

# Need for Inclusive Growth: Empowering the Persons with Disabilities in India

## Abstract

India has one of the largest numbers of Persons with Disabilities in the world. Unfortunately, this population falls in the least of priorities for policy makers. Few measures have been put in place to empower them, but they largely remain true on paper since critical linkages to education and employment are fragmented. The private sector has been slowly coming into the fold of employing them, which stems from sound business case. There is yet, a lot of depth to be covered before the vision of Growth for Everyone ('Sabka Saath') is realized.

**Keywords:** Disabled, Disability, Skill Development, Empowerment.

### Introduction

The degree of evolvement of a society is gauged by the manner in which it cares for those on its fringes or those placed at any kind of disadvantage, vis-à-vis the rest of society at large, due to force of circumstances such as birth, age or disability. A truly compassionate society makes allowances for such infirmities in a non-intrusive, participative and sensitive manner, ensuring equal opportunities to all by providing a level playing field. The above is quoted from the archives of the Government of India<sup>1</sup>.

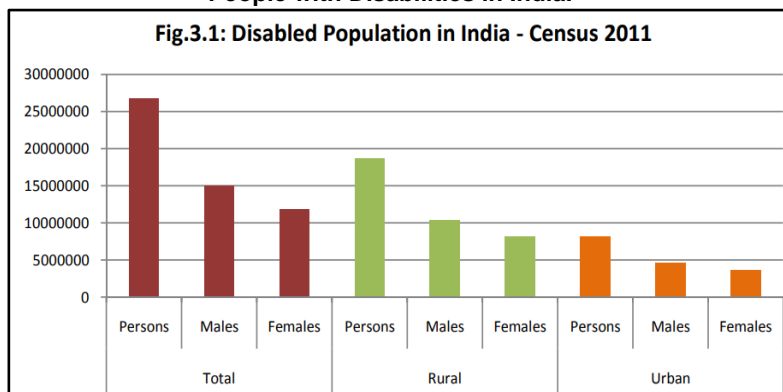


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**Figure 1**

**People with Disabilities in India.**



**Source:** Government of India

We need to make our society and systems inclusive for People with Disabilities (PWD) in India, enabling them to lead a dignified, independent life while recognising them as valuable human resource to our country. All this is possible through an integrated approach, to include legislation, policies and concessions by the government, coupled with active participation by organisations, employers and, in fact, every citizen.

The 2011 Census states that out of the 450 million-plus workforce India have 2.68-crore people have some form of disability (see Fig 1).

Estimates by the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO), however, put the figure upwards of 7 Crores<sup>2</sup>.

### Methodology

This study is based on secondary data gathered from the government of India Publications, contemporary journals and newspapers discussing the obstacles on the way for physically disabled persons.

### Aim of the study

To review contemporary Indian government policies towards the persons with disabilities, thus putting them in the main channel of development by providing health, education and vocational training.

### The Governmental Nudge

Empowering Persons with Disabilities Strengthens Human Solidarity for Everyone, former Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Ban ki-Moon told at the Rehabilitation International World Congress<sup>3</sup>. A numbers of campaigns and schemes have been launched in India towards creating disabled friendly environment in every sphere whether it is accessibility , education , providing assistive aides and appliance or empowering persons with disabilities through skills and providing employment<sup>4</sup>. Let us glance over some of them to get an insight.

In 2012, a separate Department of Disability Affairs was carved out of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which in 2014 was renamed to Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD). This move aimed to give focused attention to Policy issues and meaningful thrust to the activities aimed at welfare and empowerment of the PWD's. The Department acts as a Nodal Agency for matters pertaining to disability and Persons with Disabilities including effecting closer coordination among different stakeholders: related Central Ministries, State/UT Governments, NGOs etc. in matters pertaining to disability.

The National Skill Development Council (NSDC) formed the 'Affirmative Action Division', dedicated to facilitating skill training among marginalized communities by understanding their unique needs and finding customized solutions.

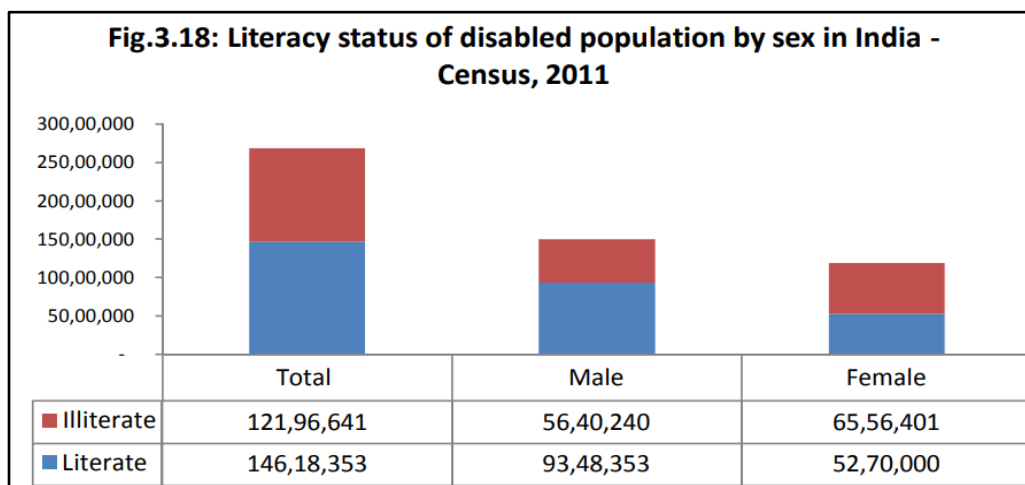
The National Action Plan for Skill Training of PwD was jointly launched by Ministry of Skill

Development and Enterprise (MSDE) and Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disability with target of skilling 25 lakh PwD from 2015 to 2022.

A significant move towards empowerment of PWD's the Parliament passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016. This Act replaces the existing Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. In the new Act, the categories of disabilities have been increased from existing 7 to 21. The Act also provides for increasing reservation quota from 3 per cent to 4 percent in government jobs and providing assistive technology, tailor-made training and support systems to ensure that PwDs learn and grow in their jobs. Moreover, Employers' share of Provident Fund (PF) and Employees State Insurance (ESI) is reimbursed by the Government for this group of workers<sup>5</sup>.

In order to enable PWD's gain universal access and independent living the government launched its ambitious "Accessible India Campaign" (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) which seeks creation of physical and virtual infrastructure truly accessible and inclusive for the persons with disabilities and for making public buildings, transport system and information communications technology accessible on a wide scale. 50 cities have been selected as part of this Campaign<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 2: Literacy status of people with disabilities in India.**



**Source:** Government of India

### Challenges and Opportunities: The way forward

With numerous schemes already in place, it is important to evaluate whether it has delivered on its mandate.

At the onset, it is important to understand that disability may act as a major impediment in formal education. Thus, the first point of intervention should be attainment of education, as it builds the foundation for future. It is worth pointing out that as per Census 2011 of the total disabled population; only 55% (1.46 Cr.) are literates. This leaves a huge area to be covered<sup>7</sup>. The educational sector should be more inclusive by adapting newer techniques with respect to content of the curriculum, methods of

teaching and ensuring that classrooms, facilities, and educational materials more accessible.

For the empowerment of disabled population, apart from education, participation in economic activity is extremely important. Collaboration with the employment and labor sectors is essential to ensure that both youth and adults with disabilities have access to training and work opportunities at community level. Productive and decent work in a positive environment is essential for the social and economic integration of individual persons with disability (PWDs). The National Action Plan for Skill Development of Persons with Disabilities, under the DEPwD has, during the last 4

years imparted skill training under the Skill Development /Vocation Training program to about 1.4 lakh PwDs. On the other hand, more than 51,000 PwDs have been trained under Skill India's flagship scheme of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)<sup>8</sup>.

While the Government can only do so much, it is imperative that the Private Sector joins hands for a more 'Conscience Capitalism'. An emerging and encouraging trend has been seen where modern Companies across sectors have said that employing PwDs also makes sound business sense given the low attrition rates, high productivity, loyalty and low absenteeism. Thus, recruitment has expanded to include various roles along the supply chain — from the warehouse to smaller fulfillment centres (delivery hubs). For example, Lemon Trees Hotels claim 22% of its staff is Opportunity Driven Individuals (ODI) with Down syndrome and Autism. 70% of staff in 20 KFC Outlets are speech and hearing impaired. Aegis Limited has 600 PWD's working in India, with disabilities like visual impairment, locomotor disability, etc. Similar hiring is underway in Flipkart, Amazon, Accenture, Cisco, State Bank of India, Big Basket, Café Coffee Day, etc. This is an important step towards an inclusive workforce that corporates have been trying to create.

There is nonetheless a long way to go before we can be proud of inclusive policy. Given the country's jobless economic growth and the fact that almost one million people are added to its workforce every month, PWD are often denied employment opportunities. Muthu Raj, project executive, Youth4Jobs, a company that skills and helps PwDs find employment, said that despite legislation and awareness, only about 24% of PwDs get access to livelihood opportunities. Monitoring and Evaluation in the service delivery should be strengthened. Generating representative community-based data should be of importance, since it helps to plan and execute appropriate measures. Involvement of persons with disability is of paramount importance in policies, as they give insight into their problems and suggest possible solution. The health and education departments must pull up their socks to increase public awareness and understanding of disability. Governments, voluntary organizations, and professional associations should consider running social marketing campaigns that change attitudes on stigmatized issues.

### Conclusion

It has been pointed out that there is a genuine non-availability of evidence-based facts, lack of co-ordination between the Government and NGOs, the absence of a coherent community level strategy, limited competence and capacity of decentralizing

services, limited models of good practices. Disability should be considered as an important issue by the Government and should cover all types of disabled who need rehabilitation services. Thus, we need a multi-sectoral approach including social integration interventions of health, education, and vocational programs for a truly inclusive growth programme<sup>9</sup>.

### End Notes

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