with visual disabilities? Why? Why not?

- Do you know anyone who have benefited from such provisions?
- Do you feel you have benefited from such rules (provisions) yourself? If yes, in what way?

## **8. Experience of successful strategies**

8a. Do you have any friends/peers with visual disabilities who are not able to acquire paid work? If yes, as compared to these friends/peers, what did you do differently in order to get paid work?

8b. Which services/resources were most vital for you to find paid work? Why?

8c. If you are provided with income maintenance benefit, which is an approximate amount of your current salary, will you continue with your current paid work? Why? why not? (Understanding disability benefit trap).

8d. How did you negotiate with the employers to create an inclusive work place?

8e. Can you share some successful experiences of negotiating/dealing with government official/public services and well-fare providers when you wanted to get into paid work?

## **9. Concluding points**

9a. If given an opportunity, how will you change the government laws/policies/provisions to help youth with visual disabilities to get paid work?

9b. Any innovative practices and/or success stories which lower barriers and help youth with visual disabilities to get paid work you would like to highlight?

9c. Any concluding comments or suggestion you would like to share?

9d. Anything else you would like to comment on which we have not talked about so far?

## **Appendix 5: Consent form for interviewing experts**

Invitation for experts to participate in research project

*How can youth with disabilities better participate in labour markets?*

### **Background and objectives**

Many government policies are designed to help youth with disabilities find paid work, but often the disabled youth cannot find gainful employment. This study aims to map the policy context in Norway and India. In addition, it intends to examine under what conditions government policies relating to quotas, wage subsidies, tax incentives, non-discrimination provisions and reasonable accommodation measures improve labour market outcomes for youth with disabilities. In particular government policies such as *Discrimination and Accessibility Act* (2009 and 2014), *Jobs Strategy for People with Disabilities* (2012) and *Inclusive Working Life (IA) Agreement* (2014) from Norway, and *Persons with Disability Act* (1995) and *The Rights of Persons with Disability Bill* (2016) from India will be reviewed in order to understand their impact on the employment prospects of disabled youth.

The study will conduct interviews with disability policy experts and youth with visual disabilities with the view to get diverse perspectives on the labour market situation of disabled youth. Expert interviews will facilitate comparing labour market policies in both the countries. The project will focus on youth with visual disabilities under the age of 35.

This study is conducted by Gagan Chhabra who is a PhD student affiliated with the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy under the Faculty of Social Science at Oslo and Akershus University College (HiOA).

### **What does participation in the project involve?**

Experts who are interested in and are responsible for implementing labour market policies for youth with disabilities will facilitate in policy review. Through expert interviews, the researcher will be able to map the policy context and will better understand the institutional structures in Norway and India. Field experts such as representatives from disabled people organizations, members of local-regional-national government, disability rights scholars and diversity managers from private-public sector can offer access to empirical data, valuable insider perspectives and experiential advice which can immensely benefit the study. Experts will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews, which will last around 120 to 150 minutes.

If you allow, the conversation (interview) will be audio recorded in order to ensure that the researcher can note down all the details.

### **What happens to the information about you?**

The researcher will make sure that the privacy and confidentiality of experts who participate in the interview will be maintained at all time. Only the researcher will have the access to what is being said in the interviews. The transcripts of the interview will be shared with both the supervisor and co-supervisor of the study. The audio recording device and the transcripts will be locked in a file cabinet. Information from the transcripts will be used to write three or more academic articles and a final dissertation. In the research articles and transcripts, the researcher will ensure that the interview participants are anonymised i.e. their identity cannot be recognised.

All audio recordings will be deleted by 31st of December 2019. Anonymised transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet for future reanalyses.

## **Voluntary participation**

To participate in the conversation (interview) is voluntary. You may refuse to answer specific questions, which you are uncomfortable with. Furthermore, you may at any time withdraw your consent to participate. You do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. If you withdraw your consent, all information about you will be deleted.

If you want to participate or have any questions about the project, please contact Gagan Chhabra at:

Email: gagan.chhabra@hioa.no

Tel: +47 40982780

The project has been approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research, NSD, Bergen, Norway,

## *Consent to participate in the PhD research*

I agree to participate in the interview conducted by Gagan Chhabra for the purpose of his PhD research. I have been briefed about the project and I agree with the way in which findings from the interview will be used by the researcher. I agree that the interviews can be transcribed.

I agree to give my voluntary consent to participate in the interview.

-----  
(Signed by the participant, date and place)

-----  
(Signed by the researcher)

## **Appendix 6: Consent form for interviewing youth with visual disabilities**

Invitation for youth with visual disabilities to participate in research project  
*How can youth with visual disabilities better participate in the labour market?*

### **Background and objectives**

Many government policies are designed to help youth with disabilities find paid work, but often the disabled youth cannot find gainful employment. This PhD study intends to examine under what conditions government policies relating to quotas, wage subsidies, tax incentives, non-discrimination provisions and reasonable accommodation measures improve labour market outcomes for youth with disabilities. In particular, government policies such as *Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act* (2013), *Jobs Strategy for People with Disabilities* (2012) and *Inclusive Working Life (IA) Agreement* (2014-18) from Norway, and *Persons with Disability Act* (1995), *Accessible India Campaign* (2015) and *The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act* (2016) from India, will be reviewed in order to understand their impact on the employment prospects of disabled youth. The study will conduct interviews with field experts and youth with visual disabilities in order to get diverse perspectives on labour market situation for disabled youth. The project will focus on youth with visual disabilities under the age of 35. By documenting the experiences of the disabled youth we will be able to achieve a clearer picture of the practical impact of the policy measures that aim to enable them to find and retain suitable employment.

This study is conducted by Gagan Chhabra who is a PhD student affiliated with the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy under the Faculty of Social Science at Oslo and Akershus University College (HiOA).

### **What does participation in the project involve?**

The opinions, experiences and views of young women and men with visual disabilities, who have succeeded or struggled to participate in the labour market, will form an integral part of this research. Through interviews, I will capture and compare the different voices of the youth with visual disabilities between Norway and India. I am interested in your experiences of how you dealt with employers, service providers, and public authorities in order to get paid work. You are invited to participate in a conversation (interview) which will last from 90 to 120 minutes duration.

If you allow the conversation (interview) will be audio recorded with the view to ensure that I can note down all the details.

### **What happens to the information about you?**

I will make sure that the privacy and confidentiality of youth with visual disabilities who participate in the interview will be maintained at all time. Only Gagan Chhabra will have the access to what is being said in the interviews. The transcripts of the interview will be shared with both the supervisor and co-supervisor of the study. The audio recording device and the transcripts will be locked in a file cabinet. Information from the transcripts will be used to write three or more academic articles and a final dissertation. In the research articles and transcripts, I will ensure that the interview participants are anonymised i.e. their identity cannot be recognised.

All audio recordings will be deleted by 31st of December 2019. Anonymised transcripts may be stored for later re-analyses (until the PhD has been accepted).

## **Voluntary participation**

To participate in the interviews under this PhD research is voluntary. You may refuse to answer specific questions, which you are uncomfortable with. Furthermore, you may at any time withdraw your consent to participate. You do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. If you withdraw your consent, all information about you will be deleted.

The voluntary participation in the interviews means that you will not be paid or compensated in cash or kind.

If you want to participate or have any questions about the PhD project, please contact the researcher at:

Email: gagan.chhabra@hioa.no

Mobile: +47 40982780

The project has been approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research NSD, Bergen, Norway.

## *Consent to participate in the PhD research*

I agree to participate in the interview conducted by Gagan Chhabra for the purpose of his PhD research. I have been briefed about the project and I agree with the way in which findings from the interview will be used by the researcher. I agree that the interviews can be transcribed.

I agree to give my voluntary consent to participate in the interview.

-----  
(Signed by the participant, date and place)

-----  
(Signed by the researcher)



## **The Articles**



## **Research Article I**

Gagan Chhabra. (2019). Two worlds, too apart to converge? A comparison of social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India. Published in *ALTER-European Journal of Disability Research* vol. 13, pp. 83-100.

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Research Paper

# Two worlds, too apart to converge? A comparison of social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India



*Deux mondes trop éloignés pour converger ?  
Comparaison des politiques de régulation sociale en  
matière d'emploi des personnes handicapées en Norvège  
et en Inde*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to compare for the first time social regulation policies aimed to influence the employment of disabled people for Norway and India. This article situates the social regulation policy reforms and compare them to chart convergence within the policy goals and content for these two very different countries. The article relies on evidence from secondary sources, such as legislations, country reports and policy dossiers since early 1990s. The taxonomy of regulations, economic means and information strategies, popularly understood as “sticks, carrots and sermons” grounded in institutional theory, is employed to systematically analyse and present the similarities within social regulation

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<sup>1</sup> I am a visually impaired Ph.D. student working at Oslo Metropolitan University. I was born and brought up in India and have been living in Norway for the past six years. My research interests include disability policies, employment programs, comparative research, history of the disability rights movement and human rights regime. Much gratitude is expressed to Dr Rune Halvorsen for his valuable inputs and counselling during the formative stage of this research article. In addition, the generous support and continual encouragement from Dr Åsmund Hermansen and Dr Janikke Vedeler throughout the writing process could hardly be overstated. This article is part of the Ph.D. project, which is funded by the Research Council of Norway.

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policies. “The most instructive comparisons (. . .) are those that surprise” and through documentary analysis this article demonstrates that there is a surprisingly high degree of convergence concerning the social regulation policy goals and content for Norway and India. This article expands the boundaries of the still emerging field of comparative disability policy research and will help policy makers to understand the social regulation policy options in a cross-national perspective. The research findings reveal the need to uncover driving forces putting these countries on the path of policy convergence.

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## R É S U M É

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### Mots clés :

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Cet article propose pour la première fois de comparer les politiques de régulation sociale de l'emploi des personnes handicapées en Norvège et en Inde. Il présente la mise en place des réformes dans ce secteur et les compare pour interroger une éventuelle convergence, tant dans les objectifs que les contenus, entre ces deux pays si différents. L'analyse s'appuie sur l'exploitation de données secondaires, telles que des lois, des rapports et des documents. L'étude des régulations, des moyens économiques et des stratégies d'informations, plus familièrement connus sous les termes « la carotte, le bâton et le sermon » dans la théorie institutionnelle, permet d'analyser de manière systématique les convergences à l'œuvre dans ces deux pays. Celles-ci existent à un degré étonnamment élevé, tant au niveau des buts que du contenu de ces politiques. Ces résultats plaident pour un nouvel élargissement de la recherche comparative en matière de politiques du handicap et devraient aider les décideurs politiques à mieux comprendre les politiques de régulation sociale dans une perspective transnationale. Il est en effet nécessaire de mieux cibler les forces motrices qui mettent ces pays sur la voie de la convergence de leurs politiques.

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## 1. Introduction

Are the policies aimed at the employment of disabled people similar in Norway and India? This straightforward question might be answered with a short reply ‘no’, because disability policies, like any other government policies, are contingent on the policy context, which is constituted by historical, social, economic, political, cultural and legal factors (Lemaire, 1998). Norway and India are worlds apart on these macro-level factors (see Table 1 for an overview of these factors) and this, in turn leads to diverging policy context. In addition, these policies are formulated by institutions, which are expected to follow a path dependent trajectory. New institutional theory assumes that once institutions have been established, they are slow to change and earlier events induce further steps in the same direction (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009; Pierson, 2000), resulting into significantly different disability policies because of varying institutional structures prevailing in Norway and India (see Table 2 for an overview of different institutions). Taking policy and institutional context divergences as a given, it might be tempting to conclude that the disability policies concerning employment differ significantly for these two countries. However, this article will warrant against such hasty conclusions.

In this article, social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people since early 1990s in Norway – social democratic welfare state, high-income country (Engelstad, 2016) – and

**Table 1**  
Contrasting macro-level factors for Norway and India.

	Norway	India
Economy	Developed country High Gross National Income: 66,520 USD (Engelstad, 2016, p. 227)	Developing country Low Gross National Income: 5350 USD (Engelstad, 2016, p. 227)
Welfare State	Generous and developed High tax-funded, Universalistic and social democratic welfare state (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Törnquist & Harris, 2016)	Less developed Highly means and needs-tested Protective welfare state (Rudra, 2008, p. 111)
Social	Very good access to health, education Low risk of social exclusion and poverty (Engelstad, 2016; Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016)	Poor access to health, education and other social parameters High risk of poverty and social exclusion (Törnquist & Harris, 2016)
Cultural and linguistic	Relatively homogeneous society (Törnquist & Harris, 2016) 2 official languages in Norway (St. meld. Nr. 35, 2007–2008)	Highly heterogeneous society (Törnquist & Harris, 2016) 22 official languages recognised by Indian Constitution (NCPEDP, 2011, p. 8)
Political	Constitutional Monarchy, unitary system Got independence in 1905. Previously subjected to Swedish and Danish colonial rule (Törnquist & Harris, 2016)	Federal Parliamentary, Constitutional Republic Got independence in 1947. Previously subjected to British colonial rule (Törnquist & Harris, 2016)
Legal	Constitutional Law System (Törnquist & Harris, 2016)	Common Law System (Kothari, 2012)
Demographic	High life expectancy (Male: 80, Female: 84) (Engelstad, 2016, p. 227) Aging society (Törnquist & Harris, 2016)	Medium life expectancy (Male: 64, Female: 68) (Engelstad, 2016, p. 227) Will be the youngest society in the world in 2020-average age is 29 years (Government of India, 2017, p. 131)

India – protective welfare state, lower middle-income country (Rudra, 2008) – are analysed. The comparative findings suggest that the goals and content of these policies are converging for both countries, as they work towards promoting employment of disabled people, mediating the barriers encountered by them, and influencing the employers' behaviour. These, apparently unanticipated, yet empirically instructive findings could facilitate policy makers to better understand these social regulations prevailing in Norway and India, thereby situating the policy options in a cross-national perspective.

To begin with, disability policy is understood as a system consisting of three interconnected and interdependent sub-systems namely: social regulations, social benefits and social services (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Within the social regulation subsystem, social regulation policies are viewed as instruments designed to “influence the functioning of markets and the behaviour of non-governmental actors, with the goal of promoting welfare policy objectives or human rights” (Halvorsen, Waldschmidt, Hvinden, & Bøhler, 2017, p. 14).<sup>2</sup> Social regulations have long prevailed within the labour market, as employment offers pathways for achieving financial independence, building social networks, participating in the community, securing psychosocial well-being and realizing dignity (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Sainsbury, Coleman-Fountain, & Trezzini, 2017). Employment of disabled people has been a perennial challenge in Norway (Molden & Tøssebro, 2013) and India (World Bank, 2007) and social regulations were formulated to tackle it since early 1990s. The taxonomy of “regulation, economic means and information” popularly expressed as “sticks, carrots and sermons” (Vedung, 1998, p. 30) is employed to categorize these social regulation policies and to accentuate their growing convergence. Policy convergence could be understood as one of five things: “policy goals, content, instruments, outcomes and styles” (Bennett, 1991, p. 218). This article illustrates the

<sup>2</sup> Social regulation policies are different from social redistributive policies and the former are exclusively compared in this article.

**Table 2**

Comparison of different institutions working for disabled people.

Norway	India
The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion coordinates Norway's policy for persons with disabilities ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015</a> , p. 17)	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is a nodal Ministry for persons with disabilities ( <a href="#">World Bank, 2007</a> , p. 21)
No specific department exclusively dealing with the issues of persons with disabilities. Thus, following "sector responsibility" principle ( <a href="#">Hvinden &amp; Halvorsen, 2003</a> , p. 296) resulting in a multi-sectoral approach	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, established in 2012 to deal with the issues of disability ( <a href="#">Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015</a> )
Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV): it administers national insurance benefits and labour market policy ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015</a> , p. 76)	No nationwide institution concerning administration of employment and welfare rights for persons with disabilities The Ministry of Labour has the responsibility for vocational training and economic rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. The National Employment Service through 23 Special Employment Exchanges assists persons with disabilities in obtaining gainful employment
Statped: special needs educational services for 6 specific disabilities. Focuses on research, rehabilitation, education ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015</a> , p. 67)	National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC): It offers vocational training and loans ( <a href="#">Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015</a> )
Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Ombud: National Surveillance body. It enforces Anti-discrimination Act, it issues non-binding opinions.	7 National Institutes: focuses on rehabilitation, training and delivering of assistive aids ( <a href="#">Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015</a> , p. 15)
Equality Tribunal: it can issue legally binding order on cases referred by Ombud ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015</a> , p. 10)	Office of the Chief Commissioner for persons with disabilities It has the same powers of a civil court, Regulatory and Monitoring Institution
Strong NGO and DPO Institutions: there exists collaborative relationship with Government. Benign and positive approach towards state ( <a href="#">Halvorsen &amp; Hvinden, 2009</a> ).	It addresses grievances concerning discrimination, accessibility, equal opportunities and deprivation of rights ( <a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016</a> )
DPO example based in Oslo: Norges Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon (FFO)	Vibrant NGO and DPO Institutions: there exists more confrontational relationship with Government. DPOs engaging in contentious political actions ( <a href="#">Chander, 2016</a> )
Norwegian Employers' Federation started the "Ripples in the Water project" in 2011 to facilitate in training and employment of persons with disabilities and to create a more inclusive working life ( <a href="#">NHO, 2018</a> )	DPO example based in New Delhi: National Centre for the Promotion of the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (NCPDEP)
	Confederation of Indian Industry introduced a voluntary Corporate Code on Disability in 2006 to make Indian private sector more inclusive.
	In last decade, workplace inclusion and equal opportunity policies are being adopted more readily in some companies in the Indian private sector ( <a href="#">Bhattacharya et al., 2015</a> )

policy convergence exclusively taking place within policy goals and content by comparing the social regulations aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India.

Historically, disability policies in Norway have been compared to the Nordic region and European countries (see [Bickenbach, Ferri, Guillen Rodriguez, Halvorsen, & Hvinden, 2017](#); [Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009](#); [Hvinden, 2003](#); [Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003](#)), and this is a path well-trodden. Moreover, disability policy comparisons have primarily focused on social services and benefits and "there is a lack of systematic and cross-national data about the working of social regulatory systems and their impact on the lives of persons with disabilities" ([Halvorsen et al., 2017](#), p. 17). This article ropes in the perspectives from global South (India), ventures into hitherto uncharted territory within comparative disability research and commences filling the empirical gap for the much needed, yet under-studied, cross-national social regulation policy research. In other words, social regulation policies are recently being compared and are certainly converging in relatively similar policy and institutional context prevailing



within European countries (Bickenbach et al., 2017). However, this article demonstrates that traces of convergence can be observed in countries which are two worlds apart.

## 2. Institutional theory and three analytical concepts

The social regulations aimed at the employment of disabled people entail different measures, i.e. anti-discrimination legislation, wage subsidies and accessibility guidelines (Sainsbury et al., 2017). These measures can be classified under three distinctive categories, “legislative means, financial incentives or persuasion through information and appeals to actors’ social conscience” (Halvorsen et al., 2017, p. 15), in other words, “sticks, carrots and sermons” (Vedung, 1998). These measures are formulated and implemented by different Government institutions with the objective to influence employer’s behaviour and to create inclusive labour markets.

Governments undertake policy reforms by the virtue of political, economic and legal institutions, which are relatively permanent and stable features of any given society (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). Institutions are specific social structures, which facilitate in shaping and re-shaping of norms, values, roles and expectations in society (Turner, 1997), thereby making them integral elements to realize the policy goals articulated by governments. Through regulatory institutions, governments can crack the bureaucratic whip, consequently altering the prevalent economic and social structures, which could influence the achievement of desired policy outcomes (Lemaire, 1998; Vedung, 1998). In this article, the three analytical concepts of regulations (sticks), economic means (carrots) and information and persuasion strategies (sermons) were operationalized by leveraging theoretical perspectives from the new institutional theory (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009; Turner, 1997).

Regulations (Sticks): “are measures undertaken by governmental units to influence people by means of formulated rules and directives which mandate receivers to act in accordance with what is ordered in these rules and directives” (Vedung, 1998, p. 31). Government institutions enforce these measures for norm-settings and for signalling regulative intention to the market forces and non-government actors. They are based on the assumption that individuals either behave like “passive pawns” or “self-interested knaves” (Le Grand, 1997, p. 149), who have to be directed towards acceptable behaviour and/or constrained from undesirable activities, through the use of regulatory “sticks” (Lemaire, 1998; Vedung, 1998). Examples include anti-discrimination legislations, implemented to alter the pawnish and knavish employers’ behaviour and guide them to develop equal opportunity policies.

Economic means (Carrots): are “policy instruments that involve either the handing out or the taking away of material resources, be they in cash or in kind” (Vedung, 1998, p. 33). Through these instruments, government institutions “make it cheaper or more expensive in terms of money, time, effort, and other valuables to pursue certain actions” (Vedung, 1998, p. 33). These instruments yield the best outcome, when individuals are viewed as self-interested knaves “who respond actively to the incentive structures” (Le Grand, 1997, p. 154). Examples include wage subsidies and tax incentives used by governments to incentivize the employers and recruit disabled people.

Information (Sermons): entails “moral suasion or exhortation” and it covers attempts at influencing people through the transfer of knowledge, the communication of reasoned argument, and persuasion. The information category covers “not only objective and correct knowledge, but also judgments about which phenomena and measures are good or bad, and recommendations about how citizens should act and behave” (Vedung, 1998, p. 33). The primary assumption underlying information programs is that lack of knowledge is the cause of undesired behaviour, which could be altered through information dissemination and persuasion strategies. Government employs social institutions to undertake information dissemination and knowledge transfer to voluntarily persuade individuals, who are viewed as “public spirited, altruist knights” (Le Grand, 1998, p. 149). Examples include mass-mediated campaigns, awards and recognitions, transfer of best practices, voluntary agreements and peer learning programs targeted to alter employers’ perception concerning the recruitment of disabled people.

These three analytical concepts of sticks, carrots and sermons offer theoretical perspectives to demonstrate traces of policy convergence.

### 3. Case selection, data collection and data analysis

#### 3.1. Case selection

The case selection was done in a non-random, intentional way (Yin, 1989) closely tied up to the concept of social regulation policies and its worldwide development since 1990s. Firstly, it was contingent on where the outcome of interest occurred, i.e. adoption of social regulations in two significantly different countries. Secondly, it was done in a pragmatic manner, as the experience of living and working in Norway coupled with the providential accident of birth and education in India gave me knowledge of and access to the research topic in the two countries, thereby partly making case selection a practical prerogative.

#### 3.2. Data collection

Data was collected through documentary and historical archival analysis (Yin, 1989), based on materials obtained from secondary sources. Different policy documents (15 from Norway and 10 from India), which included Government legislations, White Papers, shadow reports from civil society and academic literature on the broad themes of disability, employment and equal rights were reviewed (see Tables 3 and 4 for the policy documents reviewed). All the Norwegian documents were retrieved from the official Government portal (<http://www.regjeringen.no>). However, the Indian documents were retrieved from multiple sources, i.e. Government portals (<http://www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in>) coupled with civil society and multilateral organizations websites. Criteria, such as date of publication (from the beginning of 1990s), legal status (binding/non-binding), publishing authority (Government, civil society, multilateral organization), title of document (having words such as disability, employment, work, rehabilitation, social regulations), type of document (exclusively formulated at national-level and not at local, regional, state level) and theme of document (social protection, equal rights and labour market integration for disabled people) facilitated the review process. In essence, these documents were collected and analysed, because they were legally binding and/or they marked a significant policy shift signalling the adoption of social regulations in Norway and India since the decade of 1990s.

#### 3.3. Data analysis

Questions, such as which documents are concerned with social protection and labour integration for disabled people and which ones deal with anti-discrimination policies, guided the data analysis. The analysis navigated through different social protection, employment and anti-discrimination policy documents targeting disabled people. In order to study these documents, a qualitative content analysis combining the steps of summarising, explicating and categorizing was conducted (Mayring, 2000). At first, these documents and their sections were sorted into three distinctive subsystems: social regulations, social benefits and social services (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Thereafter, the documents and provisions concerning the social regulation subsystem in general were thoroughly studied, with a specific focus on those aimed at the employment of disabled people for both countries. A qualitative approach was employed to summarize the content, situate the documents in their historical context and categorise the data along the lines of three dimensions: regulative provisions, financial incentives, information and persuasion strategies adopted by Norwegian and Indian Governments to influence the employers' behaviour and realize employment equality for disabled people since early 1990s. A temporal boundary was placed on the document review and analysis to make the process of interpretative review and the comparative analysis manageable.

Norway follows “the principle of sector responsibility” (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2003, p. 296) and a mainstreaming approach, therefore there are no laws exclusively framed for disabled people. This implies that regulative provisions aimed at the employment of disabled people are spread over multiple policy documents and different legislations for Norway. However, there is a consolidation of these provisions in two specific laws in the Indian context, namely Persons with Disabilities: Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act 1995 (hence forth PWD Act) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (hence forth RPWD Act). Thus, difference in the

**Table 3**

Reviewed policy documents and legislations for Norway.

Title	Year	Publishing Authority	Type
Attføringsmeldingen (The White Paper on Rehabilitation)	1991–1992	The Ministry of Labour and Administration	White Paper No 39
Menneskeverd i sentrum (Focus on Human Dignity: A plan of Action for Human Rights)	1999–2000	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs	White Paper No 21
Fra bruker til borger: En strategi for nedbygging av funksjonshemmende barrierer (From user to citizen: A strategy for reducing disability barriers)	2001	The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs	Public Report No 22 (NOU: 22)
Nedbygging av funksjonshemmende barrierer (Dismantling disabling barriers)	2002–2003	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	White Paper No 40
OECD thematic review on reforming sickness and disability policies to improve work incentives	2005	The Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Country Note
Arbeid, velferd og inkludering (Work, inclusion and welfare)	2006–2007	The Ministry of Labour and Inclusion	White Paper No 9
Job Strategy for People with Disabilities 2012	2011–2012	The Ministry of Labour	Annex to bill, Proposition 1S to Stortinget
Lov om forbud mot diskriminering på grunn av nedsatt funksjonsevne (Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act)	First enacted: 2008 Amended: 2013	The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion	Legislative Act
The IA Agreement 2014–2018 (Inclusive Working Life Agreement)	2014–2018 Last updated: 2016	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Letter of Intent
Arbeidsmiljøloven Act relating to working environment, working hours and employment protection, etc. (Working Environment Act)	2015	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Legislative Act
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Norway's Initial Report	2015	The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion	Country Report
The Ombud's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – a supplement to Norway's first periodic report	2015	The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO)	Shadow Report
NAV i en ny tid – for arbeid og aktivitet (Labour and Welfare Administration – NAV – in new times, for work and activities)	2015–2016	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	White Paper No 33
Hørings notat: Forslag til ny lov om statens ansatte (Civil Service Act Hearing April 2016)	2016	The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation	Hearing/Consultation for legislative amendment
Traineeprogram I Staten For Personer Med Nedsatt Funksjonsevne (State's traineeship program for persons with reduced functioning)	2016	The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation	Official brochure

nature of documents added a layer of complexity for the data analysis; multiple documents from Norway had to be analysed in order to map and understand the social regulation provisions aimed at the employment of disabled people, whereas PWD Act 1995 and RPWD Act 2016 partly sufficed to comprehend the regulative provisions in India. Nonetheless, as illustrated in Table 4, several key documents were also reviewed and analysed to situate these social regulation provisions in their broader institutional and policy context prevailing in India.

**Table 4**  
Reviewed policy documents and legislations for India.

Title	Year	Publishing Authority	Type
PWD Act, The Persons with Disabilities: Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation	1995	Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs	Legislative Act
People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes	2007	World Bank	Evaluation Report
Employment of Disabled People in India	2009	Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC)	Base Line Study
Persons with Disability & the India Labour Market: Challenges and Opportunities	2011	Shenoy Meera working for International Labour organisation, India	Employment Study
Key Issues of 120 million persons with disabilities in India	2011	National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People	Universal Periodic Review/Parallel report
The Road to Inclusion: Integrating persons with disabilities in organizations	2015	Youth For Jobs The Boston Consulting Group	Employment Study
Accessible India Campaign	2015	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities	Nation-wide campaign
First Country Report on the Status of Disability in India (Submitted in pursuance of Article 35 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)	2015	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities	Official country report
The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act	2016	Ministry of Law and Justice	Legislative Act
Parallel Report of India on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2017	National Disability Network (NDN) and National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Parallel country report

#### 4. Two differently similar policy trajectories

Governments are privy to the fact that the employment of disabled people is significantly lower as compared to the general employment rate for both Norway and India. In Norway, the employment rate for disabled people in early 1990s was 41%, while the general employment rate was 75% (Molden & Tøssebro, 2013). Since 2002, the employment rate for disabled people has “fluctuated around 42–45%” (Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016, p. 2), approximately 30% lower than the general employment rate. In India, the employment rates for disabled people have undergone a downward spiral from 42.7% in 1991 to 37.6% in 2002 (World Bank, 2007, p. 16) and further declining to 37% in 2011 (NDN & NCRPD, 2017, p. 33). The employment rate for disabled people is almost 20% lower than the general employment rate. However, it must be acknowledged that the employment statistics are not directly comparable between Norway and India, owing to definitional and computational differences. In addition, they are contested in both countries, although more widely in the Indian context. Nevertheless, the employment statistics paint a grim picture of the employment situation for disabled people for both countries. These statistics have been employed as a heuristic by both the Governments to intervene in the labour market since early 1990s.

This policy trajectory comparison commences in early 1990s, because in this decade there was a discernible shift towards the adoption of social regulations within European disability policies, which consequently influenced the Norwegian disability policy development (Bickenbach et al., 2017; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Tøssebro, 2016). Furthermore, UN standard rules in early 1990s and the adoption of UN CRPD in mid-2000s accelerated the shift towards social regulations worldwide, in turn influencing the Indian disability policy development (Ahmed, 2015; Kothari, 2012). Since there were no major social regulation policies aimed towards disabled population before the decade of 1990s for both Norway and India, any comparison of prior disability policy trajectory, though significant, will not yield any empirically valuable insights concerning social regulation policy convergence. Thus, moving forward, the important historical junctures, leading to the adoption of social regulation policies, are

pragmatically punctuated and the policy convergences are teased out by briefly describing the policy developments in Norway and India since the decade of 1990s.

#### 4.1. Norwegian policy trajectory

Since early 1990s, Norwegian disability policies have systematically introduced elements of social regulation. Based on previous reviews of the policy trajectory (see Tøssebro, 2013; 2016), we can identify at least three main historical junctures in the development and acceptance of social regulation policies. Firstly, under the banner of “Work Approach”, the focus of Norwegian disability policies moved away from passive redistributive income maintenance arrangements to more active self-help oriented measures (St. meld. nr. 39, 1991–1992, p. 7).

Secondly, from the beginning of 2000s, disability policy shifted its focus from “welfare policies to social regulations” (Tøssebro, 2016, p. 118). The public-report “From user to citizen” in 2001 was a watershed moment popularizing the implementation of social regulation policies (NOU 22, 2001). Norway enacted the Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act in 2008 (hence forth ADAA) and further amended it in 2013. It underscored an affirmative action duty for employers “to promote non-discrimination in recruitment, working conditions, promotion and protection against harassment” (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014, p. 112). This legislation has been at the forefront of the new social regulation policy movement.

Thirdly, in 2001 the Norwegian Government entered into a tripartite agreement with its social partners and the goal No 2 of this Inclusive Working Life Agreement is targeted towards increasing the employment of disabled people. It is an important initiative from the Government designed to promote employment and prevent the exclusion of disabled people in private and public sector (The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015a). This agreement has been renewed several times and it is still working towards achieving employment equality for disabled people.

All these measures coupled with the adoption of accessibility norms, building codes, transport regulations and universal design action plans (Tøssebro, 2016) have cumulatively altered the social regulation policy landscape in Norway.

#### 4.2. Indian policy trajectory

Until 1990s, there was no comprehensive nationwide policy targeting disabled people (Kothari, 2012; NDN & NCRPD, 2017). Examining the policy trajectory indicates that one of the landmark legislations, which has shaped the disability policies in India has been the PWD Act 1995 (Ahmed, 2015; Kothari, 2012; World Bank, 2007). This Act had both redistributive provisions and regulatory measures. It outlined regulations governing education, employment, rehabilitation and non-discrimination (Ahmed, 2015; Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1996; World Bank, 2007). The PWD Act articulated the ideas of equality, rights, full participation in the Indian disability policies for the first time; however in practice it perpetuated the welfare legacy (Ghai, 2015; Kothari, 2012).

Moving forward, in the early 2000s, the rights-based discourse gained momentum and the implementation failures of the PWD Act pushed the civil society to demand for change (Ahmed, 2015; Chander, 2016). Through a long and deliberative process, the Indian Government introduced a comprehensive statute, namely the RPWD Act 2016, which repealed and replaced the PWD Act. The RPWD Act was framed to give effect to the UN CRPD (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 1), which India signed and ratified in 2007 (NCPEDP, 2011, p. 2). This Act articulates provisions of reasonable accommodation, accessibility, universal design and non-discrimination, as it is aligned with the principles, norms, rules and procedures of UN CRPD (NDN & NCRPD, 2017). Complementing the RPWD Act, in 2015 Indian Government also launched “the Accessible India Campaign”<sup>3</sup> (Government of India, 2017, p. 158), thereby popularizing the adoption of social regulation measures. In essence, from the early 1990s till today, there is a considerable shift within the disability policy landscape and principles

<sup>3</sup> A detailed description of the goals and content of Accessible India Campaign can be found here: <http://accessibleindia.gov.in/content/index.php>.

of accessibility, reasonable accommodation, universal design and non-discrimination have gained notoriety in India.

## 5. Evidence of policy convergence

By employing the taxonomy of sticks, carrots and sermons grounded in the new institutional theory, the social regulations formulated by the Norwegian and Indian Government are compared in order to influence the employers' behaviour, lower employment barriers and promote employment equality for disabled people. The evidence presented below shows a distinctive pattern of convergence within the policy goals and content for the social regulation measures in both countries. Firstly, in "bundle of sticks", three distinctive sets of legal regulations, namely employment quotas, employment rights and anti-discrimination provisions are juxtaposed. Secondly, in "basket of carrots" incentives, such as wage and facilitation subsidies from Norway are compared with the financial benefit schemes from India. Thirdly, in "string of sermons", measures from the government and its social partners, such as awards and sharing of best practices from both countries are contrasted.

### 5.1. Bundle of sticks

#### 5.1.1. Employment quotas

The most important measure for the employment of disabled people in the Norwegian public sector is "preferential hiring" (Engelstad, 2016, p. 219). Section 9 of Civil Service Act, 1983, outlines regulations concerning interviews and recruitment for disabled people in state enterprises. This regulative provision could be viewed as a mild form of affirmative action or moderate quota, which aims to enhance employment opportunities for disabled people in the state enterprises. It allows for an exception to the qualification principle, wherein a less qualified disabled person can be hired in lieu of a qualified non-disabled job applicant (The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2016a). In addition to the preferential hiring provision, during 2004 and 2006 the Norwegian Government outlined the target to recruit at least 5% of disabled people within the public sector (Bull & Andreassen, 2007). This soft target has been reintroduced in the current Government's political platform for 2018 as well (Kvistum, 2018) and these policy goals and intentions are suggestive of affirmative actions. Furthermore, in 2011 the Norwegian Government launched the trainee programme scheme for disabled people (The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2016b) "to recruit qualified employees to governmental enterprises" (The Ministry of Labour, 2012, p. 40). This program is like a "job niche, created purposively to be offered directly or through competition only to persons with disabilities" (Sainsbury et al., 2017, p. 99).

Following a parallel path, employment quota system has had a long legacy in India, which "has introduced an elaborate system of 'reservations' (quotas) to strengthen the access of minority groups to public sector jobs" (Engelstad, 2016, p. 219). Nationwide employment quotas for disabled people were introduced in the PWD Act of 1995. "Section 33" of the Act mandated a 3% quota for specific disabilities (Kothari, 2012, p. 113; Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1995, p. 14). Moving forward, in the "section 34" of RPWD Act 2016, Government expanded the employment quota from 3% to 4% reservation in public sector jobs (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 13; NDN & NCRPD, 2017). Thus, there exists a more radical and direct form of employment quota, ensuring the recruitment of disabled people in the Indian public sector.

The preceding comparisons indicate that the policy goal of undertaking affirmative action and realizing employment equality for disabled people (Sainsbury et al., 2017) is considerably similar between the recruitment provisions of the Civil Service Act from Norway and the employment reservation provision of PWD Act 1995 and RPWD Act 2016 from India. Both countries employ nationwide statutory provisions in moderate and radical forms to improve the employment situation for disabled people within state enterprises. Another point of convergence is that employment quotas and preferential hiring provisions for disabled people do not apply to the private sector employers in Norway and India. The logic of undertaking affirmative action by setting soft targets and creating job niches through traineeship programs in Norway could be construed as moderate forms of quotas, which is comparable to its radical counterpart in India. In essence, state enterprises are one of the largest employers in

Norway (Bull & Andreassen, 2007) and India (Rudra, 2008) and the policy goals and content of preferential hiring provisions and affirmative action measures from Norway converge with the employment reservation provisions from India.

### 5.1.2. Employment rights

In Norway, Working Environment Act regulates the different aspects of work, such as working hours, working conditions, health and safety provisions and the overall rights and responsibilities of the employees and employers. “Section 4.6” protects employees with disabilities from undue dismissal, outlines employers’ responsibility for vocational rehabilitation and guards against discrimination on grounds of disability (The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015b, p. 17–18). This Act mandates employers to create an accessible and non-discriminatory working environment.

Along similar vein, employment within the Indian public sector is governed by probably “one of the world’s most elaborate webs of labour protection legislation” (Engelstad, 2016, p. 221). India is a “protective welfare state”, having strict legislations about dismissals within the public sector (Rudra, 2008, p. 111). Disabled employees, who work in the public sector, are also protected from undue dismissals and are guaranteed accessible working environment (Ahmed, 2015). “Section 20” of the RPWD Act mandates for reasonable accommodation duties and the creation of accessible built-in work environment. It protects against dismissal on the grounds of disability. In addition, “section 27” guarantees rehabilitation services to ease the employment of disabled people into labour market (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 9–12).

To summarize, both countries have statutory provisions protecting employment rights for disabled people. Through the RPWD Act, Indian Government outlines provisions protecting exclusively the rights of disabled employees, while the Norwegian Government employs a general Working Environment Act “to foster inclusive working conditions” (The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015b, p. 9) and to protect all the employees including the ones with disabilities. Employment protection provisions for disabled people have a converging goal by making employers accountable, offer protection against undue dismissals and guarantee rights to rehabilitation services. Thus, legislatively speaking, the employment rights for disabled people in the public sector are converging in Norway and India.

### 5.1.3. Anti-discrimination provisions

One of the central objectives of the Norwegian ADAA is “to promote equality and equity, ensure equal opportunities and rights to social participation for all persons, regardless of functional ability, and to prevent discrimination based on disability” (The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015, p. 8). “Sections 6 and 7” of the ADAA allow for positive differential treatment (The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013, p. 2). In addition, “sections 12 to 17” allow for individual accommodation measures for built-in environment and also strengthen the universal design in ICT, buildings, facilities and municipal services (The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013, p. 3–5). All these provisions of the ADAA cumulatively signal to both public and private sector employers to undertake positive action duty, develop products and services which are universally designed and create accessible workplaces for disabled people.

Along similar lines, different provisions concerning individual accommodation, accessibility, universal design and non-discrimination are articulated in the RPWD Act 2016, which is inspired by UN CRPD (NDN & NCRPD, 2017). “Section 3” enshrines the right of reasonable accommodation for disabled people in public sector (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 4). “Section 20” strengthens the non-discrimination and accessibility provisions (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 9, 10). Both public and private sector employers, having more than 20 employees, are mandated to follow non-discrimination principles while recruiting disabled people. Furthermore, “section 21” demands the private sector to formulate equal opportunity policies (NDN & NCRPD, 2017). In “section 40”, goals to set accessibility standards are outlined and “section 46” makes both public and private sector service providers adhere with accessibility norms (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 15, 16).

In essence, there is a high degree of convergence between the policy goals and content concerning the ADAA 2013 from Norway and the RPWD Act 2016 from India. The legislative provisions of these Acts strive towards creating an equal and non-discriminatory society and promote the development of a barrier-free and inclusive environment within the labour market. Both countries aspire to similar

policy goals and flesh out converging policy content around accessibility norms, reasonable accommodation duty and non-discrimination provisions (see Table 5 for the legislative provision comparisons from Norway and India).

### 5.2. Basket of carrots

In Norway, wage subsidy is utilized as a common incentive strategy to promote employment of disabled people (Dyrstad, Mandal, & Osborg Ose, 2014). The employer can cover parts of the salary cost for hiring disabled people through wage subsidy (Bragstad & Sørbo, 2015; The Ministry of Labour, 2012). In addition, Norwegian Government offers facilitation subsidy, compensating the employers, who incur extra cost to accommodate the workplace for hiring disabled people (Dyrstad et al., 2014). This subsidy could be used for initiatives involving “job try-outs, facilitation or on-the-job training” (The Ministry of Labour, 2012, p. 35). These measures facilitate in overcoming cost and productivity barriers associated with the employment of disabled people (The Ministry of Labour, 2012).

Indian Government does not offer any specific wage subsidy to the employers. However, it has recently introduced a post-placement support scheme, wherein a fixed amount of financial support is given to disabled employees for a short-time duration to ease their entry into wage employment after successful completion of skill training. This support could be given to disabled employees working in public and private sector (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2017). In the last decade, Government launched a financial incentive scheme, wherein it payed “the employer’s contribution for Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees State Insurance (ESI) for 3 years” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 226) to incentivize the recruitment of disabled people. There is no direct facilitation subsidy provided by the Indian Government to the employers. However, the Government delivers assistive aids to disabled people for enhancing “their economic potential” (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015, p. 47).

In essence, it is not surprising that Norway, with its comprehensive welfare state and a strong financial muscle (Törnquist & Harris, 2016) is handing out carrots, in the form of wage and facilitation subsidy to the employers to hire disabled people, whose productivity is uncertain and cost expenses are not clearly understood. Along similar lines, Indian Government, despite its budgetary constraints, is offering financial incentives in the form of post-placement support and contributions to the EPF and ESI to incentivise employers. These initiatives share a similar policy goal of making disabled people an attractive option for recruitment within the labour market and a common logic of using financial incentives to influence employers’ behaviour.

### 5.3. String of Sermons

In Norway, the Inclusive Working Life Agreement is a prime example of voluntary agreement, through which, Government intends to non-coercively influence its social partners and capitalize on the legacy of “cooperation and trust between the authorities, employees and employers” (The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015a, p. 1). The second goal of the agreement aims to increase the employment of disabled people (The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2015). Following the queue from the Inclusive Working Life Agreement, the Norwegian Employer Federation has started a program called “Ripples in the Water”, which hands out awards to employers, who create an inclusive working environment and recruit disabled people. This program entails giving awards and transmitting information through promotional films (NHO, 2018), as both education and publicity are effective means to influence the employer community (Sainsbury et al., 2017). Along with the Inclusive Employer awards, given under this program, there are multiple accessibility awards granted by municipalities to individuals or organisations on accessibility and universal design themes (The Directorate of Children Youth and Family Affairs, 2018).

Since 1969, the Indian Government has given national awards to outstanding individuals and institutions working in the field of disability. “Sixty-three awards” are handed out every year to acknowledge the role models and create awareness on disability issues (The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015, p. 23). Along with this initiative, in 2015 the Indian Government launched “Accessible India Campaign” and created an inclusiveness and accessibility index, asking the employers



**Table 5**  
Comparing the content of legislative provisions from Norway and India.

Bundle of sticks	Norway	India
Employment quotas	<p>Civil Service Act 1983: Section 9: “If it among qualified applicants for a position is someone who claims to be disabled/having reduced employability, and either is with or without work, there must always be summoned at least one such applicant to the interview before the given setting. If it among qualified applicants for a position is someone who claims to be disabled/having reduced employability, and either are with or without work, such job seeker must be preferred and employed even if there are better qualified applicants” (<a href="#">The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2016a</a>)</p>	<p>Persons With Disability Act, 1995: Section 33: “Every appropriate Government shall appoint in every establishment such percentage of vacancies not less than three per cent for persons or class of persons with disability of which one per cent. Each shall be reserved for persons suffering from: (i) Blindness or low vision; (ii) Hearing impairment; (iii) Loco motor disability or cerebral palsy, in the posts identified for each disability” (<a href="#">Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1995</a>) Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act): Section 34: “Every appropriate Government shall appoint in every Government establishment, not less than four per cent of the total number of vacancies in the cadre strength in each group of posts meant to be filled with persons with benchmark disabilities” (<a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016</a>, p. 13) RPWD Act, 2016: Section 3: “The appropriate Government shall take necessary steps to ensure reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities” (<a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016</a>, p. 4) Section 20: “Every Government establishment shall provide reasonable accommodation and appropriate barrier free and conducive environment to employees with disability” (<a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016</a>, p. 9). Section 40: “The Central Government shall, in consultation with the Chief Commissioner, formulate rules for persons with disabilities laying down the standards of accessibility for the physical environment, transportation, information and communications”. Section 45: “The appropriate Government and the local authorities shall formulate and publish an action plan based on prioritisation, for providing accessibility in all their buildings and spaces providing essential services such as all primary health centres, civil hospitals, schools, railway stations and bus stops” Section 46: “The service providers, whether Government or private shall provide services in accordance with the rules on accessibility formulated by the Central Government under section 40” (<a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016</a>, p. 15–16)</p>
Accessibility and universal design	<p>Working Environment Act, 2015: Section 4.1: “passageways, sanitary facilities, work equipment, etc. shall to the extent possible and reasonable be designed and arranged so that employees with disabilities can work at the undertaking” (<a href="#">The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015a, 2015b</a>, p. 17) Fragments of sections 12, 13, 14 and 15 Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act, 2013 (ADA Act): Section 12: “Breach of the duty to ensure universal design or individual accommodation. . .shall constitute discrimination” Section 13: “Public undertakings shall make active, targeted efforts to promote universal design within the undertaking. The same shall apply to private undertakings focused on the general public” Section 14: “New ICT solutions shall be universally designed. . .As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, all ICT solutions shall be universally designed” Section 15: “universal design requirements laid down in or pursuant to the Planning and Building Act shall apply to buildings, facilities and outdoor areas intended for the general public” (<a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013</a>, p. 4)</p>	

Table 5 (Continued)

Bundle of sticks	Norway	India
Employment protection and welfare rights	Working Environment Act, 2015: Section 4.6: “If an employee suffers reduced capacity for work as a result of an accident, sickness, fatigue or the like, the employer shall, as far as possible, implement the necessary measures to enable the employee to retain or be given suitable work. The employee shall preferably be given the opportunity to continue his normal work, possibly after special adaptation of the work or working hours, alteration of work equipment, work-oriented measures or the like. . .the employer shall in consultation with the employee prepare a follow-up plan for return to work following an accident, sickness, fatigue or the like” ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015a, 2015b, p. 20</a> )	RPWD Act, 2016: Section 20: “No promotion shall be denied to a person merely on the ground of disability”. “No Government establishment shall dispense with or reduce in rank, an employee who acquires a disability during his or her service Provided that, if an employee after acquiring disability is not suitable for the post he was holding, shall be shifted to some other post with the same pay scale and service benefits. Provided further that if it is not possible to adjust the employee against any post, he may be kept on a supernumerary post until a suitable post is available or he attains the age of superannuation, whichever is earlier” ( <a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 9–10</a> )
Anti-Discrimination provisions	ADA Act, 2013 Section 5 outlines the general rule regarding the prohibition against discrimination. “Discrimination on the basis of disability shall be prohibited”. Section 6: “Lawful differential treatment shall not breach the prohibition in section 5” Section 7: “Positive differential treatment on the basis of disability shall not breach the prohibition in section 5” Section 8: “Public authorities shall make active, targeted and systematic efforts to promote equality irrespective of disability” ( <a href="#">The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013, p. 2–5</a> )	RPWD Act, 2016: Section 3: “The appropriate Government shall ensure that the persons with disabilities enjoy the right to equality, life with dignity and respect for his or her integrity equally with others. . . No person with disability shall be discriminated on the ground of disability” ( <a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 4</a> ). Section 20: “No Government establishment shall discriminate against any person with disability in any matter relating to employment”. Section 21: “Every establishment shall notify equal opportunity policy detailing measures proposed to be taken by it”. Section 22: “Every establishment shall maintain records of the persons with disabilities in relation to the matter of employment, facilities provided and other necessary information in compliance with the provisions of this Chapter in such form and manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government” ( <a href="#">Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, p. 9, 10</a> )

to make the workplace accessible for disabled people. Through these initiatives, the Indian Government signals its intent and persuades the private sector to address themes of accessibility, universal design and inclusive working life. Complementing these efforts, social partners have shared best practices concerning the recruitment of disabled people in the Indian private sector ([Bhattacharya, Agrawal, & Shenoy, 2015](#)). In 2006, the Confederation of Indian Industry “developed a Corporate Code on Disability for voluntary adoption by companies” ([Ghai, 2015, p. 139](#)). Furthermore, the Indian civil society and private sector have jointly delivered awards to recognize disabled role models and inclusive employers. They have also created awareness on the themes of accessibility and universal design ([NCPEDP, 2018](#)).

The Norwegian Government prefers the route of sermons to influence the disability policy landscape through voluntary moral suasion. It has created indirect mechanisms, through which social partners can sermonize on its behalf. Similarly, the Indian Government in conjunction with its social partners employs a soft, persuasive approach to influence the practices concerning the employment of

disabled people. The focus on accessibility and the growing interest in the transfer of best practices and handing out of awards in India is fairly similar to the Norwegian strategy of relying on voluntary agreements and undertaking knowledge transfer through moral suasion and awards. The evidence indicates that similar sermons to influence employers' behaviour are being preached in both countries but from different altars.

## 6. Concluding discussion

In this article, evidence from secondary sources demonstrated a high degree of convergence within the goals and content of social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people for Norway and India since the decade of 1990s. Social regulation policies are certainly converging within European countries (Bickenbach et al., 2017). However, the evidence indicates that such convergence is observable across countries belonging to significantly different policy and institutional contexts. This unanticipated convergence for Norway and India, which are two worlds apart, partly challenges the assumption about path-dependencies in social institutions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009).

Evidence indicates that both countries employ regulative sticks, but to different degrees. Norway uses the employment quota in a moderate form and presents it in a covert manner to boost the employment of disabled people in the public sector. The examples of preferential hiring provisions from Civil Service Act (1983), the “job niche” created by the state's traineeship program and the recent reintroduction of the soft target to recruit 5% of disabled people within the state sector vindicate this empirical finding. India follows a parallel path and employment quotas are more radical and direct in public sector jobs. Although employment quota is seen as a controversial instrument throughout Europe, there is “continued use and renewed interest” in it (Sainsbury et al., 2017, p. 103). This article highlights the affirmative action provisions, which are underutilized in Norway by juxtaposing them with India. It asks the policy makers to take a fresh look at the affirmative action measures to realize employment equality for disabled people in Norway, as these measures are no longer perceived as a taboo topic by the Norwegian policy makers (Kvistum, 2018). In addition, variations of employment quotas for disabled people are prevalent exclusively in the public sector and they are not applicable to the private sector. Both countries have a converging policy goal to achieve employment equality for disabled people through affirmative actions. The legislative provisions share a common logic of creating a level playing field for the employment of disabled people.

Employment rights of persons working in the public sector are highly protected in Norway and India. Legislative provisions have a goal to create an open, inclusive and accessible working environment for disabled employees. Both countries have strict regulations on dismissals and guarantee rehabilitation services to disabled employees. However, counter intuitively the employment protection concerning dismissals in India is more comprehensive within the public sector, as compared to Norway (Engelstad, 2016). Norway's ADAA legislation with its amendments paves the way to create an inclusive society. There is uncanny similarity in the policy goals and content between the Norwegian ADAA and the non-discrimination, accessibility, universal design and reasonable accommodation provisions of the Indian RPWD Act 2016. Both countries are using regulations with a similar logic to make employers more accountable and lower the employment barriers for disabled people.

Norway is an advanced and generous welfare state (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Törnquist & Harris, 2016), consequently it can afford to offer financial incentives to the employers in the form of wage and facilitation subsidy. Indian Government, despite its financial constraints, hands out post-placement support to the disabled persons seeking wage employment and it pays the Employees Provident Fund and State Insurance contributions for the disabled employees. In both countries, the logic behind handing out these financial carrots is to entice the employers to hire more disabled people and to lower potential productivity and cost barriers associated with recruitment of disabled people. Policy makers in both countries are aware that financial incentives could alter employers' behaviour (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Sainsbury et al., 2017), however they ought to hand out more attractive carrots in order to realize the full employment-generating potential of the financial instruments.

Both countries use the string of sermons to persuade employers to create open, inclusive and accessible working life. Norway uses the Inclusive Working Life Agreement, which is voluntary and encourages employers to undertake transfer of best practices and share experiences from role models.

The recent trend towards delivering awards on inclusive employer and accessibility themes in Norway has a striking affinity to the initiatives in India. Indian Government hands out national awards and it also encourages private sector companies to share best practices. Complementing the Government's efforts, the Indian corporates and civil society also share awards and best practices. The fundamental logic behind awards and voluntary agreements is the transfer of knowledge and to undertake peer learning, which could influence employers' behaviour concerning the recruitment of disabled people. In Norway and India, the policies and initiatives of the government and its social partners reflect a fairly similar logic. However, voluntary agreements have a long legacy in the Norwegian disability policy context and the Indian Government can take a leaf out of this book to develop more cooperative relations with its social partners so that persuasive sermons could be delivered.

In essence, despite diverging policy and institutional contexts, some bundle of sticks, basket of carrots and string of sermons within social regulation policies, are converging to a high degree for Norway and India. From a bird's eye view, the policy convergence in these two countries, which are two worlds apart, is intriguing and it leads to three research implications. Firstly, if the social regulation policies are converging across different policy and institutional contexts, prevailing in Norway and India, one might wonder: "What driving forces are pushing these two countries, which are worlds apart on the path of policy convergence?" Therefore, there is need to conduct further research to better comprehend the underlying mechanisms triggering policy change and convergence. Secondly, the policy instruments, styles and outcomes, which might differ significantly and might be influenced by path-dependent trajectories for Norway and India have not been analysed, as this article is a first step in exploring policy convergence taking place in these two significantly different countries. Thus, there is still a need for more cross-national research to locate the traces of policy convergence and/or divergence and map the influence of institutional path-dependency across different disability policy systems. Thirdly, there is a need to further internationalize the field of comparative disability research and involve countries from global South along with their counterparts in global North in cross-national research, because policy divergence can no longer be taken for granted, even if countries are two worlds apart.

### Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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Research Paper

# Two factors, one direction towards social regulation policy convergence: Learning from policy experts in Norway and India<sup>☆</sup>

*Deux facteurs, une direction vers la convergence des politiques de régulation sociale : apprendre des experts en politiques en Norvège et en Inde*

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## ABSTRACT

Two significantly different countries such as Norway and India have adopted similar social regulation policies aimed at the employment of disabled people since the 1990s. Countries can adopt social regulation policies, such as anti-discrimination provisions, owing to multiple factors. This article uncovers two common factors leading to policy convergence within social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India. An exploratory qualitative case study was conducted, wherein 25 policy experts (11 from Norway and 14 from India) were interviewed. Findings from expert interviews indicate that the observed policy convergence are connected to two trends that can be detected both in Norway and India. The first concerns the influence

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of international treaties; the second concerns grassroots mobilization of disabled people and their organizations. Findings point towards increasing internationalization of social regulation policies and these policy developments transcend the global North and global South divide.

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## R É S U M É

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Malgré leurs nombreuses différences, La Norvège et l'Inde ont adopté des politiques de régulation sociale similaires, visant à l'emploi des personnes handicapées depuis les années 1990. Des pays peuvent adopter des politiques de régulation sociale, telles que des dispositions anti-discrimination, en raison de multiples facteurs. Cet article met en évidence deux facteurs communs menant à une convergence des politiques dans le cadre des réformes de la réglementation sociale visant à l'emploi des personnes handicapées en Norvège et en Inde. Une étude de cas qualitative exploratoire a été menée, au cours de laquelle 25 experts en politiques (11 de Norvège et 14 d'Inde) ont été interrogés. Les résultats des entretiens avec des experts indiquent que la convergence des politiques observée est liée à deux tendances qui peuvent être détectées à la fois en Norvège et en Inde. La première concerne l'influence des traités internationaux; la seconde concerne la mobilisation populaire des personnes handicapées et de leurs organisations. Les résultats indiquent une internationalisation croissante des politiques de régulation sociale et ces développements politiques transcendent la fracture entre le Nord et le Sud.

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## 1. Introduction

Globally, disabled people have low employment outcomes and face precariousness within the labour market, and governments adopt redistributive and regulatory policies to promote their employment inclusion (Heyer, 2015). Social regulation policies are designed to “influence the functioning of markets and the behaviour of non-governmental actors, with the goal of promoting welfare policy objectives or human rights” (Halvorsen, Hvinden, Bickenbach, Ferri, & Rodriguez, 2017: 14). There is an emergent trend towards the adoption of social regulation policies, i.e. anti-discrimination provisions in the labour market, across the Global North<sup>1</sup> countries such as Norway (Tøssebro, 2016). A similar policy trajectory has been witnessed in the developing Global South context, such as India (Ahmed, 2015; Bhambhani, 2018), and there is a policy convergence within social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people for Norway and India (Chhabra, 2019). This article questions policy experts to answer what factors explain the social regulation policy convergence in Norway and India since the 1990s. It follows a pragmatic and time-bounded point of departure, to understand the factors associated with policy convergence from the early 1990s, because prior to this period there were no major social regulation policies, i.e. anti-discrimination provisions within labour markets,

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<sup>1</sup> Global North South countries are heuristic constructs, connoting not only geographical divides, but also economic, political, cultural and social disparities. Global North countries are understood as rich, developed, industrialized, having an advanced welfare state, and they constitute a minority world, while Global South countries are poor, developing, industrializing, have an underdeveloped welfare state, and they constitute a majority world (Singhal, 2010).

which could influence the employment situation of disabled people in Norway (Tøssebro, 2016) and India (Chhabra, 2019).

In a broad sense, policy convergence could be understood as the growing similarity of policies over time (Heichel, Pape, & Sommerer, 2005; Holzinger & Knill, 2005), and it occurs at the level of policy goals, content, instrument, outcomes and style (Bennett, 1991). Policy convergence theorists debate the influence and efficacy of different exogenous factors, such as international pressures, and endogenous factors, such as domestic priorities (Knill, 2005; Holzinger & Knill, 2005; Hoberg, 2007). This article, based on an exploratory case study (Yin, 2012), relates to this policy convergence debate by comparing changes within disability policies for two significantly dissimilar countries, Norway and India. It explicates the influence of a specific external and internal factor, which influenced the adoption of social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people from the early 1990s.

This article is valuable on three fronts. First, it expands the frontiers of policy convergence research as historically it has focused on Global North countries, and countries from Africa and Asia are under-represented (Heichel et al., 2005). Second, there has been a growing interest to compare the social regulation policies adopted to enhance employment equality for disabled people across the European countries (Bickenbach, Ferri, Guillen Rodriguez, Halvorsen, & Hvinden, 2017). However, comparative disability policy research involving countries from the Global North and Global South is scarce (Grech & Soldatic, 2016), and whenever disability policies from the Global South such as India have been analysed, the predominant focus has been on the evaluation of redistributive welfare policies associated with poverty elevation (Singhal, 2010). Third, policy convergence is traced and compared for countries that follow a similar policy making process and are institutionally more alike (Bennett, 1991; Heichel et al., 2005), and there is relatively less research comparing insights from policy experts who operate in differing institutional settings and welfare regimes, which mediates the disability policy learning, formulation and adoption process (Waldschmidt, Sturm, Karacic, & Dins, 2017). Therefore, this article uniquely contrasts expert perspectives from two dissimilar countries, to map factors resulting into social regulation policy convergence.

## 2. Contrasting the context in Norway and India

The labour market context in Norway and India is significantly different, as it is shaped by distinctive economic, social, cultural, and legal factors, and varying institutional arrangements (see Chhabra, 2019:85–86). In spite of major macro-level differences, the governments of both countries are grappling with the problem of employment exclusion for disabled people in their respective labour markets. The context comparison was exclusively conducted from early 1990s for Norway and India, because this decade brought about a discernible shift towards the popularization of social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people in both countries (Chhabra, 2019).

Norway is a social democratic welfare state with a generous and universalistic welfare provisioning, and it has a well-funded and centralized public employment agency called the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, which coordinates the implementation of labour market policies (Arnardóttir, Hotvedt, Nousiainen, & Ventegodt, 2018). There is a thriving ecosystem, consisting of active disability organizations, which have a benign and positive outlook towards the political dispensation (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). The labour market in Norway is highly regulated with robust employment protection and high participation rate among the general population (Tøssebro, 2016). However, there exists a disability employment gap wherein 43.8% of the disabled population are employed, versus 74% of the general population (Statistics Norway, 2019). In the last two decades, this disability employment rate has remained stable between 42–45% (Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016:2). Prior to the 1990s, disabled people were seen as users being catered by the generous redistributive provisions (Tøssebro, 2016). However, since the 1990s, the Norwegian government has focused on enhancing employment participation among vulnerable groups, and there has been a systematic adoption of social regulations. Notable reforms linked to social regulations include the introduction of accessibility and non-discrimination amendments in the Working Environment Act, the passage of Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Law, the creation of a specific ombudsman for disabled people, and the implementation of the

Inclusive Working Life Agreement, focused in part, to enhance employment inclusion of disabled people (Arnardóttir et al., 2018).

In contrast, India has a protective and less developed welfare state, and there exists no centralized public employment agency coordinating employment policies (Chhabra, 2019). There are many organizations, which are run by and for disabled people (Bhambhani, 2018). These organizations often have a confrontational stance towards the government to adopt and enforce disability policies (Chander, 2016). The labour market is predominantly informal, unregulated and fragmented with a poor general participation rate (Harris-White, 2003), and less than one percent of disabled people are employed in the formal sectors of labour market (Bhattacharya, Agrawal, & Shenoy, 2015). Prior to 1990 there were no nation-wide disability policies that ensured welfare and employment inclusion for all disabled people (Ahmed, 2015). Notable social regulation reforms post 1990 in India included the passage of Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995, which mandated employment quotas in government sector jobs, and facilitated in the creation of the office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities to monitor the implementation of regulations. Furthermore, the regulation reforms in the 21st century entailed the launch of the Accessible India Campaign in 2015, and the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016, which is aligned with the principles and norms stipulated in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) (Chhabra, 2019).

### 3. Theoretical ideas

#### 3.1. Factors associated with Policy Convergence

There are multiple exogenous and endogenous factors that influence policy convergence across countries (see Bennett, 1991:215; Hoberg, 2007:127; Holzinger & Knill, 2005:779). First, a popular exogenous factor influencing policy convergence, is the international harmonization trend. International harmonization entails “legal obligation from international or supranational agreements deliberately agreed by the involved countries in multilateral negotiations” (Knill, 2005:766). It occurs in a top-down manner, wherein national laws and policies are harmonized with international legal obligations stipulated by supranational organizations such as the European Union (EU) and multilateral agencies such as the United Nations (UN). Second, a popular endogenous factor influencing policy convergence is domestic pressure resulting out of grassroots mobilization. Local actors such as active and informed citizens, interest groups and civil society organizations could build advocacy coalitions, which are contingent on “similar policy core beliefs” (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016:22), and undertake collective action. Disabled people and their organizations have successfully built such coalition networks, which operate from below, and they engage in collective action by coordinating their efforts across multiple levels to influence national government policies (Charlton, 1998; Heyer, 2015). There are interaction effects wherein these factors can operate concomitantly. For example, policy actors could be influenced by transnational factors, i.e. international harmonization trend from above, and domestic pressures, i.e. grassroots mobilization from below to bring about cross-national disability policy convergence (see Waldschmidt et al., 2017:181). Furthermore, the influence of such exogenous and endogenous factors on policy formulation and adoption is mediated by institutions and policy legacies (Guy Peters, 2016).

#### 3.2. Institutional Change

Policy convergence is shaped by institutions that undergo gradual, subtle and incremental change over time (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:15). In order to explicate the two factors contributing to the adoption of social regulations in Norway and India, this article employs the ideas linked to institutional layering and institutional displacement respectively.

Institutional layering involves when new rules are introduced as amendments, revisions and additions over and above and alongside old rules. Institutions are not radically replaced, but alterations take place, which changes the structure (Van der Heijden, 2010). Layers of new policies, rules and agents result into a gradual institutional change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Layering is triggered by “subversives” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), who are change agents not working to radically displace, but

**Table 1**  
Characteristics of policy experts.

Characteristics of the Experts	Total	Norway	India
Experts	25	11	14
Gender			
Male	14	7	7
Female	11	4	7
Age			
>40	4	3	1
40–50	4	2	2
50–60	11	3	8
60<	6	3	3
Disability			
Yes	4	2	2
No	21	9	12
Years of experience with disability issues			
≥10	11	4	7
10–20	6	2	4
20≤	8	5	3

gradually alter the institution. They work within the institutional system and follow its expectations. Nevertheless, they change it in a piecemeal manner. Thus, “institutions, both the formal ones within government and the social actors that work with (or at times against) the formal institutions” (Guy Peters, 2016:70) play a pivotal role in the process of policy formulation and adoption.

Displacement refers to the introduction of new rules and the replacement of old ones. Taken-for-granted processes and practises are questioned and replaced by new models (Van der Heijden, 2010). The process of displacement may take place abruptly or in a gradual way, wherein institutions could be changed by agents who are ‘losers’ under the old system (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:16). New institutions supersede and replace the existing institutions. “Insurrectionaries” trigger institutional displacement (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:23). These change agents are dissatisfied with the institutional status quo, and work towards the elimination of the institution and its emergent replacement (see an extended overview for types of institutional change and the policy actors triggering it in Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:16–27; Van der Heijden, 2010).

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Data collection

This article is based on an exploratory case-study method (Yin, 2012), wherein two significantly different countries are compared to learn more about the factors, which lead to the occurrence of a common outcome, i.e. adoption of social regulation reforms. 25 expert-interviews were conducted between March and December 2017. First, 11 experts were interviewed in Norway, subsequently 14 experts were interviewed in India. The sampling of experts was done in a purposive manner. The experts represented different institutions and the sample included government representatives, heads of disability organizations, disability rights activists, academic researchers, employers’ federations’ members and anti-discrimination agency officials (characteristics of the experts in Table 1). Before commencing the interviews, the appropriate ethical clearances were obtained from the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research Agency (research project reference number 51653), and consent from the experts was secured. Expert interviews was chosen as a deliberative strategy for data collection, since experts can be viewed as “crystallization points for practical insider knowledge” (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009:2), who could provide process insights linked to policy adoption. Since the experts were promised anonymity, they are only identified by their generic work-profile (Table 2 for the experts’ work-profiles). The expert interviews were based on a semi-structured, topical guide, which was informed by a previously conducted document review. Two topical guides with a relatively similar point of departure were formulated, which guaranteed the comparability of data (Meuser &

**Table 2**  
Work profile of Experts.

Experts Norway		Experts India	
Expert 1	Disability Rights activist/head of disability organization	Expert 12	Disability Rights activist/head of disability organization
Expert 2	Policy implementer (civil servant, mid-level designation)	Expert 13	Disability Rights activist/head of disability organization
Expert 3	Policy maker (civil servant, high-level designation)	Expert 14	Anti-Discrimination official
Expert 4	Disability rights activist	Expert 15	Anti-Discrimination official
Expert 5	Anti-Discrimination official	Expert 16	Policy implementer (civil servant, mid-level designation)
Expert 6	Representative of Employers' Federations	Expert 17	Corporate Representative
Expert 7	Academic researcher	Expert 18	Policy maker (civil servant, high-level designation)
Expert 8	Policy maker (civil servant, high-level designation)	Expert 19	Representative of Employers Federations
Expert 9	Representative of Employers' Federations	Expert 20	Disability Rights activist/head of disability organization
Expert 10	Representative of Employers' Federations	Expert 21	Representative of Employers Federations
Expert 11	Policy maker (civil servant, high-level designation)	Expert 22	Policy maker (civil servant, high-level designation)
		Expert 23	Corporate Representative
		Expert 24	Corporate Representative
		Expert 25	Disability Rights activist/head of disability organization

Nagel, 2009). Topics such as work-history of the expert, employment situation for disabled people, types of disability policies, institutions involved in disability policy formulation and implementation, the influence of factors affecting policy reforms and innovative government policies enhancing employment inclusion for disabled people, constituted the topical guide. The qualitative data collected from the expert interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed.

During the analytical process the focus was on “thematic units, that is passages with similar topics which are scattered about the interviews” (Meuser & Nagel, 2009:35). The data from each interview was manually coded and condensed into categories derived from the topical guide. Subsequently these categories were clustered into comparable themes across interviews. Common themes such as disabled people and their organizations and their driving force for social regulation reforms, and the influence of international institutions such as UN and EU on the domestic disability policy system emerged and were contrasted for both countries.

## 5. Two factors contributing to policy convergence policy

This section presents empirical findings in the form of selected statements from expert interviews and couches them within the theoretical ideas linked to policy convergence and institutional change. The expert insights concerning convergence within the social regulation reforms aimed at the employment of disabled people in Norway and India can be categorized within two broad groups: convergence brought about by the influence of international treaties, and convergence resulting out of grassroots mobilization of disabled people and their organizations.

### 5.1. Influence of international treaties

Increasingly, countries operate in an interconnected and interdependent world, as a result there is a need for the existence of international institutions, which “facilitate the shaping of a common response to common problems” (Bennett, 1991:225). Following the international harmonization trend, international institutions are leading to the adoption of similar policies and programmes across

different countries (Holzinger & Knill, 2005:782). The influence of supranational institutions such as the EU and multilateral agencies such as the UN on the social regulation policy development in Norway and India is presented.

### 5.1.1. Influence in Norway

Many experts highlighted the significance of harmonizing the domestic laws with international obligations. In 1996, European Disability strategy articulated anti-discrimination provisions. This was followed by legally binding adoptions (i.e. the Amsterdam Treaty and the Employment Framework Directive). Based on these social regulation developments at the EU level, experts stated that amendments were made to the Norwegian Working Environment Act in the early 2000s to prevent discrimination and ensure employment equality. Expert 1 (Disability rights activist):

“The EU was the driving force because it had a new directive in 2000 about discrimination in the labour market, which included discrimination against disabled people. . . and then suddenly the Parliament decided to include disability discrimination in the Working Environment Act. . . When the EU can introduce anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people, then Norway also must do that.”

The introduction of anti-discrimination provisions in the Working Environment Act constituted an important feature of social regulation reforms in Norway. In addition to these provisions, experts stated that EU-level regulations governing the accessibility of Information Communication Technology, public transport, and general environment made the issues of accessibility important policy priorities in Norway. This is exemplified by Expert 5 (Anti-discrimination official):

“So, there are many directives especially when it comes to universal design of buses, different transportation, how to form buildings and information and communication technology.”

Many experts assessed that the social regulation policies trickle down from the supranational level, EU, to the national level, Norway. They evaluated that Norway harmonizes its national laws with its international obligations, as it is a part of the European Economic Area<sup>2</sup> (EEA).

Another international influence associated with social regulation reforms has been the ratification of UN CRPD by EU in 2009 and Norway following suit in 2013. Although the UN CRPD ratification is regarded as an important development influencing disability policies globally, most of the experts converged on the idea that the UN CRPD ratification had a limited impact on the adoption of social regulation policies. Expert 1 (disability rights activist) ironically stated:

“I think CRPD is for the poor parts of the world, not for Norway. . . We don't need human rights instruments, it's the rest of the world who needs human rights instruments. We are perfect, we have a lot of money and we do the best we can. Any political party or at least any government would say that. CRPD doesn't make any change in Norway, but they hope it makes difference in the rest of the world.”

The statements from experts indicate that EU directives have been the major thrust, owing to which anti-discrimination provisions and design for all principles have been adopted in Norway. CRPD ratification has played a peripheral role in the process of social regulation policy reforms, which could achieve employment equality for disabled people (Fig. 1).

### 5.1.2. Influence in India

Many experts overwhelmingly assessed that the Indian government has been nudged by the multilateral agencies, such as the UN, to change its disability policies. The Persons with Disabilities Act (henceforth PWD Act) in 1995 was the first major legislation outlining principles of equality and full and effective participation. This Act was in part an outcome of the Beijing declaration organized by

<sup>2</sup> Norway alters its national legislations and adopts EU regulations under the European Economic Area agreement (Arnardóttir et al., 2018).

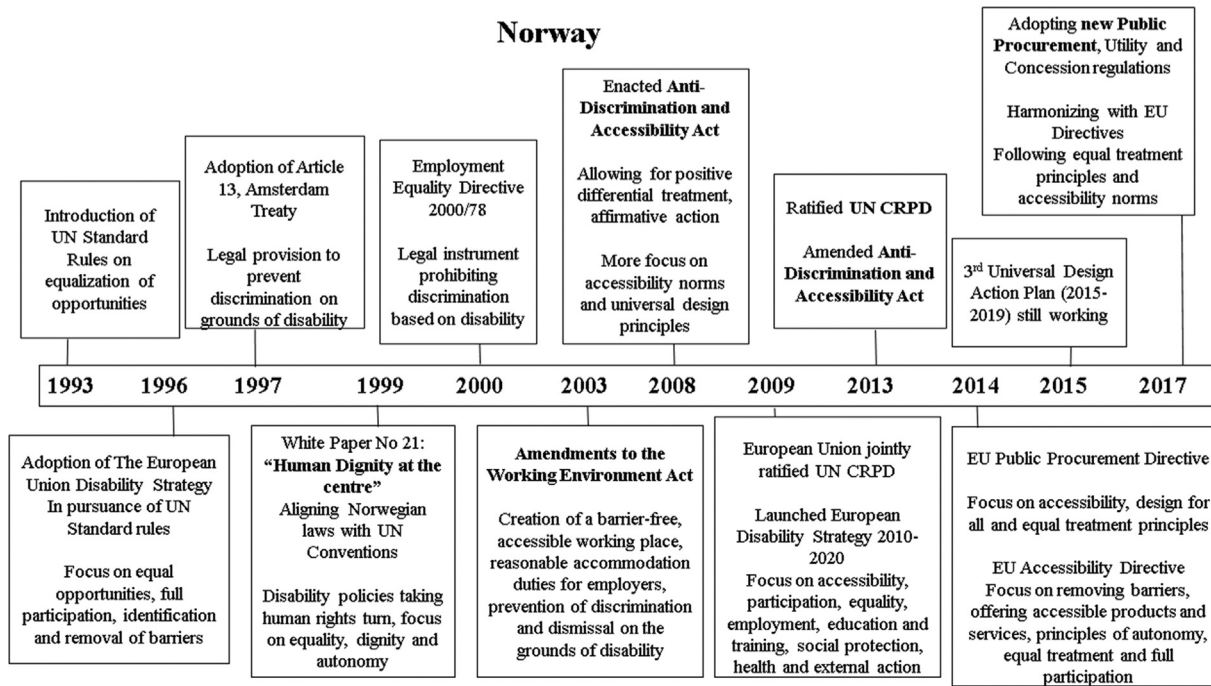


Fig. 1. International developments preceding the social regulation reforms in Norway.



the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). Expert 16 (policy implementer) stated:

“There was a Beijing declaration, which preceded the PWD Act from 1995. There, they talked about the protection of rights of disabled people. So, taking that as the main reason, we enacted this legislation. . . Since India also signed the declaration, we tried to translate our international commitment through the 95 Act.”

The enactment of the PWD Act in 1995 was a crucial juncture, which in earnest began the process of social regulation reforms affecting disabled people. However, many experts were disappointed in the PWD Act, as it offered a noble rhetoric but no tangible results concerning employment inclusion and full participation for disabled people.

Moving forward, in 2007 the Indian Government signed and ratified UN CRPD. Many experts considered this a watershed moment, which led to the adoption of social regulation policies in India. They pointed towards the international harmonization trend. Expert 13 (disability rights activist) stated:

“Of course, new Act, it is purely because the object was to harmonize with the provisions of UN CRPD, therefore it definitely runs through entirely on the principles of UN CRPD”.

Many experts assessed that the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (henceforth RPwD Act) follows a more human rights-oriented framework, which is aligned with the UN CRPD. Expert 18 (policy maker) stated that non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity policies of the RPwD Act are in line with article 27 [Work and Employment from the UN CRPD]. In essence, the expert interviews indicate that resolutions adopted in UN ESCAP and the ratification of UN CRPD have triggered social regulation reforms in India. Moreover, experts pointed out that UN CRPD ratification changed the dynamic in the Indian disability policy system (Fig. 2).

### 5.1.3. *Discussing the influence of international treaties*

Experts assessed that both countries formulated social regulation policies to promote the employment of disabled people, to fulfil their international legal obligations. They assessed that both Norwegian and Indian governments were keen to address common problems, such as disability discrimination, lack of accessibility and low employment outcomes for disabled people. Solutions, such as anti-discrimination provisions and accessibility norms to tackle these common problems, have been articulated by supranational institutions such as the EU and multilateral organizations such as the UN.

Previous research has found that Norwegian social regulation reforms to prevent discrimination and promote employment equality have been significantly influenced by the policy developments and international obligations stipulated by the EU since the decade of 1990s (Arnardóttir et al., 2018; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Experts mentioned that Norway has become more global and the policies are getting influenced by international developments. This finding is corroborated by the fact that the recent trend of “internationalization” (Tøssebro, 2016:112) has impacted the disability policy agenda in Norway. Moreover, experts critically assessed that the UN CRPD has negligibly influenced the adoption of social regulation policies, and the Norwegian government has given low priority to the UN CRPD. Their observation corresponds well with previous research, which argues that Norway was slow in ratifying the UN CRPD and is perceived as a latecomer as compared to other Nordic and Western-European countries (Waldschmidt et al., 2017:180–183). Furthermore, the influence of UN CRPD has been peripheral on the Norwegian disability policy system (Bickenbach et al., 2017; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009).

Experts evaluated that the Indian Government has been more directly influenced by the UN instruments. The preamble of the 1995 PWD Act, which promoted the principles of equality and full participation for disabled people, explicitly attributes the policy formulation to the UN ESCAP efforts from 1992 and the UN standard rules from 1993 (Ahmed, 2015). Moving forward, UN CRPD ratification by the Indian Government led to the adoption of the RPwD Act, which introduced social regulations such as non-discrimination provisions, reasonable accommodation duties and accessibility norms, within the Indian disability policy system (Bhambhani, 2018). Thus, EU and UN stipulated

## India

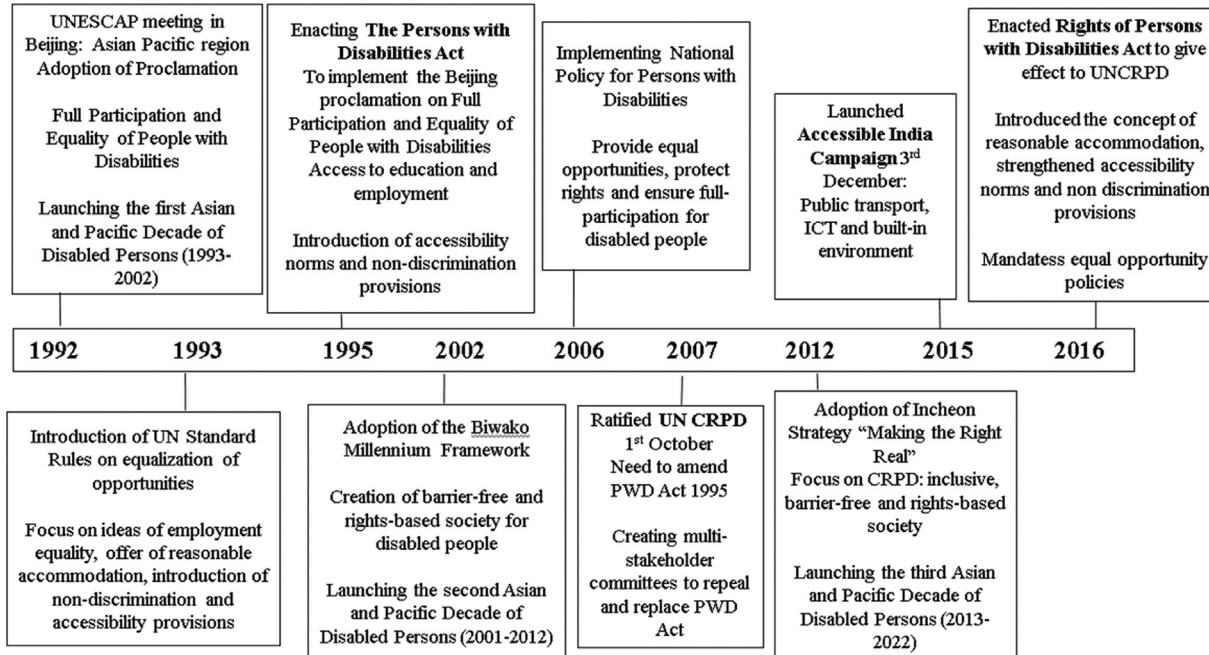


Fig. 2. International developments preceding the social regulation reforms in India.

legal obligations, which resulted into the social regulation policy convergence for Norway and India respectively.

Although both countries moved in the same direction to adopt social regulation reforms, they have different points of departure as distinctive policy contexts will prevail across Global North and Global South countries. Norway has a developed welfare state, with a long legacy of disability policy reforms and stable labour market institutions (Hvinden & Tøssebro, 2016). The labour market is predicated on a collaborative tripartite agreement amongst employers, trade unions and government to secure high employment participation. Moreover, the members of civil society have a voice in the policy formulation process (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Norway is a member of the European Economic Area, and is bound by the norms associated with the free movement of goods, capital, services and labour, which are designed to mitigate market deficiencies (Arnardóttir et al., 2018). Taking into account this stable institutional and policy legacy, supranational actors nudge Norway to undertake institutional layering (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), resulting into subtle and gradual change to the already existing rules, policies and institutions (Van der Heijden, 2010). A prime example of policy layering was the amendments in the Working Environment Act, wherein non-discrimination provisions to achieve employment equality for disabled people was added to an already robust national legislation to harmonize with social regulation reforms trickling down from the EU. Taking a cue from the institutional change occurring within Europe, domestic “subversive” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) policy actors worked within the collaborative and well-functioning Norwegian political and legal system to usher social regulation reforms in a piecemeal way.

In contrast, India has an underdeveloped welfare state, lacked a legacy of disability policy reforms and has weak labour market institutions (Ahmed, 2015; Chhabra, 2019). Furthermore, the Indian government had not prioritized employment inclusion of disabled people as the labour market has largely remained informal and unregulated (Singhal, 2010). However new avenues for policy and institutional change opened up in the early 1990s as India liberalized its economy and better integrated it with the global system (Harris-White, 2003). Multilateral agencies such as the UN supported the insurrectionaries who undertook radical institutional displacement, which led to the introduction of new rules, policies and institutions (Van der Heijden, 2010) to transform the disability policy system. A prime example is the enactment of the first comprehensive legislation, PWD Act in 1995. This disability legislation had no precursor and was in part brought about by the influence of international multilateral organizations, which supported domestic actors who had marginal representation and their policy priorities were neglected in the prevailing institutional and policy system. Thus, it is clear that convergence within the social regulation reforms that took place in Norway and India was influenced by supranational institutions and multilateral organizations. Nonetheless, the similar reforms were brought about in different ways which were mediated by the varying institutional context and policy legacy.

## 5.2. The influence of grassroots mobilization

The mobilization of individuals and organizations at the grassroots level are important catalysts to usher social movements resulting in policy change and social transformation (Waldschmidt, Karacic, Sturm, & Dins, 2015). Broad based, multi-actor advocacy coalitions can bring about desired policy change (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016), as in the recent years disability policy formulation has been pushed to become more deliberative, consultative and democratic (Bickenbach et al., 2017). The advocacy coalition actors lobby and place demands on the government to implement social regulation reforms (Heyer, 2015). The influence of disabled people and their organizations involved in grassroots mobilization in Norway and India is presented.

### 5.2.1. Grassroots mobilization in Norway

Many experts stated that from the late 1990s, some disability organizations demanded that social redistributive measures such as financial benefits, be complemented with social regulations such as anti-discrimination provisions. Expert 1 (disability rights activist) stated that disabled people and their organizations “pushed forward for stronger rights and another way of thinking then. Not only this welfare thinking, but also discrimination thinking”. Talking specifically about the priorities of some

disability organizations in the early 2000s, Expert 7 (academic researcher) stated that discrimination, accessibility and regulatory policies was on the agenda of the disability organizations. Experts highlighted that consultation with disabled people and their organizations was pivotal for the enactment of Anti-Discrimination legislation in 2009.

Many experts assessed that disabled people and their organizations were getting more involved in policy formulation and are getting represented within labour market institutions. Expert 8 (policy maker) stated that disabled people are sitting at the top of the Labour and Welfare administration. They head the user arena and determine the policy agenda. In essence, many experts argued that disabled people and their organizations leverage their collaborative relations to pull the political strings and influence the disability policy formulation. Prime examples include the Anti-Discrimination law. They assessed that in totality, disabled people and their organizations have supported the emerging social regulation, policies which are aimed to secure equality and inclusion for disabled people in Norway.

### 5.2.2. Grassroots mobilization in India

Many experts evaluated that historically the Indian Government had been callous in framing disability policies and granting rights to disabled people. Consequently, disabled people and their organizations, had to resort to policy advocacy by employing confrontational actions. Expert 13 (disability rights activist) stated that from the mid-1970s until mid-1990s, the movement of blind people was in forefront of the disability rights movement to influence the formulation process of the disability legislation. Their engagements led to the formation of consultation committees, culminating with the passage of the PWD Act in 1995. This legacy of political agitation was carried forward in the late 2000s. Disabled people and their organizations created cross-disability advocacy networks and pushed the Indian government to frame a new law, which was aligned with the principles of UN CRPD. The perspective of expert 12 (disability rights activist) is illuminating:

“For seven months there was a big fight between us and the Minister, series of rallies, sit-ins and blocking his house. It was after seven months of advocacy and sustained pressure and activism that the Minister considered to set up a Committee and conceded to the idea of a new [disability] law.”

Political agitations have been an integral feature of disability rights movement in India. In addition to the agitations orchestrated on the street, many experts mentioned that policy advocacy has been conducted through the involvement of judiciary, which was regarded as a benign ally. As Expert 12 (disability rights activist) stated:

“We will then say [to other disabled people]: Look, these are your rights, ask for your rights. Demand. Ask for reasonable accommodation, ask for non-discrimination. If discrimination takes place, sue the employers.”

Some experts were actively consulted after the Indian government signed and ratified the UN CRPD. Discussing the influence of disability rights activists, Expert 24 (Corporate representative) stated that the RPWD Act with its non-discrimination and equal opportunity provisions was drafted by disabled people organizations. In addition, commenting on the positive developments concerning the disability policy consultation process in India, Expert 25 (disability rights activist) stated: “we have a much more vibrant civil society than we used to have.” In essence, experts highlighted that the use of political agitations by disabled people and their organizations has triggered policy change. Moreover, some experts stated that positive judicial pronouncements on issues of employment, accessibility, and anti-discrimination have emboldened disability organizations. Prime examples of policy changes brought by the influence of disability rights activists were the PWD Act 1995 and RPWD Act 2016. Experts articulated that disabled people and their organizations have a stronger voice and greater visibility, leading to a greater representation in the policy consultation process (Table 3 for the influence of disabled people and their organizations).

**Table 3**

Influence of grassroots mobilization by disabled people and their organizations triggering social regulation reforms.

Activities	Norway	India
Nature of policy advocacy	Collaborative relationship Working closely with public authorities	Contentious political action: confrontational approach Use of litigation
Representation and consultation	Long legacy of representation at local, regional, national level; stable consultation procedure	Post UN CRPD ratification: better representation at local, regional, national level and increased role in the policy consultation at national level
Type of policy adoption	Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act 2009	Person with Disabilities Act 1995 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016
Institutional change	The office of Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud to promote full participation and inclusion for disabled people in the Norwegian Society	Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities to monitor the welfare and regulatory provisions of disability legislations

### 5.2.3. Discussing the importance of grassroots mobilization

Experts from both countries assessed the positive influence of disabled people and their organizations in bringing about social regulation reforms, which promoted employment equality. Globally, disability rights movements have made claims on resource redistribution, legal recognition and political representation (Charlton, 1998; Heyer, 2015). Social mobilization of disabled people and their organizations has followed a bottom-up trajectory with growing cooperation among transnational disability groups. Disability rights activists are “norm entrepreneurs” (Heyer, 2015:207) pushing the policy agenda for equality and equal worth, and use the tactics of “naming and shaming” (Waldschmidt et al., 2017:179) to pressurize their governments to adopt social regulation policy reforms.

Experts assessed that both countries have vibrant civil society networks, consisting of organizations run by and for disabled people, and disabled people have been front-runners championing for their own rights. The ideological framework provided by “nothing about us, without us” (Charlton, 1998) captures the essence of self-advocacy and grassroots mobilization resulting in a resurgent disability rights movement in Norway (Waldschmidt et al., 2015) and India (Bhambhani, 2018).

Some experts assessed that there exists a collaborative relationship between the Norwegian Government and the disability organizations, which are regularly consulted. This observation of experts corresponds well with the finding that historically in Norway, disabled people and their organizations “have achieved close, informal and cooperative relations” (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009:198) with the government and public bureaucracy. By leveraging the collaborative relations, disability organizations influence the formulation of disability policies. Experts converged with the prevailing scholarship that some disabled people and their organizations lobbied for anti-discrimination provisions, accessibility norms and reasonable accommodation duties aligning their activities from below with the international trends to push for more social regulations (Tøssebro, 2016).

Similar to Norway, Indian experts evaluated the growing influence of disabled people and their organizations on the policy reforms. Experts concurred with scholarship that grassroots activism led to the first nationwide statute on disability: the PWD Act of 1995 (Ahmed, 2015). The influence of disabled people and their organizations has steadily increased since the early 1990s (Bhambhani, 2018) and they have strategically combined elements of contentious political action in the form of strikes and sit-ins (Chander, 2016) with policy advocacy measures involving litigation (Ahmed, 2015). Since the 1990s, these organizations have been influenced by the global discourse on disability rights (Chander, 2016). In the mid-2000s, these organizations pressurized the Indian Government to ratify the UN CRPD and engaged in the consultation process and formulation of the RPwD Act 2016 (Bhambhani, 2018). Experts evaluated that there has been a considerable influence of grassroots mobilization and policy advocacy work of the disability organizations to push for a human rights regime and the adoption of social regulations within the disability policy system in India.

Although the grassroots mobilization of disabled people led to social regulation reforms in both Norway and India, there were notable differences, as one country belongs to the Global North while the other to the Global South context. The disability activists in Norway who undertook grassroots mobilization, could be understood as subversive change agents (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), who gradually and systematically worked towards altering the policy priorities, as they have a quite collaborative relationship with the government (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). They triggered institutional layering. A prime example is the ombudsman for disabled people. A case for such an institution could be made as the Nordic countries has a longer history of such social regulatory institutions (Arnardóttir et al., 2018). Furthermore, policy layering accompanied the institutional change in Norway, as some disabled activists argued for the adoption of an anti-discrimination law to prevent disability discrimination. Historically, Norway has a long policy legacy for similar anti-discrimination laws preventing discrimination for protected minority groups (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Sweden had adopted anti-discrimination provisions and constituted an ombudsman dedicated to prevent disability discrimination in the 1990s (Arnardóttir et al., 2018). Following these disability policy developments, disability rights activists undertook “naming and shaming” (Waldschmidt et al., 2017), and nudged the Norwegian government to pivot from singular focus on redistributive policies, towards a more broad-minded focus on social regulation reforms, which could equalize the life-chances for disabled people (Tøssebro, 2016).

In contrast, it was apparent that the disability rights activists in India played the role of insurrectionaries (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) and confronted the Indian government, either through strikes, contentious political actions, or through judicial activism, wherein they forced the Indian government to comply with its obligations towards disabled people (Bhambhani, 2018; Chander, 2016). These activists undertook social mobilization by following the Gandhian legacy of civil disobedience and triggered institutional displacement. They were able to ask the federal government to create a nationwide legislation, i.e. Persons with Disability Act (1995), in spite of the fact that disability in India does not fall under federal jurisdiction, but is a state prerogative (Ahmed, 2015). As part of the PWD Act, they demanded a creation of the office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, which could compliment their judicial activism efforts. Such radical policy and institutional displacement took place in the 1990s, resulting in part out of contentious political action and non-disruptive civil disobedience (Bhambhani, 2018). Following their success, the last two decades have seen more grassroots mobilization, wherein the government now sees disabled people as partners to form progressive legislations, i.e. RPwD Act (2016). It seems that the activists are now moving towards a subversive role, wherein they could bring about gradual institutional and policy change, as they are being better represented and actively being consulted by the Indian government (Bhambhani, 2018). Like their counterparts in Norway, disability rights activists are increasingly participating in transnational advocacy networks (Heyer, 2015), and have successfully undertaken the tactic of naming and shaming to nudge the Indian government towards social regulation reforms (Table 4).

## 6. Concluding discussion

This article contrasted the insights from Norwegian and Indian disability policy experts to find out that two factors such as international harmonization trend from above and grassroots mobilization from below have contributed to social regulation policy convergence, which transcends the Global North and South divide. In spite of differing institutional arrangements and policy legacy, the governments in both Norway and India moved in this similar direction towards social regulation reforms since the decade of 1990s. Based on the insights from the policy experts who operated in distinctively different policy contexts, there are a few takeaways.

First, the social regulation reforms have been influenced by similar exogenous top-down factors, which operated differently in Norway and India. Norwegian social regulation policies were incrementally harmonized with the EU directives and legal guidelines, and the rules linked to employment equality and non-discrimination were layered upon already existing robust regulatory framework. In addition, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud was created in line with the long legacy of similar ombud institutions, which have existed for protected groups (Arnardóttir et al., 2018). In the collaborative, well-functioning context, subversive policy actors undertook systematic policy and

**Table 4**  
Two factors contributing to social regulation policy convergence.

Factor	Institution		Type of domestic policy actor		Change	
	Norway	India	Norway	India	Norway	India
International Harmonization Top-down influence	EU	UN	<i>Subversives</i> rule-abiding Collaborative Better political representation	<i>Insurrectionaries</i> Rule-changing Confrontational Poor political representation	Incremental Evolutionary Layering Anti-Discrimination Law 2009/17 Ombudsman	Radical Revolutionary Displacement PWD Act 1995 RPwD Act 2016 CCPD
Grassroots mobilization Bottom-up influence	Disabled people and DPOs	Disabled people and DPOs	<i>Subversives</i> rule-abiding Collaborative Better political representation	<i>Insurrectionaries</i> Rule-changing Confrontational Poor political representation	Incremental Evolutionary Layering Anti-Discrimination Law 2009/17 Ombudsman	Radical Revolutionary Displacement PWD Act 1995 RPwD Act 2016 CCPD

CCPD: Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with disabilities.

institutional layering to fulfil the legal demands placed by supranational institutions such as the EU. Like Norway, the Indian government was influenced by the pressure of harmonizing its laws with international standards linked to equality, inclusion and participation set out by the UN (Ahmed, 2015). However, the route of policy and institutional change was different. Radical nation-wide legislations were enacted, first the PWD act in 1995 and subsequently RPwD act in 2016. Furthermore, new statutory institutions such as the Office of Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities was created to monitor the implementation of social regulation reforms (Chhabra, 2019). These disability reforms were ushered by insurrectionaries and were akin to institutional and policy displacement, as there were no historical precedents for such reforms aimed at disabled people in India.

Second, complementing these international influences, the social regulation reforms in both the countries have also been achieved on account of bottom-up grassroots mobilization where sustained pressure has been applied by disabled people and their organizations. They have become better informed, well-connected and more vociferous. They are forming domestic and transnational advocacy networks to bring about similar social regulation reforms (Heyer, 2015). In Norway, policies linked to employment equality and non-discrimination have been influenced by the inputs of the disability organizations, which have collaborative relations with the government (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009). Disabled people and their organizations in Norway have been subversive actors with good political representation, who have worked in tandem with the Norwegian government to usher social regulation reforms. However, their counterparts in India had limited political representation, and therefore had to rely on contentious means, non-disruptive actions and judicial activism to push the Indian government to adopt social regulation reforms (Bhambhani, 2018). They worked as insurrectionaries leading to institutional policy displacement, wherein new disability reforms and regulatory institutions were introduced to the Indian disability policy system. Despite the divergent tactics, the ultimate outcome of disability organizations has been to undertake grassroots mobilization of disabled people predicated on “nothing about us, without us” (Charlton, 1998), and have pushed for an employment equality and non-discrimination for disabled people.

Third, factors behind policy convergence could be understood as exogenous, international pressures influences trickling down from top, or endogenous domestic priorities bubbling up from the bottom (Bennett, 1991; Holzinger & Knill, 2005; Hoberg, 2007) However, the influences revealed through the expert interviews could not be perceived as either external or internal. There is rather a spiral dynamic at play (Waldschmidt et al., 2017), which makes these influences not distinctive or mutually exclusive, but overlapping and interconnected. Even the experienced policy experts could not always clearly single out the influence of these factors contributing to social regulation policy convergence.

Finally, the factors associated with social regulation policy convergence is well documented for the Global North countries (Bickenbach et al., 2017; Heyer, 2015). This article is both empirically and theoretically valuable, as it demonstrates that similar factors operating in different ways contributing to social regulation policy convergence for two dissimilar countries such as Norway and India, belonging to the Global North and Global South respectively. It seems that internationalization of social regulations is a new normal within disability policy regimes constituting the Global North and Global South countries. However, there is a need for further cross-national disability research, which compares not only the adoption of social regulation reforms, but also its implementation, because effective implementation of such regulatory reforms can help in securing the human rights of disabled people globally. Furthermore, the focus on social regulation reforms in Global South countries should complement and not compete with the implementation of social redistribution policies. Therefore, this article invites more broad-based Global North Global South disability policy research, which explores the policy learning, adoption and implementation across varying institutional systems.

### Disclosure of interest

The author declares that he has no competing interest.

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### **Research Article III**

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## **Research Article IV**

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# Social Resilience in the Labour Market: Learning from Young Adults with Visual Impairments in Oslo and Delhi

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## Abstract

Globally, young adults with visual impairments (YAVI) encounter multiple employment barriers. However, many circumscribe the risk of labour market exclusion and secure gainful employment. This article surfaces protective factors that enable some qualified YAVI from Oslo and Delhi to participate in the labour market. It answers what similar individual and structural protective factors enable YAVI to overcome employment barriers in Oslo and Delhi. The article is theoretically couched in the three dimensions of social resilience linked to the individual's coping, adaptive and transformative capacities, which are mediated by formal institutions, that is, disability organizations and public employment agencies. This comparative article is based on a qualitative case study wherein 29 YAVI were interviewed. It sparks a much-needed cross-national dialogue within youth studies and disability research to view YAVI as resourceful agents and not passive actors.

## Keywords

Youth, social resilience, employment, visual impairment, Norway, India

## Introduction

The youth studies literature has for long discussed the challenges concerning labour transition for young adults, as such transitions have become protracted, non-linear, risk-laden, fragmented, chaotic and more individualized (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007; Coles,

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2018; Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005; Walther, 2006; Woodman, 2012). Young adults are expected to be navigators and negotiators to measure and respond to uncertainties prevailing in the labour market (Furlong et al., 2011; Roberts, 2018). Youth precariousness is amplified, as youths encounter greater risk of being entrapped in flexible or temporary contracts. They might be asked to take up low-paid and unskilled jobs, and in periods of economic recession, they are the first to be dismissed and often the last in the labour market queue. Thus, a general trend towards individualization, coupled with increasing labour market flexibilization, has contributed to labour market precariousness among the youth population (Hvinden et al., 2019; Walther, 2006). These youth transitions become even more precarious for disabled youth on account of individual and structural barriers (Bussi et al., 2019; Chhabra, 2020). First, they encounter rigidity within the education system and labour market. Second, they face inaccessibility within the general environment, transportation systems and information and communications technology. Third, they experience discrimination concerning their capabilities and the soft bigotry of low expectations (King et al., 2003). Historically, within youth research, disabled youth have constituted a marginalized position (Coles, 2018; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Singal, 2008). There has been a limited focus on comprehending their lived perspectives (Gregorius, 2014). This article foregrounds the under-explored and under-reported employment experiences of young adults with visual impairments (YAVI), such as blind and low-vision youths.

Globally, YAVI have a precarious employment situation, as they encounter high employment barriers and limited job opportunities, resulting in poorer employment history, premature labour market exit or permanent exclusion (Chhabra, 2020; Cmar, 2019; Zhou et al., 2013). YAVI are considered to be at risk and/or as risk members within the labour market (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Connors et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2007). Historically, youth research entailing vision-impaired youth has inordinately focused on employment barrier amelioration; however, limited emphasis has been accorded to their experiences associated with employment success (Gregorius, 2014; Shaw et al., 2007). The purpose of this comparative article is to move beyond the discussion of barriers, constraints and limitations and offer positive perspectives grounded in individual capabilities and structural resources which enable a few qualified YAVI to secure employment in Oslo and Delhi.

This exploratory article asks what similar individual and structural protective factors enable YAVI (aged 20–35) to overcome employment barriers in Oslo and Delhi. It discusses the commonalities associated with the employment success of a few YAVI, despite their unique personalities and life circumstances, on the one hand, and the different institutional arrangements and contextual factors prevailing in Oslo and Delhi, on the other. It has a pragmatic point of departure and aims to understand what works by comparing the employment narratives linked to resilience. It refrains from applying a reductionist approach to comprehend resilience (Ungar, 2008). It uncovers individual actions, coupled with institutional enablers, that operated concomitantly to facilitate a few YAVI to accumulate requisite human capital and secure employment in Oslo and Delhi.

This article is valuable on three fronts. First, it has a unique empirical vantage point, as it gives primacy to the marginalized narratives of YAVI from Oslo and Delhi, which has hitherto never been contrasted. Second, comparative research



focusing on the perspectives of disabled youth from the Global North–Global South context is rather scarce (Gregorius, 2014). Their experiences and viewpoints have largely remained absent from academic literature, policy discourse and youth studies research (Chhabra, 2020; Singal, 2008, 2010). Third, the successful employment experiences of YAVI may serve as a magnifier for other disabled youth undergoing an education to employment transition. Furthermore, their experiences of circumnavigating employment challenges may overlap with youth who do not have a disability. Thus, the underexplored and underreported employment insights of YAVI could contribute in a cross-national, interdisciplinary dialogue between youth studies and disability research.

### **Analytical Framework: Resilience**

The concept of resilience has been applied in disparate fields, such as biology, economics, psychology, ecology, anthropology and social policy (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). It has also been employed to explore labour market transitions among the youth population (Bigos et al., 2014; Hvinden et al., 2019). More recently, it has been successfully applied to cross-nationally compare employment precariousness for disabled youth (Bussi et al., 2019). At a fundamental level, resilience entails an individual's capacity to bounce back from adverse, stressful, unfortunate and vulnerable situations. Resilient individuals are often associated with possessing protective psycho-social attributes, such as a healthy self-concept, high self-esteem and a strong sense of self-efficacy (see King et al., 2003, pp. 93–94). In addition, they are shown to demonstrate a positive temperament, internal locus of control, problem-solving skills and an optimistic outlook (Angelocci, 2007; Murray, 2003), which enables them to accumulate human capital, fend off adversities and secure desired well-being. However, this essentializing, individual-centred and outcome-oriented understanding of resilience has been thoroughly critiqued (Ungar, 2008; Wright & Masten, 2015) and has given way to a more holistic, context-dependent and process-oriented understanding (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Historically, within youth research, the concept of resilience has followed 'four waves' (see Hart et al., 2016, pp. 1–2). The first wave gives primacy to individual characteristics that uniquely enable a person to overcome external adversities. The second wave explores the significance of familial, educational and communitive resources as protective factors, which facilitate circumscribing the negative outcomes associated with risk (Murray, 2003). The third wave contextualizes the micro- and meso-levels through the lens of culture (Ungar, 2008). The fourth wave follows an ecological framework grounded in bio-psycho-social explanations (Wright & Masten, 2015). This final wave of resilience offers a broad framework to situate the individual experience, attributes and aspirations within the context of formal and informal institutions, which corresponds well with the concept of social resilience.

Social resilience entails coping, adapting and transformative capacities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 10) that empower an individual to adjust successfully to present and future risks and secure well-being. First, coping capacities enable individuals to absorb immediate risks by mobilizing the resources proximally available, enabling them to mitigate the negative consequences of risk and to restore well-being. Second, the adaptive capacity entails the individual being proactive and

anticipating and preventing the occurrence of risk, so that present and future well-being becomes likely. Third, transformative capacities entail individuals raising their sociopolitical consciousness, actively partaking in civil society organizations and, through sustained collective action and representation, creating social institutions enabling their individual well-being. Within youth research, the concept of social resilience offers a critical and normative framework to comprehend the significance of contextual factors (Bussi et al., 2019; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). It encompasses the influence of protective factors across the individual, relational, community and cultural levels on accumulating human capital and overcoming adversities (Hvinden et al., 2019; Murray, 2003; Ungar, 2008).

### **Contrasting Youth Transition Regimes in Norway and India**

The labour market contexts in Norway and India are significantly different, as they are shaped by distinctive economic, social, cultural and legal factors and varying institutional arrangements (see Chhabra, 2019, pp. 85–86). However, to comprehend the protective factors associated with social resilience and positive employment outcomes for YAVI, it is crucial to pinpoint a few notable differences. Norway is a social democratic welfare state with generous and universalistic welfare provisioning (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). There is a well-funded and centralized public employment agency called the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). Among its responsibilities, it coordinates the work and rehabilitation policies for disabled youth. The labour market in Norway is highly regulated, with robust employment protection (Bussi et al., 2019; Hvinden et al., 2019). In addition, comprehensive safety nets, that is, disability pensions, are available for disabled youth (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018), and such pensions can be combined with earnings from part-time employment (Unge Funksjonshemmede, 2016). Moreover, the Norwegian regime follows a developmental trajectory and undertakes social investments by giving access to higher education to all its citizens almost free of charge (Bussi et al., 2019, p. 143), thereby enabling human capital accumulation.

In contrast, India has a protective welfare state that is highly means-tested, with limited coverage (Chhabra, 2019). There exists no centralized public employment agency coordinating employment policies. The labour market is predominantly informal and fragmented with a poor participation rate (Chhabra, 2020; Singal, 2008). Access to higher education is limited for disabled youth, as it requires paying steep tuition fees. However, financial loans and grants are available for a relatively few disabled youths to pursue higher education (Singal et al., 2011). There is a limited focus on human capital development for and restrictive access to meagre disability pensions, in addition to poor employment protection (Chhabra, 2020; Singal & Jain, 2012; Singal et al., 2011).

This article acknowledges the wide structural and institutional differences prevailing in Norway and India. Notwithstanding the contextual differences, YAVI encounter labour market precariousness in both Oslo (Berge, 2007; Opinion, 2018) and Delhi (Chhabra, 2020; Singal & Jain, 2012; Singal et al., 2011).

## Methods

This article is based on a comparative case study method (Yin, 2012). Qualitative interviews were employed to map and understand the influence of protective factors enabling a few qualified YAVI from Oslo and Delhi to secure gainful employment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, as they give 'privileged access to people's basic experience of the lived world' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 32). During the fieldwork spanning November 2017–June 2018, 29 YAVI were interviewed—17 from India, based in Delhi and neighbouring cities, and 12 from Norway, based in Oslo and neighbouring cities. The interviewees belong to the age group of 20–35 years, with an almost equal gender representation: 15 males and 14 females. Twenty-one interviewees had secured part-time or full-time employment, and six were actively seeking jobs. In addition, one interviewee from Norway was on disability pension, and one was not on disability pension and did not seek a job. Furthermore, almost all the interviewees had concluded higher education (see Table 1 for the interviewee characteristics and Table 2 for job profiles). It is

**Table 1.** Interviewee Characteristics

	Total	Norway	India
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	15	6	9
Female	14	6	8
<b>Age</b>			
20–25	3	1	2
26–30	20	9	11
31–35	6	2	4
<b>Level of visual impairment (based on ICD-10, 2006)</b>			
Moderate vision impairment	4	2	2
Severe vision impairment	13	7	6
Blindness	12	3	9
<b>Nature of visual impairment</b>			
Congenital	13	6	7
Progressive	8	4	4
Adventitious	8	2	6
<b>Highest level of education</b>			
High school	7	4	3
Bachelor's	9	6	3
Master's	13	2	11
<b>Employment status</b>			
Employed, not seeking job	16	6	10
Employed, seeking job	5	3	2
Unemployed, seeking job	6	1	5
Unemployed, not seeking job	1	1	0

(Table 1 continued)

(Table 1 continued)

	Total	Norway	India
Disability pensioner	1	1	0
<b>Nature of employment</b>			
Full-time	16	5	11
Part-time	5	4	1
<b>Sectors of employment</b>			
Government	7	3	4
Private	7	3	4
Non-profit	7	3	4

**Source:** Chhabra (2020, p. 8).**Table 2.** Job Profiles

India	Norway
Public bank official	2 Communication and administration advisor in public sector
Public sector teacher	1 Public and online school teacher
Private bank official	1 Information technology: accessibility and user tester
Information technology/ accessibility consultant	2 Health instructor in the non-governmental sector
Computer and English-language trainer	2 Physical trainer in the non-governmental sector
Recruitment consultant	1 Recruitment consultant
General administration/ organization consultant	1 General administration/organization consultant
Travel operator for hotels	1
Legal advisor	1

**Source:** Based on data collected from the field study and subsequently analyzed.

worth noting that, relatively speaking, the interviewees were more privileged, as they had concluded higher education, had a less chequered employment history, were more conscious of their employment rights and seemed to be more socially mobile, which stands in stark contrast to the socio-economic realities experienced by the majority of youth with visual impairments globally.

The interviewed youth were purposively recruited through snowball sampling. Potential leads concerning interviewees were retrieved via important disability organizations operating in Delhi and Oslo. When the initial interviewees were recruited, they recommended their colleagues and friends to participate in this study. The face-to-face interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide that was used as a springboard to elicit the employment narratives of the interviewees. The interview guide explored the aspects such as the interviewees' biographies, experiences at the previous and current workplace, employment barriers, experiences of participation in employment programmes and work rehabilitation measures, assessment of disability policies, activities of disabled people's organizations and

their career aspirations. Voluntary, informed consent was sought, and appropriate ethical clearances were obtained from the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research Agency (research project reference number 51653). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were thematically analysed to identify 'repeated patterns of meanings' in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). At first, each interview was analysed on an individual level and then compared across broad themes to identify the repeating patterns for each country. Initial codes were assigned manually while perusing the transcripts, and they were compared with the field notes taken immediately after the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Comparison of notes coupled with the search for broad and relevant words in the transcripts led to the refining of the codes and condensation of meanings, which resulted in clustering and comparison of themes for both Oslo and Delhi. The analytical framework of social resilience (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013) enabled organizing the themes concerning some individual and structural protective factors contributing to the employment inclusion of a few qualified YAVI in Oslo and Delhi.

## **Youth, Social Resilience and Employment**

This section presents the youths' perspectives and views them through the analytical lens of social resilience, to map the protective factors located at the individual and structural levels. The first subsection discusses the individual protective factors associated with employability (Angelocci, 2007; King et al., 2003). Research concerning the employment transition of disabled youth has demonstrated that the individual can possess coping, adaptive and transformative capacities to overcome immediate risks, plan for future contingencies and collectively mobilize to take action and alter social arrangements, economic relations and formal institutions (Bussi et al., 2019). However, an individual's agential capabilities are bounded and influenced by external protective factors and context-specific institutions that mediate their opportunities, behaviour and experience (Hvinden et al., 2019; Murray 2003, Ungar, 2008; Wright & Masten, 2015). Therefore, the second section discusses the crucial influence of structural protective factors, such as the services offered by disability organizations and public employment agencies, that allowed these YAVI to manifest social resilience and circumscribe the risk of unemployment.

### *Individual Factors: Coping, Adaptive and Transformative Capacity*

In spite of employment adversity, many YAVI are successful in securing gainful employment. A few protective factors associated with coping, adaptive and transformative capacities, which enable them to circumscribe the risk of unemployment, are discussed below.

#### *Coping Capacity: Assistive Technology*

One pivotal employment barrier in Oslo inhibiting labour market inclusion of YAVI is employers' negative attitudes and misconceptions concerning their work capacity and independent functioning (Berge, 2007; Chhabra, 2020). Many interviewees

employed an active reliance on assistive technology to assuage their prospective employers' concerns and demonstrate their capabilities, in order to avert the adversity of labour market exclusion. The interviewees in Oslo were cognizant of their abilities and shortcomings and appreciated the value of open communication while participating in job interviews. This notion is best encapsulated by Interviewee 19 (blind, female, employed):

I think it's very important that you believe in yourself and that you know yourself pretty well and that you know your needs [...] What kind of accommodations do you need to get to do your job [...] they [prospective employers] ask for some things which you need, how do you use a computer and small questions like that. I just show them that this is not a big thing and I can also tell them that my visual impairment has matured me and is also one of my strengths.

This critical awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses allowed the interviewees to undertake 'content reframing' (King et al., 2003, p. 175), wherein they were able to focus on their capabilities and see their visual impairment in a positive light. This in turn helped some interviewees to signal their employability to their prospective employers during the recruitment process. In addition, many interviewees were able to demonstrate their problem-solving orientation. The experience of Interviewee 23 (low vision, male, employed) is illustrative:

Do not consider anything a problem that can't be fixed. For example if you read slow because the text is small, you make it bigger, if you write slow with hand but you are awesome at writing on a keyboard, get a job where you could do something with the keyboard [...] Never think you can't do anything unless you practically can't, for example drive a car...

Their problem-solving capacity enabled interviewees to reorient the job interview to focus on their individual capabilities, and not merely on their visual impairment. Previous research has found that employment outcomes are positively associated with YAVI who have built competence in the use of computers, alongside assistive technology solutions, that is, screen readers and magnifiers, and are able to demonstrate their employment-related skills during the recruitment process (Shaw et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2013). The acquisition of computer competence strengthened the coping capacity of the interviewees and could enable them to overcome the immediate risk of employment exclusion.

Like their counterparts in Oslo, interviewees in Delhi were able to circumnavigate prospective employers' sceptical attitudes and risk of job interview failure by relying on their competence in the use of computers and smartphones in conjunction with assistive technology. The experience of Interviewee 4 (blind, female, employed) is illustrative:

in the interview they said okay you have done your masters [...] you can't see, how can you do [the job] [...] I took out my phone, I just composed a small text and I sent across [...] I can go and tell everybody about how I can do things, what I can do, what I cannot do [...].

This interviewee gave primacy to conducting open interaction and finding solutions by using her smartphone enabled by a screen reader, which averted her employment

exclusion. Research entailing the employment of vision-impaired people has found that competence in assistive technology enhances their likelihood for employment inclusion (Pal & Lakshmanan, 2012). Furthermore, interviewees learned the usage of assistive tools and technology through open Internet sources, that is, YouTube and podcasts, and all of them use smartphones. By building competence in the use of screen readers, they also bolstered their English-language proficiency, which was considered an important skill to cope within the Delhi labour market. The experience of Interviewee 2 (low vision, male, employed) is illuminating:

Apart from YouTube, the screen reader became my best friend to teach me English. Whatever pronunciation done by this screen reader, I was able to follow it properly. I followed [the screen reader], then I learned a bit of English, [subsequently] I started to speak in English wherever I went.

Interviewees in Delhi assessed that employing assistive technology and competence in the English language partly enhanced their employability.

To sum up, interviewees from both Oslo and Delhi viewed the adoption of assistive technology as a crucial protective factor making them more independent. Employers' negative perceptions often inhibit labour market inclusion of YAVI (Angelocci, 2007; Chhabra, 2020), and through the use of technology, YAVI can signal their employability to their prospective employers (Shaw et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2013). Building competence in assistive technology allowed the interviewees to undertake content reframing (King et al., 2003) and become more solution-oriented, which in turn made them more optimistic and enabled them to cope with proximal employment adversities.

### *Adaptive Capacity: Networking*

YAVI who are able to accumulate and leverage their human capital and obtain paid/unpaid internships are more likely to secure future employment (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Cmar, 2019; Connors et al., 2014; Gregorius, 2014). Many interviewees in Oslo actively network and seek work internship opportunities. This urgency of engaging with the interested people and reaching out to them in potential fora is best encapsulated by Interviewee 22 (blind, male, employed): '[B]e out there, be in conferences, be around on interesting topics [...] I have been to lots of conferences and lots of people know me both by name and [through] internet [...]'. This initiative to network in part enhances their likelihood to secure future employment. As Interviewee 18 (blind, male, employed) stated:

[...] I feel like my ability to network play the role in me getting this job [...] I could say "hi again..its me again" you know, "you already know me [...]"And that's not gonna get you a job right away but at some point [...] it increases your luck or it makes those impossible coincidences a little less impossible[...] its [networking] is going to increase your [employment] chances.

The interviewees undertook this active networking by reaching out to professors from their universities and vision-impaired friends, and they also leveraged the network from family members. YAVI who are able to successfully tap their network

stand a better chance of averting the risk of employment exclusion (Goertz et al., 2010; Gregorius, 2014; Shaw et al., 2007).

Similar to their counterparts in Oslo, many interviewees in Delhi stated the significance of reaching out to their familial, social and professional networks in securing their first employment. A few interviewees used social media to network, with a view to knowing more about available job vacancies and securing skills that were more valuable in the labour market. The networking experience of Interviewee 1 (blind, male, employed) is illuminating:

I used to get in touch with different people [...] I will drop him or her a message on LinkedIn, on Facebook or wherever I could find them. And talk to them, get to know how they work, establish my network [...] I reach out to them.

Traditional networks were also actively leveraged by many interviewees to map out a future career trajectory. As Interviewee 4 (blind, female, employed) stated: ‘So friends, teachers, your seniors who are visually impaired, they gave a lot of guidance as to what all can be achieved, what all can one do [...] that’s how I got into [my first job]’. YAVI who successfully leverage their informal networks, linked to family, kith and kin, are better able to circumscribe the future risk of unemployment in India (Singal, 2008; Singal & Jain, 2012; Singal et al., 2011).

To sum up, many interviewees in Oslo and Delhi reached out to their formal and informal networks to secure work and internship opportunities and get advice on job-related skills, making them more employable. By following this proactive approach, they were able to fend off the risk of future unemployment.

### *Transforming Capacity: Being Moral Agents*

Volunteering for disability organizations is positively correlated with future employment outcomes for YAVI (Angelocci, 2007; Lund & Cmar, 2019). In Norway, interviewees expressed the desire to positively influence the situation of people with visual impairments by undertaking volunteering activities with a prominent disability organization. They undertook collective action in the form of information awareness campaigns and rights advocacy efforts and volunteered to create a more inclusive labour market. The perspective of Interviewee 24 (low vision, male, employed part-time) is illuminating:

we arranged events for visually impaired people or visually impaired youth [...] we also tried to I guess change the world, try to make it better for visually impaired students, trying to make a change by talking to other people [or] politicians.

Many interviewees felt the need to volunteer for and work on issues affecting the visually impaired community, as it gave them a deeper sense of purpose. These perspectives corresponded well with previous research on disabled youth, who, through volunteering, were able to secure self-confidence, boost self-esteem, expand their social network and gain a greater sense of community, which could result into piecemeal social transformation (Gregorius, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). Their efforts to undertake collective action foster social resilience and enhance the likelihood of better employment outcomes (King et al., 2003).



In a similar vein, many interviewees in Delhi undertook disability advocacy before securing gainful employment. They wanted to stay engaged with the visually impaired community. They volunteered for multiple disability organizations based in Delhi. The experience of Interviewee 1 (blind, male, employed) is insightful:

[...] I used to go as an assistive technology expert in various seminars to train persons with [visual] disabilities on the use of assistive technology [...]. I was deeply connected with an initiative [...] who bring persons [or] youth with disability in the mainstream to make them aware of their rights and to connect them with the advocacy field [so that] they should be able to facilitate and create a levelled playing field for themselves as well as persons like them [...]

When YAVI collaborate with each other and undertake collective action, they become agents of change, which not only affects their employment outcomes but also creates avenues for transforming the Indian labour market (Singal & Jain, 2012; Singal et al., 2011).

To sum up, the interviewees from both Oslo and Delhi wanted to be agents who volunteered to enhance social consciousness concerning visual impairment. Many of them wanted to volunteer for issues that affected them directly, as well as those that affected visually impaired youth in general. Research indicates that undertaking self-advocacy to educate the public is positively associated with overcoming employment barriers (Goertz et al., 2010; Gregorius, 2014; Shaw et al., 2007). Disabled youth, through their voluntary commitments, demonstrate active agency as they undertake self-reflection, critically observe the opportunities and constraints around them and take collective action to bring social transformative change (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018).

The individual protective factors manifesting in the form of the coping, adaptive and transformative capacities of YAVI in Oslo and Delhi allowed them to overcome employment adversity and enhanced the likelihood of their labour market inclusion. However, these individual agential capacities were circumscribed by context-dependent institutions (Hvinden et al., 2019; Roberts, 2018), which operated differently in Oslo and Delhi (see Table 3 for individual factors fostering social resilience).

### *Structural Factors Fostering Social Resilience*

Resilience is influenced and mediated by structural factors, which are contingent on context (Bussi et al., 2019; Ungar, 2008). Understanding resilience through a broad framework (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Wright & Masten, 2015) enables the exploration of interlinkages between individual and structural protective factors, which could facilitate in overcoming employment adversity.

### *Disability Organizations*

Disability organizations work as significant protective factors. They allow disabled youth a wholesome ecosystem where they secure opportunities to enhance their skills, nourish a feeling of self-worth and empower themselves with a sense of community

**Table 3.** Individual Factors Associated with Social Resilience

Capacities	Risks		Protective Factors	
	Oslo	Delhi	Oslo	Delhi
Coping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low levels of self-esteem</li> <li>• Lack in competence in the use of assistive technology</li> <li>• Poor mobility skills</li> <li>• High reliance on public employment agency for job search</li> <li>• Inordinate focus on visual impairment and external constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>• Limited competence in the use of assistive technology</li> <li>• Poor mobility skills</li> <li>• High dependence on family and disability organizations</li> <li>• High focus on one's impairment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive attitude: sending multiple job applications</li> <li>• Being solution-oriented, achieving mastery of assistive technology</li> <li>• Being determined, having a never-give-up outlook</li> <li>• Drive to be self-reliant, limited dependence on welfare state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being patient and persistent during job search failure</li> <li>• Being solution-oriented, achieving mastery of assistive technology</li> <li>• Being a fighter, positive framing</li> <li>• Drive to become independent, not to be a family burden</li> </ul>
Adaptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor academic achievements, dropping out from school</li> <li>• Poor networking skills</li> <li>• Lack of job preparedness</li> <li>• Limited job experience, such as no work internships</li> <li>• Slow in incorporating new assistive technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not concluding school and failure to undertake higher education</li> <li>• Poor networking skills</li> <li>• Lack of job preparedness</li> <li>• Limited job experience, such as no work internships</li> <li>• Slow in incorporating new assistive technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking higher education</li> <li>• Active networking</li> <li>• Participating in work training programmes</li> <li>• Continually learning by adopting new assistive devices</li> <li>• Taking up work internships sponsored by public employment agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking higher education</li> <li>• Active networking</li> <li>• Focus on getting paid or unpaid job experience</li> <li>• Willingness to adopt new assistive devices</li> <li>• No reliance on public employment agency, finding work through disability organizations</li> </ul>
Transformative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not identifying with aims, values and methods of disability organizations</li> <li>• Limited interest in securing voluntary work experience</li> <li>• Accepting disability pension, due to poor health or repeated job search failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to, and acceptance within, disability organizations</li> <li>• Limited opportunities in securing voluntary work experience</li> <li>• Fatalistic outlook and scepticism towards positive change through disability rights advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring and job search counselling young applicants with visual impairments</li> <li>• Undertaking disability rights advocacy, such as promoting universal design</li> <li>• Volunteering for disability and civil society organizations, for example organizing summer camps</li> <li>• Aversion to disability pension, desire to contribute to society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering training on the use of assistive technology, for instance screen readers</li> <li>• Conducting workshops on interpersonal skills and job preparedness</li> <li>• Participating in information awareness and disability rights campaigns</li> <li>• Contributing to the community, having no appetite for meagre disability pension</li> </ul>

**Source:** Based on data collected from the field study and subsequently analyzed, by employing social resilience framework (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

belonging (Gregorius, 2014). On a practical level, disability organizations offers rehabilitation programmes and workshops encompassing a wide variety of services, such as using assistive technology, becoming independent in daily-living tasks, achieving transportation efficacy, job search counselling and career mentorship. All these programs and services cumulatively focus on the resources, capabilities and expertise that YAVI ought to possess in order to better cope with and adapt to employment risks (Cavenaugh & Giesen, 2012; Goertz et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2007).

A prominent disability organization in Oslo offers work and rehabilitation training for YAVI to ease their entry into the labour market (Proba, 2012). Many interviewees in Oslo positively assessed the influence of these trainings. The perspective of Interviewee 21 (low vision, female, employed) is enlightening:

Without those workshops I definitely wouldn't have been able to write a good application or know what I should prepare for a job interview, so yeah definitely those kind of workshops both for me and other blind persons are really important for [job] preparation.

These employment and rehabilitation workshops instilled a sense of self-confidence by helping interviewees understand their strengths and weaknesses (Angelocci, 2007). Navigating the labour market was chaotic and stressful for many interviewees. However, the career mentorship programmes facilitated some of them to better cope with labour market failures. Interviewee 19 (blind, female, employed) opined that 'they have this mentor [program] [...] wherein I got some help to organise my own head'. Subsequently, this interviewee got an opportunity to work as a career mentor for other YAVI. In addition, disability organizations offered part-time paid-work positions to help YAVI gain work experience. Moreover, the multifaceted work and rehabilitation services of disability organizations offered many YAVI opportunities to partake in social activities and voluntary engagements (Proba, 2012). The coping, adaptive and transformative capacities of disabled youth seem to be positively influenced by the services offered by disability organizations (Bussi et al., 2019).

There exists a plethora of disability organizations in Delhi that offer work and rehabilitation services to YAVI. These disability organizations offer programmes linked to building competence in the use of assistive technology, enhancing orientation and mobility skills and developing training modules for independent living. The different workshops and rehabilitation trainings enabled many interviewees to become more self-assured, acquire job-relevant skills and subsequently better cope with employment risks. Moreover, these workshops were crucial precursors to enhancing their employability; as Interviewee 14 (blind, female, employed) stated: '...there I learned everything, from computers, daily living skills and mobility to everything, and he [organization leader] was starting up with a computer application course [...] I enrolled myself in that computer application course'. Disability organizations enrolled many interviewees into their work training programmes linked to the usage of assistive technology. Through these training programmes, some interviewees were able to demonstrate their technical competence and convince prospective employers attending job fairs to recruit them. The positive recruitment experience of Interviewee 14 (blind, female, employed) is illustrative: '...I was a trainee in that training program, and she [prospective employer] found me to be very good with the screen readers [...] so then and there she offered me the job'. Unlike those in Oslo, many disability organizations in Delhi play a peculiar role of being an intermediary

between a prospective employer and a qualified applicant with a visual impairment. They empower the YAVI to become employable through work training programmes and offer them job search assistants. In addition, disability organizations reach out to prospective employers with the resume of some of the qualified YAVI who have built competence by participating in their job-related training sessions, volunteering opportunities and work internships. Interviewee 11 (low vision, male, employed) summarizes this notion:

In Delhi you have already so many NGOs [...] people already help you in getting jobs. Big or small, they let you start from somewhere [...] You know already plenty of people working in this sector to let you get jobs. So you have to reach out to these people, contact them and make a social circle where you are interacting with these people.

Multiple disability organizations had a complex ecosystem in Delhi, wherein they held training programmes, acted as liaisons with prospective employers and even offered avenues for voluntary engagement and part-time paid internships. All these cumulatively assisted many interviewees either to secure employment straight away or indirectly forge a career trajectory, thereby partly overcoming the adversity of unemployment.

To sum up, access to and participation within disability organizations was valuable on multiple grounds. First, it boosted the interviewees' self-confidence, enhanced their self-worth and strengthened their sense of community belonging. Second, the interviewees acquired problem-solving abilities, social competence and job-related skills. Third, they gained valuable unpaid work experience, which in part enhanced their employability. Fourth, the interviewees engaged in self-advocacy by articulating their career aspirations and accommodation needs to formal institutions and informal networks. Fifth, they mobilized and undertook disability rights advocacy to raise social consciousness. All this directly or indirectly fostered YAVI's social resilience and strengthened their coping, adaptive and transformative capacities (Bussi et al., 2019; Gregorius, 2014; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018).

### *Public Employment Agency*

The support offered by public employment agencies is crucial in facilitating YAVI who encounter the adversity of employment precariousness to secure work internships and gainful employment (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Cmar, 2019). However, seeking paid internships is not contingent merely on YAVI's personal drive, such as high work motivation or active networking, as it is mediated by country-specific institutional arrangements (Hvinden et al., 2019). In Oslo, the public employment agency, NAV, facilitates disabled youth in securing paid work internships (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). These paid internships can facilitate the building of curriculum vitae (CV), enhance job preparedness and make them ready to compete with others for future jobs, face the evolving realities of the labour market and ultimately secure gainful employment (Berge, 2007).

Interviewees in Oslo positively assessed the access to paid work internships offered by NAV, as it created job tryout opportunities for them. They fended off the future risk of unemployment by building competence, securing references and demonstrating their skills through job-training opportunities. The value of

participating in work internships offered by NAV could be encapsulated by the experience of Interviewee 19 (blind, female, employed):

I am not sure if I would have gotten this job if I have not been in the work training before [...] I was sitting in the next office and I could talk to them and I got a really good reference [...] you learn about yourself and you learn a lot about how it is to be in work, so you learn very much and you have something to write on your CV and that is also really important to have something there because that is what they [prospective employers] look for when you apply for a job [...].

Many interviewees had a personal drive to enhance their skills and secure employment. However, it would have been harder for their individual efforts to materialize if they lacked the work training opportunities supported by NAV. The interviewees were afraid of going to a job interview with gaps in their resume and not being able to assuage the productivity concerns of their prospective employers. Therefore, they took the initiative to secure work internships supported by NAV, which in some cases translated into full-time employment whilst in other cases led to better pathways to future employment. This finding corresponds well with a previous research that states that YAVI who undertake work sponsored by NAV and build their CVs have a better likelihood for future employment (Berge, 2007). In addition, NAV readily offers disability pension to YAVI in Oslo (Opinion, 2018). Instead of relying on disability pension, the interviewees assessed that NAV should view them as capable individuals and focus more on offering paid work internship opportunities.

No interviewee from Delhi secured employment through any public employment agency. However, many of the interviewees actively tried to secure employment through internships and/or training by relying on the support and services offered by disability organizations. Like their counterparts in Oslo, the interviewees were particularly concerned about building a good CV. The perspective of Interviewee 11 (low vision, male, employed), who undertook an internship alongside higher education, is illustrative: '[...] get that [internship] on your CV, get that experience, get that feel of the environment and understand what you have to do to be successful in that [work] environment'. The support from public employment agencies in securing work internships or job training opportunities was immaterial. Nonetheless, the interviewees leaned on their social capital and the support of disability organizations to find future employment avenues.

The qualitative findings correspond with previous studies that state that in the absence of a well-funded welfare state with strong formal institutions dealing with public employment support, the role of informal networks, that is, familial and community support, is pivotal for disabled youth to cope with employment adversities and to adapt to future labour market demands (Gregorius, 2014; Singal & Jain, 2012). There is a dearth of formal institutional support, as the public employment agency is a peripheral factor in influencing the employment trajectory of disabled people (Chhabra, 2019). Therefore, disability organizations partially substituted the function of public employment agencies and offered work internship opportunities, which enabled many interviewees to secure employment-related skills and prepare for future employment.

In essence, structural enablers, such as support from disability organizations and the services offered by public employment agencies, differently mediated the

**Table 4.** Institutional Enablers Fostering Resilience

Institutions	Risks		Protective Factors	
	Oslo	Delhi	Oslo	Delhi
Disability organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access</li> <li>• Bureaucratic structure</li> <li>• Limited focus on employment training and workshops</li> <li>• Limited opportunities for summer internship and voluntary activities</li> <li>• Focus on offering welfare services</li> <li>• Viewing visual impairment as a medical condition relying on welfare state</li> <li>• Lack of focus on community building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access</li> <li>• Bureaucratic structure</li> <li>• Limited focus on employment training and workshops</li> <li>• Limited opportunities for summer internship and voluntary activities</li> <li>• Being unable to organize job fairs</li> <li>• Viewing visual impairment as a medical condition requiring society's charity</li> <li>• Competition with other disability organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to employment workshops</li> <li>• Opportunities to learn from mentors</li> <li>• Workshops on resume writing, interviews and assistive technology</li> <li>• Opportunities to volunteer in the youth section and secure work experience</li> <li>• Participating in social events and building network</li> <li>• Contributing to the vision-impaired community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to employment workshops</li> <li>• Participating in job fairs</li> <li>• Workshops on resume writing, interviews and assistive technology</li> <li>• Opportunities to secure temporary work and gain experience</li> <li>• Participating in social events and building network</li> <li>• Contributing to the vision-impaired community</li> </ul>
Public employment agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delays in offering assistive tools and technology</li> <li>• Offering less relevant work internships that do not enhance job skills or giving disability pensions</li> <li>• Limited access to and poor employability focus of labour market programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited opportunities to secure assistive tools and technology</li> <li>• Limited support services and relevance of public employment agencies</li> <li>• Limited or no opportunities to participate in labour market programmes</li> <li>• Lack of access to paid work internships</li> <li>• Bureaucratic structure and limited resource allocation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to secure assistive tools and technology, for example long cane, screen readers and magnifiers</li> <li>• Access to paid work internships through wage subsidies</li> <li>• Opportunities to participate in labour market programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using disability organizations and familial and community support to secure assistive tools and technology</li> <li>• Securing paid or unpaid internships through familial and disability organization support</li> </ul>

**Source:** Based on data collected from the field study and subsequently analyzed.

employment opportunities for YAVI in Oslo and Delhi (see Table 4 for institutional enablers fostering social resilience). Indeed, formal institutions shape the labour market transition of youth by enabling or circumscribing their agency (Furlong et al., 2011; Roberts, 2018; Walther, 2006), and the significance of labour market transition for the youth population can hardly be overstated (Bigos et al., 2014; Brzinsky-Fay, 2007; Hvinden et al., 2019).

## Concluding Remarks

This article compares a few potential factors leading to employment inclusion among some qualified YAVI from Oslo and Delhi, employing the concept of social resilience. There seems to be a dynamic and multifaceted interplay between individual and structural protective factors, which facilitated identifying some surprising similarities and crucial differences concerning social resilience.

First, the significant overlapping individual factors entailed proficiency in the usage of assistive technology, which boosted YAVI's self-confidence and strengthened their coping capacities. Moreover, YAVI successfully employed their interpersonal skills to secure work internships, which enhanced their adaptive capacity and improved their likelihood for future employment. Finally, through undertaking volunteering engagements, they perceived themselves as moral actors having transformative capacity who actively contributed back to the vision-impaired community, as they undertook disability rights advocacy. The findings of this article correspond with previous research that suggests that the factors such as greater competency in the usage of computers with assistive technology (Zhou et al., 2013) and undertaking of paid internships (Cmar, 2019; Connors et al., 2014) are in part positively associated with better employment outcomes for YAVI. Moreover, volunteering in disability organizations seems to open novel pathways to employment for YAVI (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Lund & Cmar 2019). However, this contradicts the findings concerning voluntary engagements and employment inclusion reported by Bussi et al. (2019). YAVI's transformative capacity grounded in self-advocacy efforts partly mirrors the capability of youth within the labour market, who are not only navigators and negotiators (Hvinden et al., 2019; Walther, 2006) but also agents of change who undertake self-organization and collective action against growing labour market precariousness, thereby challenging the individualization trend (Furlong et al., 2011; Roberts, 2018).

Second, there was a coinciding structural factor that fostered social resilience among YAVI and mediated their employment opportunities. These entailed participation in job-related training programmes, social engagements and volunteering opportunities offered by disability organizations (Berge, 2007). These support systems boosted their self-confidence and facilitated their building of social skills and job preparedness. YAVI's participation in the social, rehabilitation and volunteering activities of disability organizations facilitated their human capital accumulation, which in turn enhanced their employability.

Third, alongside these overlapping protective factors, there were some stark differences that uniquely influenced the employment outcomes for interviewees in Oslo and Delhi. A case in point is the significance of acquiring English-language skills as a pivotal individual factor for securing gainful employment in Delhi.

However, the employment opportunities for interviewees in Oslo were not at all impacted by their English-language proficiency.

Fourth, the one significant diverging structural factor was the services and benefit support offered by public employment agencies. These agencies offered paid work internships wherein employers could secure wage subsidies support to temporarily recruit disabled youth in Oslo (Bussi et al., 2019; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018). It was apparent that their personal protective factors, such as computer competence and securing work internship opportunities, were in part shaped by the formal institutional support system. This finding is congruent with previous research that found that public employment agencies significantly influence employment outcomes for disabled youth in Oslo (Bussi et al., 2019) and that their support is pivotal for YAVI (Berge, 2007; Opinion, 2018). Furthermore, within the Nordic region, the youth labour market transitions are influenced by the plethora of active labour market policies organized by public employment agencies (Bigos et al., 2014). However, interviewees in Delhi did not have the opportunity to rely on any such formal labour market institution or activation policies, as there is no centralized, well-funded, national-level public employment agency (Chhabra, 2019). Disability organizations partly substituted the role of public employment agency in Delhi, as they organized job fairs and worked as mediators between prospective employers and qualified YAVI. They had relatively more prominence in Delhi, and the public employment agency clearly had a more significant role in Oslo. The employment support offered by formal institutions differed, which disparately shaped interviewees' labour market opportunities.

In essence, YAVI in Oslo and Delhi have varying capabilities, which are conditioned by distinctive external factors that influence their employment inclusion. Nonetheless, the fundamental commonalities associated with the coping, adaptive and transformative actions employed by YAVI from Oslo and Delhi are empirically intriguing. Therefore, this article generates a 'working hypothesis' to offer analytic generalization (Yin, 2012, p. 20) by speculating that some protective factors could be positively associated with employment outcomes for YAVI which coincide, in spite of significant personal and contextual differences. Furthermore, the article deliberately moves beyond discussing the banality of big differences, which are intuitively understood for YAVI who are seeking employment in the highly differentiated labour markets prevailing in Oslo and Delhi. Rather, this comparative article surfaces a few commonalities to secure a more nuanced understanding of the protective factors that foster social resilience and enable YAVI in overcoming employment adversity. It invites a much-needed interdisciplinary Global North-South dialogue within youth studies and disability research to view YAVI not as passive actors but as active agents who are capable of not only individually coping with and adapting to employment risks but also collectively transforming their labour market reality.

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### **Author's Bio-sketch**

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## **Research Article V**

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## ARTICLE

# Insider, Outsider or an In-Between? Epistemological Reflections of a Legally Blind Researcher on Conducting Cross-National Disability Research

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Researchers have long debated the perils and possibilities associated with being an insider or an outsider while conducting qualitative research. This paper revisits this insider-outsider debate by drawing on the experiential insights of a legally blind researcher who, as a part of a comparative study, conducted qualitative interviews with 29 young adults with visual impairments from Oslo and Delhi in 2017 and 2018. It inquires into how the researcher's positionality and identity influences the process of knowledge production while conducting Global North-South comparative disability research. Based on critical reflections across different stages of the research process, the paper problematizes the simplistic binaries, such as insider-outsider, Privileged-Oppressed, Us-Them and Native-Foreign. It argues for the adoption of an in-between researcher status located somewhere on the insider-outsider continua. Comparative disability research entailing Global North and Global South countries is scarce. This paper offers valuable epistemological insights for other researchers working with marginalized groups.

**Keywords:** insider research; outsider research; Norway; India; comparative disability research; in-between

## 1. Introduction

The question associated with insider and outsider researcher positionality has been vociferously debated in social research (Bridges 2017; Crossley et al. 2016; Griffith 1998; Hellawell 2006). In structural terms, researchers who consider themselves insiders are the members of 'specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social statuses; outsiders are the non-members' (Merton 1972: 21). Researchers' insider status entails that they share common characteristics, such as impairment status, race and sexual orientation, with the marginal group they are studying, whilst outsiders stand at a distance from the marginal group and therefore are considered as non-members. On the one hand, the researcher's positionality of having an insider-outsider status has significant ramifications (Hellawell 2006), because the researcher who is perceived as an insider by the participants could secure privileged access and undertake co-construction of knowledge (Chaudhry 2018; Humphrey 2007). On the other hand, if the researcher is perceived as an outsider, they might be able to ask naïve questions to the vulnerable group and thereby push the envelope of understanding for the researcher, the marginal community being researched and the general public (Bridges 2017). Critical awareness about insider-outsider positionality is extremely important while conducting research on marginalized groups such as disabled people, as historically they have been objectified, othered and oppressed during the research process (Barnes 1996; Barnes 2008; Oliver 1990; Oliver 1992; Stone & Priestley 1996). This paper has a unique empirical and epistemic vantage point because of two factors. First, it is based on the observations secured from the fieldwork conducted in Oslo and Delhi entailing young adults with visual impairments (henceforth YAVI). Although vital, comparative disability research entailing Global North and Global South is few and far between (Chhabra 2020). Knowledge production and its dissemination is predominantly unidirectional, flowing from Global North to South (Grech & Soldatic 2016), thereby constituting a challenge of 'scholarly colonialism' (Meekosha 2008: 2) and perpetuating the power imbalance across the Global North-South divide (Crossley et al. 2016). Second, this comparative research is conducted by a person with a severe visual impairment endeavoring to surface the hitherto marginalized voice of YAVI who are economically excluded and socio-culturally othered across countries belonging to the Global North and Global South (Chhabra 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to lay bare my critical reflection process associated with questions of identity, positionality and reflexivity to discuss the complex methodological issues associated with conducting either insider or outsider research. Although I initially considered myself, and was intuitively perceived as, an insider by the youth participants because of my impairment status, nonetheless, I was othered on distinctive vectors associated with biographical

experiences and social location. Therefore, the paper challenges the dichotomous construction of insider-outsider positionality (Bridges 2017) and argues for the adoption of a more nuanced researcher position of an in-betweener (Chaudhry 2018; Crossley et al. 2016), predicated on increased reflexivity and critical awareness.

## 2. Insider/Outsider Research

In common parlance, an insider is an 'Insighter' who has access to and an understanding of the history, culture and social life of a marginal group owing to his/her 'continued socialization in the life of a group' (Merton 1972: 15). Insider-researchers acknowledge that knowledge is intimately tied to experience. They acquire tacit knowledge owing to their in-group socialization; align themselves with the values, interests and commitments of the group; and they employ sensitivity to achieve empathic understanding (Fay 1996; Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009). Insider-researchers have built a trust-surplus and therefore could secure access to the group easily (Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009). In addition, they could ask difficult questions and acquire thick, authentic descriptions on sensitive themes. The researcher could undertake data dissemination, which could assist in the advocacy efforts. Insider-research is considered to be less exploitative and more empowering as it prioritizes giving voice to the previously silenced perspectives from marginalized groups (Bridges 2017). All these features cumulatively make insider-research more ethical and valuable for the marginal group and the general society (Bridges 2017).

Although being an insider might seem epistemologically fruitful, there is a persistent threat of individual and group solipsism while conducting insider research (Fay 1996; Merton 1972). Individual solipsism contends that 'each person has privileged access to his or her own mental states and processes' (Fay 1996: 10). However, researchers have to be adequately skeptical, as knowledge predicated exclusively on individual experience could be deemed subjective and unreliable (Fay 1996: 21–22; Bridges 2017: 345). Therefore, researchers ought to exercise requisite caution while comprehending and interpreting the knowledge-claims exclusively emerging out of individual experiences. Similarly, group solipsism argues that each group eventually 'have a monopoly of knowledge about itself' (Merton 1972: 14). It is problematic, because if knowledge and its production is rigidly reduced to the parameter of group-identity then 'we all would be epistemically trapped in our own little homogeneous worlds' (Fay 1996: 10) and run a risk of being 'epistemologically and morally isolated' (Bridges 2001: 355). Therefore, the insider-researcher has to guard against these individual and group solipsistic pitfalls during the process of data collection and analysis.

Moreover, for insiders it might be more difficult to manage the expectations of the members from the marginal group, wherein they might be interested in the data production that is more aligned with their values instead of having empirical fidelity. They might also expect favors in the form of friendship, financial help and counselling support (Humphrey 2007). This in turn can lead to serious ethical dilemmas (Hellawell 2006). In addition, insiders possess tacit knowledge of the marginal group and a shared understanding, which might cause them to take the primary issues for granted. Their immersion with the group life could cause difficulties in achieving adequate analytical distance (Merton 1972). Furthermore, it is very hard to be an absolute insider to a group, because there is a pernicious challenge linked to group heterogeneity and intersecting identity (Crossley et al. 2016; Humphrey 2007). An insider might have distinctive personal and social features coupled with multi-layered identities, which might 'render them outsiders in certain respects and insiders in others' (Bridges 2017: 341).

In light of these complex challenges associated with being an insider during the research process, it is epistemologically expedient and methodologically prudent to be an outsider who is far from 'the corrupting influence of group loyalties' (Merton 1972: 30). Outsiders experience more freedom from particularistic expectations and group loyalties, which facilitates them to ask novel questions and challenge accepted explanations (Fay 1996). They tend to minimize 'the presence of the researcher in the research product' (Griffith 1998: 361). They could rely on 'Verstehen', empathic understanding to more rigorously comprehend and explicate the social phenomena (Merton 1972), as they do not seek to achieve 'subjective psychological identification' with the marginal group they study (Fay 1996: 24). The outsider-research is particularly valuable as it could enhance the understanding of the researcher, the marginalized community and the wider public (Bridges 2017; Humphrey 2007). Yet, the ambition to conduct outsider research is problematic, as an outsider might have an identity-marker or biographical experience that overlaps with the group they study, and achieving so-called objective distance and value-neutrality might be an elusive goal (Griffith 1998; Chaudhry 2018; Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009).

It is apparent that both the insider and outsider researcher positionality have their inherent benefits and intrinsic limitations. The researcher's positionality is rather fluid, and it is futile to regard a researcher exclusively as a culturally embedded, subjective insider or an objective, detached outsider (Crossley et al. 2016; Griffith 1998). In order to better comprehend the nebulous space existing between the insider-outsider dichotomy (Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009: 60; Humphrey 2007), the paper leans on a conceptualization of the researcher as a stranger who purposively wanders (Simmel 1950). A stranger's purposefulness is in part grounded in 'Wertbeziehung', which determines the foci of research interests and value orientation (Merton 1972: 16). Based on their personal, social and situational factors, a stranger could leverage 'distance and nearness, indifference and involvement' while studying a group (Simmel 1950: 404). The non-committal stranger could be an in-betweener (Chaudhry 2018) who could transcend the strict binary of insider-outsider researcher positionality. The stranger could occupy the hyphenated third space (Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009). By adopting the positionality of being an in-betweener vis-à-vis their interlocutors, they could offer a more nuanced understanding, which is contingent upon multiple identities, complex biographies and layered social



locations (Crossley et al. 2016). However, the in-betweener’s fluid researcher positionality could be a methodological ‘tightrope’ to walk on (Humphrey 2007: 16), because a researcher can neither retreat as a distant outsider, nor be preoccupied with group solidarity as an intimate insider.

### 3. The Research Project and My Positionality

This paper belongs to a comparative case study (Yin 2012) wherein I interviewed YAVI from Oslo and Delhi in 2017–2018. The interviewees belong to the age group of 20–35 years with an almost equal gender representation. Most of the interviewed youth had previously secured higher education and were either actively seeking jobs or were engaged in part-time or full-time contractual employment in Oslo or Delhi (see the characteristics of participants in **Table 1**). Before commencing the interviews, I secured ethical clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (research project reference number 51653).

**Table 1:** Characteristics of participants.

	Total	Norway	India
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	15	6	9
Female	14	6	8
<b>Age</b>			
20–25	3	1	2
26–30	20	9	11
31–35	6	2	4
<b>Highest level of education</b>			
High School	7	4	3
Bachelors	9	6	3
Masters	13	2	11
<b>Employment status</b>			
Employed not seeking job	16	6	10
Employed seeking job	5	3	2
Unemployed seeking job	6	1	5
Unemployed not seeking job	1	1	0
Disability pensioner	1	1	0
<b>Nature of employment</b>			
Full-time	16	5	11
Part-time	5	4	1
<b>Employment sectors</b>			
Government	7	3	4
Private	7	3	4
Non-profit	7	3	4
<b>Level of visual impairment (based on ICD-10, 2006)</b>			
Moderate vision impairment	4	2	2
Severe vision impairment	13	7	6
Blindness	12	3	9
<b>Nature of visual impairment</b>			
Congenital	13	6	7
Progressive	8	4	4
Adventitious	8	2	6
<b>Geographical parameter</b>			
Raised in the capital city/region	7	2	5
Migrated to the capital city	19	7	12

The Global North-South research foci entailing the comparison of Norway and India was intuitively relevant for me, as I am both a person of Indian descent and have lived and worked in Norway for many years. Initially, I considered myself as an insider because, firstly, a significant identity-marker (i.e., vision impairment) overlaps between the interviewed participants and me. Secondly, I had previously lived and worked in Delhi and had moved in and out of the labor market in Oslo. My employment history could potentially correspond with the labor market experiences of the youth participants. Thirdly, a majority of the participants have geographically relocated from different parts of India to Delhi and Norway to Oslo in order to seek employment. This could coincide with my biographical experience from the formative years. Finally, I am 33 years old, which maps with the participants' age group (20–35 years). This biographical affinity could offer a common experiential point of departure and endow me with an insider status.

However, in spite of a few overlapping factors, I realized that my biographical experience and social location often distanced me from the participants, who partly othered me on the vectors of gender, class, level of education, language-skills and nationality. While conducting Global North-South research, it is vital to acknowledge the complexity and multiplicity associated with the researcher's identity, the inherent challenges concerning power imbalance linked to the researcher's position and their subsequent influence on the research process (Crossley et al. 2016). The cross-national fieldwork made me realize that I was an in-between with partial overlapping identities in relation to the participants (Chaudhry 2018).

#### 4. Locating Insider/Outsider Debate in Disability Research

Disability research is no stranger to the insider-outsider debate. Historically, there has been a wedge, wherein medical professionals, public bureaucrats and non-disabled researchers have presented the outsider perspective predicated on medical diagnosis, administrative categories and sociological constructs (Oliver 1990; Oliver 1992; Pothier & Devlin 2006). Whilst the disabled scholars, disabled people and disability organizations claimed to present the insider perspective based on a shared identity-marker (i.e., impairment status and a similar experience of societal exclusion) (Barnes 1996; Barnes 2008).

In the early days of disability rights movement, disability organizations and disabled scholars have sparked a disability rights movement globally based on materialist perspectives, amplifying the economic subordination and social marginalization of disabled people by the non-disabled society (Charlton 1998; Thomas 2006). Disabled scholars have argued for validating the experiences of disabled people, while the research done by non-disabled scholars has been considered 'as a violation of their experience' resulting in their disempowerment' (Oliver 1992: 105). In 1981, Paul Hunt, a British disabled activist, labelled non-disabled researchers as parasite people and put forward the radical claim that these non-disabled researchers benefited from or exploited the disabled subjects while conducting research. He considered that researchers were neither detached nor objective and their self-imposed obsession with detachment was intrinsically hypocritical and flawed. Due to such ethical and epistemological concerns, disabled people became wary of non-disabled researchers (Stone & Priestley 1996). Furthermore, disabled scholars have concluded that 'researchers should be espousing commitment not value freedom, engagement not objectivity, and solidarity not independence' (Barnes 1996: 110). Disabled scholars, in conjunction with disabled people and their organizations, demanded to take full control over the process of the research production concerning disability (Charlton 1998; Oliver 1990). In addition, disabled people and their organizations advocated to set the research agenda and they asked questions such as *What type of knowledge is being produced? How is it being produced? and Who is producing it and benefiting from it?* (Oliver 1992; Barnes 2008).

In the early 1990s, the concept of emancipatory disability research was introduced (Oliver 1992). The slogans 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (Charlton 1998: 3) and 'No participation without representation' (Oliver 1992: 105), which emerged as a consequence of a vibrant disability rights movement and vigorous disability scholarship from the 1990s, have had significant epistemological and ethical consequences for conducting disability research.

Undoubtedly, the identity-based disability politics, disability rights movement and disability scholarship has achieved relative success in promoting rights for disabled people and broadening the disability research agenda. Nonetheless, it has been thoroughly critiqued on multiple grounds. First, it perpetuates separatist notions of 'us', the disabled people, versus 'them', the non-disabled people (Shakespeare 2014: 106). Second, it overlooks the shortcomings of identity-centered research as there exists 'multiple and intertwined strands in our identities' (Thomas 2006: 179). Third, it is rather unidimensional and fails to resonate with the gender dimension (Ghai 2015; Morris 1996; Traustadóttir 2006). Furthermore, the recent turn towards social, linguistic and cultural constructions of disability (Goodley 2017; Gustavsson 2004) coupled with the popularization of critical disability theory (Pothier & Devlin 2006) have further problematized the notion of identity-based disability research.

Alongside the poignant critique of disability research coming from the European and North-American disability scholars, it is worth noting that disability research has predominantly been Global North-centric, as the perspectives of disabled people from the Global South largely have been overlooked and failed to shape the disability research agenda (Chhabra 2020; Goodley 2017; Meekosha 2008). However, in the last few years, active efforts are being made to challenge the unidirectional flow of knowledge production from Global North to Global South (Grech & Soldatic 2016) and to move beyond the 'liberal, identity-based framework' in order to acknowledge that disability identity is

complex, intersectional and multilayered (Chaudhry 2018: 72; Ghai 2015; Thomas 2006; Traustadóttir 2006). The diversity within disabled peoples' experiences and the relationship of disability with the identity markers 'of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and social class' (Goodley 2017: 44) have cumulatively expanded the contours of the insider-outsider debate within disability research. In essence, the disabled scholars have challenged the outsider perspective and problematized the researcher's identity and position based on three arguments: epistemological, ethical and ethico-political (see Bridges 2017: 344). These interconnected arguments have influenced the epistemic priorities within disability research.

## 5. Insider/Outsider Perspectives at Different Stages of Research

The researcher's positionality of being an insider, outsider or an in-betweener significantly affects the different stages of the research process, as both insiders and outsiders have 'their distinctive assets and liabilities' (Merton 1972: 33). Similarly, being an in-betweener (Chaudhry 2018) and occupying a fluid hyphenated space (Humphrey 2007) somewhere across the insider-outsider continua (Hellowell 2006) entails epistemic and methodological implications.

### 5.1 Research Design

The primary factor that shaped my research interest was the fact that I am a person with visual impairment, whilst the secondary factor was that I had a firsthand experience of applying for, failing to secure and eventually gaining employment in both Oslo and Delhi. Therefore, I chose the theme of comparing employment experiences of YAVI from Oslo and Delhi.

From the beginning, I was immersed in this comparative research project, and my previous knowledge, prior experiences and intimate familiarity with the theme enabled me to ask pertinent questions, such as what similarities or differences exist among employment experiences of YAVI from Oslo and Delhi. These questions have hitherto never been raised within the comparative disability research. *Wertbeziehung* vindicates the prevalence of distinctively different foci of research interests predicated upon subjective position and social location of the researchers (Merton 1972; Fay 1996; Griffith 1998), and it is straightforward to acknowledge that my biological constraint and biographical parameters shaped my research interests, questions and the interview-guide. Notwithstanding *Wertbeziehung*, outsiders (i.e., researchers who do not have a visual impairment) could definitely design a similar research project, entailing YAVI from Oslo and Delhi. The recent comparative research entailing youth with disabilities conducted by non-disabled researchers vindicates this observation (see Halvorsen & Hvinden 2018).

### 5.2 Recruiting Participants

The participants for this study were recruited in a purposive and opportunistic manner through a snowball sampling technique. In the first phase of this comparative project, policy-experts were interviewed and some of them enabled in seeking contact with the disability organizations working with employment and rehabilitation issues of YAVI in Oslo and Delhi. At the beginning of the field-study in India, the qualitative data was collected from participants and a European assistant accompanied me throughout this process. I was able to gain access, interact with and build rapport with YAVI as they initially perceived me as an insider, owing to my visual impairment. My impairment disclosure was pivotal during this phase of data-collection, as the participants became more willing to share their intimate life-stories, reflect upon their difficult employment experiences and recommend their friends and colleagues to participate in this comparative research project. They felt comfortable as I could offer a safe space for them to express their employment experiences without any inhibitions. The boundaries between the participants and me as a researcher were initially blurred. Being an insider allows achieving privileged access and facilitates in building trust with the oppressed group (Bridges 2017; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Because the insider socializes within the group, they can easily leverage professional networks and pull the social levers to gain access and to understand the issues faced by the members of the marginalized group (Crossley et al. 2016; Griffith 1998). The disabled people have previously viewed non-disabled researchers through reluctance and skepticism, as they have been portrayed as victims fulfilling a preordained tragic role (Oliver 1990). In addition, the non-disabled researchers have been accused of objectifying and exploiting the disabled people in order to further their academic or research careers (Barnes 1996; Barnes 2008; Stone & Priestley 1996). Indeed, accessing the marginalized groups and comprehending their world-views could pose a data-collection challenge for outsider-researchers (Bridges 2017).

It was relatively easy to gain access, build trust and interview YAVI from Delhi, as I shared a significant identity-marker in the form of my biological constraint. However, throughout the interviews, the veneer of me being an insider was ripped off, as questions were raised concerning my identity and social location. The following incident pointedly encapsulates the issue of multilayered identity. Before commencing an interview at the premises of a prominent disability organization, one blind participant asked his sighted colleague if I was Indian, as I spoke English so well. His sighted interlocutor described my features: light-skinned, long hair, accompanied by a European assistant. While this conversation was transpiring in Hindi, and I could fully understand the content of it and interject with my explanations linked to nationality, I felt I was being socio-culturally othered and treated as an outsider. In spite of the fact that I

have an Indian name, I understand and speak Hindi, and the brief introduction prior to the interview categorically stated that I was a person of Indian descent who was working in Norway, this youth participant could not initially accept that I was Indian and distanced himself from me, as, in his assessment, our sociological reality did not intersect. Furthermore, in subsequent interviews, the use of the word 'Sir', or phrases such as, 'I don't speak good English like you' seemed to create an unanticipated distance between the participants and me as a researcher. Although I shared the identity marker of being vision-impaired, many participants treated me as an outsider whose biographical experiences and social location were far removed from their lived worlds (Griffith 1998; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Some participants had lived their formative years in rural India, and when they realized that I was born in a middle-class family in an urban city, at times their responses muted and I felt a peculiar sense of estrangement from their narratives. For example, while reflecting upon the work-responsibilities undertaken to support his mother during the initial years one participant remarked:

My mother pushed me to do something ... [household] work. ...In our village, we are lacking water facility. Previously we had too [much] difficulty that in the village we need to bring water from one or two kilometer far, that means we need to pick pot or something and go and get the water. So I was helping her in that. ... [Also] the cooking work and etc. for the home.

The mother of this youth participant with visual impairment expected him to do household chores, relatively common for a rural Indian setting. This stands in stark contrast to my late mother who relentlessly advocated to include me within a mainstream school, expected me to secure good academic grades and could afford to keep me away from the household chores. The glaring disparities of my formative experiences are punctuated by the privilege of being born in a middle-class urban family. In part, my social location precluded me from intuitively understanding the biographical stories of many participants who had experienced a greater degree of marginalization and exclusion as compared to what I had witnessed. In essence, descriptive factors, such as class-specific formative experiences, English language skills and lighter skin tone, distanced me from many of the participants and problematized the simplistic binary between insider-outsider and native-foreign. In addition, being accompanied by a European assistant further complicated and colored the data-collection process and made it easier for participants to ascribe the outsider-status to me.

Similarly, the data-collection process in Oslo was facilitated by contacting a prominent disability organization working with blind and partially sighted people. Because I had acquaintances who worked in the organization, it was quicker to secure contact with potential participants to conduct interviews. Moreover, like the counter-parts from Delhi, once the participants consented to contribute, they recommended their friends and colleagues. However, the data-collection process had its fair share of challenges. The language barrier seemed hard to circumnavigate, as I wanted to conduct the interviews in English and most of the prospective participants preferred Norwegian language. It was possible to purposively recruit acquaintances who had visual impairment and were willing to be interviewed in English. However, it was difficult to follow through on their potential participant leads.

Notwithstanding the language barrier, like Delhi, the participants in Oslo primarily consented to contribute in the research project owing to the presence of a common identity-marker (i.e., visual impairment). Furthermore, they were keen to share their employment experiences, as relatively little attention has been given to their exclusion from the labor market and they felt that I could comprehend better the exclusionary mechanisms because I was an immigrant to Norway. Youth with minority ethnic status and disabilities encounter significant employment barriers in the Norwegian labor market (Halvorsen & Hvinden 2018). Moreover, I had a nominal membership of a prominent disability organization, and through their social and cultural events I interacted with many YAVI from Oslo. This initial familiarity and name recognition made me neither an intimate insider nor a distant outsider for the participants. This lukewarm in-between position facilitated me to gain the unexplored and underreported employment insights of the YAVI from Oslo. Furthermore, several interviewees were curious about the comparative research project, as it is unheard of to contrast the employment experiences of YAVI from Oslo and Delhi. The initial curiosity-factor coupled with my impairment-status facilitated in the recruitment of YAVI from Oslo.

To accentuate further the diverging layers of identity, I will describe the identity markers of a youth participant and contrast it with mine. One of the participants was a young female with low-vision, relying on magnification solution. She was a disability pensioner and had recently resumed her higher education. In addition, she had a Norwegian nationality and had difficulties conversing in English, whilst I am a young male, legally blind, relying on screen-reader solution, employed as a researcher holding an Indian nationality and possess relatively good English proficiency skills. At the level of gender, the degree of vision impairment, employment status, nationality and language skills, my biographical experiences and social location diverged considerably from that of the young woman. Therefore, although I shared a similar biological feature with the interviewee, nevertheless, there was a dissimilar sociological reality that distanced me. Perspectives linked to intersectional identity and plurality of individual experiences (Goodley 2017; Pothier & Devlin 2006; Thomas 2006) problematized the researcher position predicated on a simplistic insider-outsider binary, as during the recruitment process I frequently found myself to be an in-between (Chaudhry 2018; Crossley et al. 2016).

### **5.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

One of the stated objectives of my research project was to give voice to and validate the experiences of the hitherto marginalized group of YAVI. This gave them the confidence to express their employment challenges and discuss pragmatic solutions. During the course of interviews, they often relied on the pronouns 'we', 'our', 'us' to indicate some of the perennial employment barriers, such as employers' discrimination, which are encountered by people with visual impairments in the labor market (see Chhabra 2020). The boundary between the participants and me as a researcher often blurred when they forgot about my diverging biographical experience and social location, and they incorporated me within their employment narrative. Also, the usage of phrases such as 'you understand', 'you know what I mean', 'you believe this thing', 'you must have noticed' suggests the presence of trust and open communication, resulting in thick, authentic and rich employment narratives. However, not all participants relied on the common identity parameter of visual impairment. A case in point is the experience of female participants who were raised in rural India and migrated to Delhi for work. They often used phrases such as 'I don't know how to explain this', which reiterated the distance between the participants and me as a researcher and nudged me to ask clarifying questions.

In addition, some participants from Oslo who perceived me as an insider felt that we had common overlapping experiences of exclusion from the labor market in Oslo. This perception of being an insider contingent on my employment history was problematic, as they often did not explain the mechanisms of their labor market exclusion explicitly. They presumed that I possessed implicit understanding. Often I had to ask clarifying questions to the participants in order to be certain that I understood correctly what they meant. For example, one participant was seriously bullied during her schooling years and she frequently contemplated to stop studying. This experience was rather novel for me, as I had not encountered bullying whilst concluding my education in India. This participant expected me to know about the problem of widespread bullying in the Norwegian education system against disabled youth, which leads them to drop out from education and subsequently results in their labor market exclusion. I was taken aback by the problem of bullying and encouraged her to talk more about it through multiple clarifying questions such as 'was [this bullying] just because you could not see and you were different?' Therefore, being perceived as an insider could create liabilities during the data-collection process (Merton 1972), as shared experience, implicit understanding and common value-orientation could result in investigative impediments (Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009; Hellowell 2006). In order to circumnavigate these issues, culturally sensitive outsiders might be able to explore the experiences of marginal groups more objectively, as they are not enmeshed within the group's activities and the group participants might feel the need to explain more thoroughly their standpoint (Bridges 2017; Hellowell 2006).

My researcher positionality and identity influenced both the data collection and its analysis. I was able to promptly grasp many employment narratives that discussed the barriers encountered by YAVI. The thematic analysis was influenced by my personal, social and situational factors (Bridges 2017). Often while listening to the transcript with my screen-reader (Job Access with Speech) I vigorously nodded along, while on other occasions I was astounded afresh by some of the harrowing employment stories. The two factors that assisted the data-analysis were, first, I took preliminary field-notes after conducting each interview, which outlined the salient features of the interview, participants and the issues that surprised me. Second, working on the interview-transcripts with Dragon speech recognition software accompanied with my reading-assistant enabled me to nurture more analytical distance from the transcribed interview-data. Listening and re-listening to the interview-transcripts with my screen-reader's voice in part diminished the sense of overwhelmingness, which I encountered when I listened to the distressed stories and soliciting voice of some participants. Similarly, as the data-analysis process proceeded, I felt a peculiar sense of distance from the more positive and success-oriented employment narratives. As I juxtaposed them, I realized that the role of serendipitous contextual factors, such as where the youth participant was born, what was the family's attitude towards vision impairment, whether the youth participant could access mainstream schools and participate in disability organizations seemed to significantly affect their employment narratives. Therefore, during the data-analysis stage I could gradually move beyond the position of being enamored by the individual biographies to a state of a more nuanced and culturally sensitive understanding of collective narratives. In essence, although commencing the data-collection and analysis as an insider, I realized that I was an in-betweener (Chaudhry 2018) who pragmatically leveraged the insider status and incorporated the dynamic, malleable researcher's positionality and identity.

### **5.4 Ethical Research**

There are grave ethical implications for both researcher and the participants when the researcher is perceived as an insider. The members of a marginalized group (i.e., disabled people) might be more interested in knowledge production, which could lower the participatory barriers and enhance their social inclusion (Oliver 1990; Oliver 1992; Charlton 1998). It might be challenging for the researcher to carry this burden of high expectations. Moreover, if the research findings contradict the group's interests and values, then the insider researcher might be in an ethical predicament either to conform to the empirical data fidelity and its dissemination or to succumb to the pressures of group-solidarity and interests (Merton 1972). In addition, if the boundaries between the researcher and the participants are blurred, the insider researcher might be ascribed the additional roles of a friend, counselor or mentor (Humphrey 2007). The researcher might find it difficult to fulfill these additional responsibilities associated with the ascribed role. In addition

to this, the challenge of confidentiality becomes more pressing, because the insider researcher and the participants might socialize within the same social circles. There could be unanticipated challenges with fully concealing information across personal settings (Corbin Dwyner & Buckle 2009).

The question of high expectations associated with the research output was felt more acutely in Delhi, wherein many participants were intrigued by the comparative nature of this research and the fact that I was travelling from Norway to conduct it. Many of the participants thought that if they told me about their employment challenges, I would be able to intervene in the form of a job-offer or introduce them to influential people who could assist them in securing better employment opportunities. Their perception that I had access to networks of power and influence (Chaudhry 2018) partly fueled their expectations and resulted in ethical quandaries. This misplaced expectation was quite perplexing as in the consent forms it was categorically stated that 'the voluntary participation in the interviews means that you will not be paid or compensated in cash or kind'.

I often was expected to fulfill the role of a mentor or counsellor, as the youth participants assessed that I was financially independent, socially mobile and relatively successful. It was exceedingly difficult to fulfill the responsibility of this unexpected role. This challenge is best encapsulated by one poignant case of emotionally charged discourse when a youth participant in Delhi claimed that if she would not have a job in the future she might consider committing suicide.

If one day you hear [participant] is no more, really I will tell you, you have to be sure [participant] was facing financial problems. So if you ever come to hear something like this, then there is only one reason: because I have no work, I have no job, I did not get support from anybody.

During the course of this intensive interview, the participant expected me to directly or indirectly help her with securing a stable job in the future. However, the best I could offer was to lend my ear to her narrative, reassure her that she had tremendous grit and talent, dissuade her from undertaking negative catastrophizing and wish that she would find steady employment. Contrasting the experience of misplaced expectations and undeserved ascribed roles, there were other participants who used the word 'yaar' (friend), and they wanted to socialize with me along with the European assistant. Often I had to politely extricate from these expectations from the participants and decline their requests to join a common social network. In part, I felt a heightened sense of responsibility towards the European assistant, as she had never travelled outside Europe, and the city of Delhi has witnessed a resurgent wave of sexual assault against women. Therefore, I had to exercise additional caution while processing the socializing requests from the participants. I constantly tried to nurture empathic understanding and deal with the participants with cultural sensitivity; however, I did not attempt any psycho-emotional union with them (Fay 1996). Listening to the vulnerable life experiences of participants from Delhi was taking a personal toll on me, as I could witness my socio-economic privilege vis-à-vis the interviewees. Nevertheless, I felt quite limited and often encountered pangs of conscience owing to a recognition that I could not assist them in any meaningful and substantive manner.

As compared to Delhi, the participants in Oslo kept a requisite distance and considered me as a quasi-outsider, owing to my personal, social and situational factors (Bridges 2017; Griffith 1998), which frequently did not intersect with the vectors of their identities and social location. The issue of data-privacy and participant confidentiality was felt more acutely in the Norwegian context. The first youth participant who was interviewed decided to withdraw from the study, owing to a profound sense of concern for confidentiality. The youth participant realized that some intimate life experiences had been shared with me and was fearful that biographical experiences might be disclosed across social occasions wherein our paths might cross. In line with the ethical principle of 'beneficence' (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015: 95), the participant's request for privacy and confidentiality was fully respected and all acquired information was duly removed. On a related note, some interviewees were curious to know who participated in the research and what perspectives did they share. I have strictly erred on the side of anonymity and confidentiality and have accepted the predicament of these socially awkward moments, which happened when I interact with the participants in social settings. I often felt that the more proximity I had with the participants from Oslo, they felt that they had a compunction to know 'what I was discovering', and therefore I had to more actively distance myself from them (Humphrey 2007: 18).

Although one of the primary objectives of my research project is to give voice to the marginalized group of YAVI who have previously been overlooked (Chhabra 2020), not every experiential reflection by interviewees was taken at face value and faithfully accepted. The interviewees were challenged to explain their positions and clarify their assumptions, as I was an in-betweener, not fully immersed within their employment narratives. A case in point is one youth participant from Delhi who attributed the employment barriers to structural factors and displayed outright animus against the government and its employment policies. This was rather perplexing, as the participant had been a beneficiary of the affirmative action policy of the government and was working within the public sector. I was aware that the Indian government could be apathetic towards the employment needs of disabled people; however, the participant's relatively privileged socio-economic situation predicated on the well-paid and rather stable public sector job did not justify the overt vitriol against the government's policies. Therefore, I invited the participant to clarify her position and reflect upon the employment situation to enable a critical yet balanced reflection of the employment situation.

Not only did I challenge the youth participants' employment narratives and ask for clarifications, but also my perspectives were contested and my assumptions were undermined. Before conducting the field-study in Oslo, I felt

that the Norwegian participants would evaluate the governments' employment initiatives in a positive vein, as Norway is well renowned for its disability protection system (Halvorsen & Hvinden 2018). However, many participants in Oslo stated their disappointment with the government initiatives linked to employment measures for disabled people. One youth participant stated, 'Politicians say everyone should work...how the hell should you get them to work'. This participant problematized the gap between rhetoric and reality. Participants disabused me from my sterile assumptions (e.g., high disability protection ought to mean greater socio-economic inclusion for disabled youth). In essence, the interview process based on an open and respectful dialogue facilitated me in understanding and interpreting the complex employment narratives, which in turn enabled me to present ethical findings. I listened acutely, empathized generously, dissented diligently and learned voraciously throughout my interactions with YAVI.

## 6. Concluding Reflections

This paper has revisited the insider-outsider debate within disability research and has put forward the claim that a strict insider-outsider researcher's positionality and identity ought not to be sustained and is epistemologically controversial and methodologically untenable. While conducting the comparative field-study in Oslo and Delhi, the simplistic binaries associated with the native/foreign, privileged/oppressed, us/them, included/excluded and insider/outsider were problematized and challenged by the participants. First, I was inadvertently assessed as a foreigner in my country of origin by some participants in Delhi. In addition, being an immigrant who spoke English endowed me with an outsider-positionality in Oslo, which was difficult to transcend. At times, the participants often incorporated me within their employment narratives predicated on a collective identity marker of visual impairment. Nonetheless, I was othered on multiple vectors linked to my biographical experience and social location. I encountered moments wherein intuitive empathic understanding emerged naturally. At the same time, there were instances wherein I felt a peculiar sense of estrangement while listening to the youth participants' employment-narratives from both Oslo and Delhi. Factors such as economic privilege and social mobility worked as an important differentiator, which made participants from Delhi distance themselves from me. Similarly, while listening to the employment narratives of the participants from Oslo, at times my labor market struggles seemed more severe whilst on other occasions the employment experiences encountered by participants appeared more harrowing. There was a dialectical tension predicated on intersecting identities, complex biographies and multi-layered social locations, which nudged me constantly to re-negotiate my researcher's position in relation to the participants of this research project.

However, it must be acknowledged, at different stages I pragmatically leveraged the insider label while simultaneously learning from the othering process encountered in the field study. In essence, I felt like a 'sociological stranger' (Hellawell 2006: 486) wandering with a specific purpose to compare experiential insights of YAVI from Oslo and Delhi. I presented the perspective from the margin; however, I was acutely and critically aware that I was not situated on the periphery.

Based on the critical reflections from my field-study, three epistemological takeaways emerged. First, there is an insider-outsider continua (Hellawell 2006), and researchers seem to be insiders in some aspects and outsiders in others. Therefore, instead of labelling the researcher as either an insider or an outsider it could be epistemologically valuable to discuss 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' of the researcher (see Bridges 2017: 343; Crossley et al. 2016: 121) as the boundaries between the researcher and the researched are consistently evolving. Second, the researcher's identity is multilayered, contingent upon biological factors, biographical experiences and social location (Goodley 2017; Humphrey 2007; Thomas 2006; Traustadóttir 2006). It is problematic to exclusively identify and predominantly rely on a specific identity marker (i.e. impairment status) while conducting research. The intersectional nature of researchers' identity coupled with group heterogeneity could add additional layers of complexity while conducting research. Third, for researchers who intend to conduct Global North-South comparative research, adherence to a stringent insider-outsider researcher's position is not feasible owing to distinctive issues associated with multicultural values, material inequalities and power continua (Crossley et al. 2016; Chaudhry 2018; Grech & Soldatic 2016; Meekosha 2008).

Thus, this paper encourages the researcher to assume the role of an in-betweener to pragmatically utilize the insider status, which enables privileged access and empathic understanding. In addition, especially while dealing with previously oppressed marginalized groups, the in-betweener status could allow the researcher not to be overwhelmed by the data-collection and analysis process. The in-betweener researcher position could guard against the accusation of grinding an ax, often attributed to the disability research done by the culturally embedded disabled insiders. In addition, it allows researchers to drop the label of an objective outsider.

This paper cautions against romanticizing the insider researcher who possesses tacit knowledge and can generate thick, authentic, rich descriptions of the marginal group, whilst vilifying the idealized outsider position, which is predicated on objectivity and value-neutrality. While conducting any social research, and in particular researching on marginalized groups, such as disabled people, it is indispensable that researchers nurture openness, respect and empathy. They ought to remain critical yet culturally sensitive, constantly undertake self-scrutiny and empower the marginalized group through responsible and ethical data production and dissemination (Bridges 2017).

This paper invites researchers with disabilities to take a new look at the simplistic insider-outsider polarity and encourages them to adopt an in-betweener researcher position instead. This critical, fluid position allows for the incorporation of biographical complexities and multi-layered identities more freely at the different stages of the research process. Epistemologically speaking, this position offers much and perhaps there is little to lose.

## Competing Interests

This research paper is part of a Ph.D. study and no competing interest is reported.

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