



**BENCHMARKING
DISABILITY
INCLUSION:
10 YEARS OF SDG
IMPLEMENTATION IN
INDIA**

**By
Rising Flame**

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Acronyms in the report

Acronyms	Details
AAY	Antyodaya Anna Yojana
AB-PM-JAY	Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Aryoga Yojana
ADIP	Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances
AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
AMS	Academy of Management Studies
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
AT	Assistive Technology
B. Ed.	Bachelor in Education
BEE	Bureau of Energy Efficiency
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BRSR	Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting
BSSC	Bihar Staff Selection Commission
C&E	Customs and Central Excise
CARA	Central Adoption Research Agency
CBFC	Central Board of Film Certification
CBID	Community Based Inclusive Development Programme
CCPD	Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities
CISF	Central Industrial Security Force
CoE	Centre for Excellence
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CSE	Civil Service Exam
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission
DDRC	District Disability Rehabilitation Centre
DDRS	Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme
DEPwD	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
DiDRR	Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction
DPDP Rules	Digital Personal Data Protection Rules
EC	Election Commission
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIR	First Information Report
GAD	Gender, Age, and Disability
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses
IBPS	Institute of Banking Personnel Selection
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEDSS	Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage
IGNDPS	Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization

Acronyms	Details
INR	Indian Rupee
IPT	Intermediate Public Transport
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IRDAI	Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India
IRS	Indian Revenue Services
ISL	Indian Sign Language
IT	Information Technology
ITI	Industrial Training Institutes
JMP	Joint Management Programme
KYC	Know Your Customer
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer
LPG	Liquified Petroleum Gas
LUCC	Laghu Udyami Credit Card
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MHCA	Mental Healthcare Act
MIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NEET-UG	National Eligibility cum Entrance Test – Undergraduate
NEP	National Education Policy
NERPAP	National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NFSA	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NHFDC	National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation
NIMHANS	National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences
NITI Aayog	National Institution for Transforming India
NMC	National Medical Commission
NMHS	National Mental Health Survey
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
NSAP	National Social Assistance Programme
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NSSO	National Sample Survey
NTA	National Testing Agency
NUHM	National Urban Health Mission
OPD	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
OSCC	One Stop Crisis Centres
PDS	Public Distribution Schemes
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
POSH	Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Acronyms	Details
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
PWDVA	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RCI	Rehabilitation Council of India
RPD	Rights of Persons with Disabilities
RTE	Right to Education
SBI	State Bank of India
SBM	Swachh Bharat Mission
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCPD	State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEBI	Securities and Exchange Board of India
SHG	Self-Help Group
SIPDA	Scheme for the Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act
SMRC	Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
ST	Scheduled Tribes
Tele MANAS	Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States
UDID	Unique Disability ID
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UPSC	Union Public Service Commission
UT	Union Territory
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
XRCVC	Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged

Methodology

This paper was published at the critical juncture in 2025, on the completion of 10 years of Sustainable Development Goals to evaluate the situation, challenges of persons across disabilities in India.

The paper emerged from primary data collection done from January to March 2025, secondary data collection done from April to October 2025 and an expert review process. Below are the details of each of the steps that shaped this paper.

The primary data cited in this paper was collected during the disability and SDG Voluntary national Review India process. From January to March 2025, Rising Flame conducted a multi-stakeholder comprehensive Voluntary National Review (VNR) process as part of the civil society engagement to strengthen and spotlight disability inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The process involved multi-channel data collection to provide information on India's progress and seek recommendations from diverse stakeholders. Rising Flame led this process, facilitating the participation of 210 persons with disabilities, disability rights activists, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and other organisations working to advance SDGs in India. Along with UN in India, Rising Flame partnered with *Rashtriya Viklang Manch* and Academy of Management Studies (AMS) for different subsets of data collection.

Table 1: Summary of participation across multi-stakeholder national review process

	Total participants
Call for inputs	27
Virtual Consultation (Hindi and ISL)	56
Inter-generational FGD	14
National-level consultation, Delhi	113
Total	210

Call for inputs

Rising Flame solicited contributions through a 'call for inputs' on challenges and recommendations to strengthen SDG implementation, with a focus on disability inclusion. The call was circulated extensively, including via email to over 1000 persons with disabilities, OPDs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), individuals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The input form was also circulated on disability and other mailing lists, WhatsApp groups, and social media platforms, including Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Rising Flame received 27 submissions from individuals and organisations working across diverse sectors, including: education, livelihoods, skilling, employment, health, rehabilitation, therapy, counselling, assistive devices and technology, child rights, gender, sexuality, inclusive societies, arts and culture, sports, transport and mobility, infrastructure and accessibility, environment, awareness, and advocacy. Of these, 11 were organisational

submissions and 16 were from individuals. Notably, 18 of the 27 submissions came directly from persons with disabilities.

Virtual consultation (Hindi and ISL)

To ensure targeted outreach and inputs from rural India, Rising Flame collaborated with *Rashtriya Viklang Manch*, a voluntary network of persons with disabilities and OPDs and organised a virtual consultation, which took place on February 23, 2025, in Hindi and Indian Sign Language (ISL). A total of 56 participants from 11 states joined the discussion, with 90% of them being persons with disabilities. Participants were from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Goa, and Maharashtra. The participants included 29 men and 27 women. Through this two-hour consultation, persons with disabilities and OPDs working at the grassroots shared challenges and recommendations with regards to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 (education, skilling and employment, health, poverty, and social protection—including access to pensions, Unique Disability ID (UDID), etc.). Zoom was selected to support access and participation across states.

Inter-generational focus group

Rising Flame also collected primary data on SDG progress through an inter-generational focus group discussion (FGD) in collaboration with the Academy of Management Studies (AMS). The discussion was conducted on February 28, 2025, at the UN House in Lodhi Road, New Delhi. This session featured 14 experts, including 7 young persons with disabilities (3 young women and 4 young men). The experts for this session were chosen from across India, working on a diverse range of issues, including education, health, accessibility, law and policy, employment, climate change, disaster, urbanisation, farming, inclusion, infrastructure, and gender. The discussion took place in English, Hindi and ISL, facilitated by AMS with support from Rising Flame.

National-level consultation

A national-level consultation was held on March 1, 2025, organised by Rising Flame and the UN in India under the UNCT India Inter-Agency Disability Working Group. The consultation aimed to identify key challenges in disability-inclusive SDG implementation, propose actionable recommendations, and strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration for inclusive policies. The discussion took place in English, Hindi and ISL. The event brought together 113 attendees, including persons with disabilities, disability rights activists, OPDs, and CSOs from across India's five regions (East, West, North, South, and North-East). The consultation was organised at the Tangerine Grand, Lemon Tree Hotel, Aerocity, New Delhi, a fully accessible venue, to ensure a larger number of participants could be part of the process, including grassroots activists and representatives from national and international NGOs.

Participants were carefully selected for invitation to ensure both cross-disability and cross-thematic representation in the room, with a focus on including organisations and disability groups who are marginalised further in the community, such as those representing blood disorders, psychosocial disabilities, dwarfism and dementia. Participation of 30 persons with disabilities from outside Delhi facilitated a deeper reflection on concerns and realities from across India. Additionally, over 150 invitations to participate were circulated to experts and organisations from across India. Through pointed inputs from speakers, we received challenges and recommendations across SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17.

In addition to speaker inputs, participants received time throughout the day to raise challenges and recommendations.

Secondary data collection

Secondary data collection was done between April 2025 and October 2025 and included a wide array of sources: reports and datasets from CSOs, government websites and studies, official statistics, and news reports. This process systematically collated existing information relevant to disability inclusion, Indian Legislations, and the SDGs from the public domain to contextualise primary data. Building upon and contributing to ongoing initiatives to document the experiences of persons with disabilities in India, this process follows up on disability focused regional consultations in 2022 that focused on developments post India's VNR 2020 and the situation of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expert and peer review

This report also draws from deep expertise in the disability rights sector, incorporated through close engagement with leading experts who were invited to review different sections of this report and provide feedback and insights. Rising Flame engaged reviewers in May 2025 with expertise at the intersection of disability rights, law, policy, and critical thematic areas, including social protection, gender, climate change, education, disability rights, accessibility, inclusive employment, and grassroots leadership. The review process incorporated specific reviewer feedback to ensure the content is nuanced and specific to the thematic areas and goals, a process critical in shaping and strengthening the analysis and recommendations.

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Situation Analysis

Status and conditions of persons with disabilities in India

India has one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities globally, with India's 2011 Census recording 26.8 million, comprising 2.21% of the population.¹ Notably, this 2011 Census data accounts for only 7 types of disabilities notified under the *Persons with*

¹ Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, "Presentation on Disability, Census of India 2011: Data on Disability," December 27, 2013, <http://censusindia.gov.in/> (accessed on March 7, 2025); B Sivakumar, "Disabled population up by 22.4% in 2001-11," *Times of India*, December 29, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Disabledpopulation-up-by-22-4-in-2001-11/articleshow/28072371.cms>

Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, whereas the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016*, recognises people with 21 impairment types who could be classified as persons with disabilities. This expanded scope under the 2016 Act more closely aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which recognises all forms of disability. Further, the 2011 census did not adopt the Washington Group disability survey questions that have been tested and widely adopted.²

OPDs estimate that 4 to 8% of the population of India lives with a disability.³ This estimation is in closer alignment with the World Health Organisation and World Bank estimates that 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability—12% of males and 19% of females.⁴ The discrepancy between 2011 Census data and OPD and global estimates can be attributed to the narrow understanding of disability at the time of India's most recent census (2011), together with the stigma associated with disability that discourages reporting. Notably, the elderly populations have trouble obtaining medical certificates that categorise their impairment.⁵

India's SDG Index 2019,⁶ including reports on the number of people in the country below the poverty line and coverage in social protection schemes, does not include data disaggregated for disability. OPDs estimate that 70% of persons with disabilities in India are from poorer economic backgrounds.⁷ Regional data, moreover, confirms a high concentration of persons with disabilities below the poverty line. In Bihar's Sheohar district, for instance, 84% of persons with disabilities live below the poverty line.⁸ Persons with disabilities are more likely to be in poverty when compared with the general population due to barriers in education, employment, and social protection. Limited access to financial resources, assistive technologies, and inclusive economic policies exacerbates their economic vulnerability.⁹

² Washington Group on Disability Statistics, "A Short History on the Question Sets Developed by the Washington Group," <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/about/about-the-wg/>

³ World Bank, "People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcome," <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/358151468268839622/pdf/415850IN0Disab1ort0NOV200701PUBLIC1.pdf>, 2007 (accessed on June 26, 2025)

⁴ UN Women, "Making SDGs count for women with disabilities," <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Making-SDGs-count-for-women-with-disabilities.pdf>, 2017 (accessed on June 26, 2025)

⁵ Dey, S. (1970, January 1). "Health of the Elderly in India: Challenges of Access and Affordability," <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109208/>; James Smith and Malay Majumdar, *Aging in Asia: Findings From New and Emerging Data Initiatives*, 2012, National Academies Press.

⁶ NITI Aayog, SDG Explore Index, <https://sdgindiaindex.niti.gov.in/#/> (accessed on March 7, 2025).

⁷ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan). Annual Report 2023-2024. <https://divyangjan.depwd.gov.in/content/upload/uploadfiles/AnnualReport2023-24English.pdf> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

⁸ Basant Kumar, "'Why should we vote?': People with Disabilities Feel Sidelined in Bihar's Begusarai," *NewsLaundry*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.newsLaundry.com/2020/11/03/why-should-we-vote-people-with-disabilities-feel-sidelined-in-bihars-begusarai>

⁹ World Bank website (accessed on June 26, 2025) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability#:~:text=Persons%20with%20disabilities%20are%20more%20like%20to,levels%20of%20employment%2C%20and%20higher%20poverty%20rates.&text=Disability%20may%20also%20exacerbate%20the%20risk%20of,increased%20cost%20of%20living%20with%20a%20disability>. (accessed on June 26, 2025)

According to India's most recent census data (2011), persons with disabilities in India show low levels of literacy and educational attainment. 45% of persons with disabilities in India were illiterate, only 13% had completed secondary education, and only 5% had achieved postgraduate or higher levels of education. Literacy rates, moreover, vary by gender and location: 55% of women with disabilities were illiterate, compared to 38% of men with disabilities; and 33% of persons with disabilities in urban areas were illiterate, compared to 51% in rural areas. The next census has been announced by the Government of India to be finished by March 2027, which will provide us with updated data.¹⁰

Persons with disabilities also face exclusion in higher education. Barriers include inaccessibility, stigma, and exclusionary admission policies.

Low literacy and educational attainment,¹¹ combined with workplace discrimination, inaccessible job markets, and lack of inclusive employment policies,¹² translate into low levels of employment. According to census data (2011), only 37% of persons with disabilities aged 15 to 59 are employed, with males making up 78% of the working population of persons with disabilities. Employment discrimination persists despite the 4% reservation for persons with disabilities in government employment. Hiring remains particularly limited for persons with specific disabilities, including psychosocial, intellectual, and multiple disabilities. Many workplaces remain physically inaccessible, and discriminatory hiring processes, such as medical exams, further exclude qualified candidates.¹³ Government employment exchanges have failed to improve placements.

Persons with disabilities experience discrimination in access to healthcare,¹⁴ lack accessible medical facilities and disability-sensitive health services, and face challenges in meeting medical costs.¹⁵ Barriers to access are compounded, on one hand, by a lack of awareness among persons with disabilities about available facilities, and on the other, by high levels of stigma within the medical field. Furthermore, lack of awareness among healthcare staff all

¹⁰ Population Census-2027 to Be Conducted in Two Phases along with Enumeration of Castes, www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2133845 (accessed on June 25, 2025)

¹¹ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan). Annual Report 2023-2024. <https://divyangjan.depwd.gov.in/content/upload/uploadfiles/AnnualReport2023-24English.pdf> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

¹² Nehal Chaliawala & Sreeradha Basu, "Top Indian companies have very few people with disabilities on rolls," *The Economic Times*, August 16, 2023. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/hr-policies-trends/top-indian-companies-have-very-few-people-with-disabilities-on-rolls/articleshow/102753098.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

¹³ "The rights of persons with disabilities in private sector employment in India," Robobionics. (n.d.). <https://www.robobionics.in/blog/the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-private-sector-employment-in-india/>

¹⁴ Kavita Bajeli Dutt, "Over 80 per cent of disabled people lack health insurance in India: Survey," *The Indian Express*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Mar/26/over-80-per-cent-of-disabled-people-lack-health-insurance-in-india-survey> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

¹⁵ Sahid Akhter, "Disability needs to be inclusive in healthcare delivery system: Shweta Rawat, The Hans Foundation," *The Economics Times*, March 16, 2023, <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/disability-needs-to-be-inclusive-in-healthcare-delivery-system-shweta-rawat-the-hans-foundation/98679969> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

too often delays diagnosis, resulting in lifelong disabilities.¹⁶ For instance, a study from North India scored hospitals poorly when assessing physical accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for women with disabilities. The study found a lack of wheelchairs, ramps, elevators and accessible toilets, and a lack of equipment to examine women with disabilities.¹⁷ Inadequate healthcare services lead to poor health outcomes and lower life expectancies for persons with disabilities. By contrast, a study of families of children with Down Syndrome reports that inclusive and efficient healthcare greatly enhances the quality of life of both the child and the family.¹⁸

Limited access to quality assistive technologies exacerbates economic vulnerability. Access disparities in quality assistive devices stem from healthcare inequalities, high procurement and maintenance costs, low production, and limited market availability, compounded by poor awareness among users and service providers.¹⁹ Unmet needs are higher in rural areas, among the poor and elderly. At the national level, the lack of policies, weak governance, and insufficient government funding further restrict access.²⁰

Women with disabilities in India face compounded discrimination and marginalisation, both due to their gender and disability status. They face economic exclusion, limited participation in leadership and decision-making processes, and higher rates of violence.²¹ This disparity is evident in key development indicators enumerated in India’s census data (2011). The literacy rate among women with disabilities stands at 45%, significantly lower than both the overall female literacy rate of 65% and the 62% literacy rate among men with disabilities. Employment statistics in India’s census data (2011) reveal an even starker gap: 68% of women with disabilities aged 15-59 are not working, compared to 36% of men with disabilities and 60% of women in the general population.

Violence against persons with disabilities—especially women with disabilities and children with disabilities—represents a critical concern. Studies indicate that approximately 80% of women with disabilities experience violence, and they are four times more likely to face

¹⁶ Rajeswaran, Vijayaprasad, Hilaria, “Ethical Framework to Address Barriers to Healthcare for People with Disabilities in India,” January 20, 2023, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9853476> (accessed on June 26, 2025)

¹⁷ Sharma R, Kumar A, Suri V, et al., Cureus, “Physical Access Related User-Friendliness of Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Women With Disabilities in Various Hospitals in a City in North India: An Integrated Qualitative and Quantitative Study,” January 27, 2023, <https://www.cureus.com/articles/134658-physical-access-related-user-friendliness-of-sexual-and-reproductive-health-services-for-women-with-disabilities-in-various-hospitals-in-a-city-in-north-india-an-integrated-qualitative-and-quantitative-study#!/> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁸ Darla S, Bhat D, “Health-related quality of life and coping strategies among families with Down syndrome children in South India,” *Medical Journal Armed Forces India*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mjafi.2020.07.010> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁹ Senjam SS, Mannan H. Assistive technology: The current perspective in India. *Indian J Ophthalmol*. 2023 May;71(5):1804-1809. doi: 10.4103/IJO.IJO_2652_22. PMID: 37203033; PMCID: PMC10391423. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10391423/> (accessed on April 17, 2025)

²⁰ Cote A., Assistive Technology, “Social protection and access to assistive technology in low- and middle-income countries”, December 1, 2021, 33:102–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2021.1994052> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

²¹ Dr. Sitaram Pal, Bhola Vishwakarma, “Status of Women with Disabilities in India,” *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, August 15, 2018, https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/ArticlesPDF/article_66db21a39569bb9f63324aae6b0d8dca.pdf (accessed on June 27, 2025)

sexual violence compared to women without disabilities.²² Women with disabilities also face a higher risk of intimate partner violence (IPV)—including physical, sexual, and emotional IPV and associated mental health issues. Women with disabilities were also more likely to show symptoms of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.²³ Risks to women with disabilities are heightened by barriers in accessing emergency helplines and support systems. Further, discrimination, harassment, and violence restrict movement for women with disabilities, limiting inclusion and social engagement.²⁴ For instance, safety concerns make it difficult for women with disabilities to use auto-rickshaws and taxis. Children with disabilities are four to five times more vulnerable to abuse than non-disabled peers²⁵ and are 32% more likely to experience severe corporal punishment.²⁶

Women with disabilities also face heightened barriers in accessing healthcare when compared to both women without disabilities and men with disabilities, particularly concerning sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Women with disabilities also face routine SRHR violations, including forced sterilisation and hysterectomies without informed consent.²⁷

In 2025, India’s Supreme Court classified digital access as an intrinsic right,²⁸ but persons with disabilities in India still face access barriers in an increasingly digitised landscape. In India, only 23% of persons with disabilities own smartphones. Women with disabilities have the lowest smartphone ownership compared to men and non-disabled individuals.²⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the challenges associated with unequal digital access for persons with disabilities, as many government and private digital platforms were entirely inaccessible. Despite RPD mandates of disability-friendly services, implementation has been slow. A report assessing accessibility under the Digital India Initiative found moderate

²² Ashwaq Masoodi, “Sexual rights of disabled women,” *Mint*, December 3, 2014,

<https://www.livemint.com/Politics/FDPpol4IJOpX037spUU1kL/Sexual-rights-of-disabled-women.html>

²³ Riley A, Daruwalla N, Kanougiya S, et al., “Intimate partner violence against women with disability and associated mental health concerns: a cross-sectional survey in Mumbai, India,” *BMJ Open*, April 27, 2022, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/12/4/e056475> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

²⁴ UNFPA, “United efforts required to end violence against people with disabilities,” December 18, 2024, <https://india.unfpa.org/en/news/united-efforts-required-end-violence-against-people-disabilities> (accessed on June 27, 2025)

²⁵ Latika Roy Foundation. <https://latikaroy.org/child-protection/> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

²⁶ UNICEF, “Nearly 240 million children with disabilities around the world, UNICEF’s most comprehensive statistical analysis finds,” November 9, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-240-million-children-disabilities-around-world-unicefs-most-comprehensive> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

²⁷ Shreya Raman. India’s Laws Fail To Uphold Abortion Rights Of Women With Disabilities,” *Behen Box*, November 11, 2021, <https://behanbox.com/2021/11/11/indias-laws-fail-to-uphold-abortion-rights-of-women-with-disabilities/> (accessed on June 27, 2025)

²⁸ Abraham Thomas, “Digital access intrinsic to right to life, SC rules,” *Hindustan Times*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/digital-access-intrinsic-to-right-to-life-sc-rules-101746037816159.html>

²⁹ Satari A et. al., “The Mobile Disability Gap Report 2021”, GSMA, December 2021, <https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Mobile-Disability-Gap-Report-2021.pdf>, (accessed on March 7, 2025)

compliance but identified issues such as screen reader incompatibility, poor colour contrast, and labelling problems.³⁰

Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to environmental and climate-driven disasters, including cyclones, floods, heat waves, and severe storms. Persons with disabilities may not be able to access warnings and emergency information, be left behind during evacuation, require access to medications and assistive aids, experience greater challenges accessing basic needs, and face discrimination when resources are scarce. Persons with disabilities are also excluded from disaster risk reduction policies, plans, and social protection programmes and therefore particularly at risk during and in the aftermath of disasters.³¹

Dalit and *Adivasi* persons with disabilities experience compounded marginalisation due to social identity-based discrimination, economic deprivation, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and employment. Many *Dalits* and *Adivasis* are employed in hazardous caste-based occupations, such as leather tanning and manual scavenging, which increases their risk of disability.³² Additionally, poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation, and unsafe work environments can contribute to a higher likelihood of disability.³³ In education, *Dalit* and *Adivasi* students with disabilities struggle due to economic hardships and compounded social stigma. Similarly, in employment, they face severe discrimination, limited vocational training, and social exclusion, reinforcing cycles of poverty. Women and transgender persons with disabilities from *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities face heightened vulnerability to sexual violence.³⁴ While laws like the RPD and *Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act*³⁵ address caste or disability separately, they fail to recognise

³⁰ Gupta D, Verma P.R., Kanagaraj A, et al., “A Report on Inclusive Digital India: A Comprehensive Review of ICT Accessibility in Government Platforms,” Chase India and Sumatak Technologies, June 2023, <https://www.chase-india.com/media/vgydxbm/ict-accessibility-report-accessible-version.pdf>, (accessed on March 7, 2025)

³¹ World Health Organisation, C20 India, Disability, Equity, Justice Policy Brief, 2023, “Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities” 2023, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>, p. 82-83; Human Rights Watch, “Leave No One Behind: People with Disabilities and Older People in Climate-Related Disasters,” November 2022, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/11/202211drd_global_LeaveNoOneBehind.pdf, (accessed on March 7, 2025); United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs—Disability, “Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Situations, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/disability-issues/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction/disability> (accessed on March 7, 2025); National Institute of Disaster Management, India and Dept of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, India, “National Conference on Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR): Pathways for Inclusion and Action for Resilience,” February 5, 2020, https://nidm.gov.in/PDF/pubs/05Feb2020DiDRR_Report.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

³² Hoefe R, Lahiri S, Peepercamp M, Homeworkers Worldwide, Indian Committee of the Netherlands, “Do leather workers matter? Violating Labour Rights and Environmental Norms in India’s Leather Production,” March 2017, <https://arisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/DoLeatherWorkersMatter.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

³³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>

³⁴ Nilika Mehrotra, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, “Disability, gender and caste intersections in Indian Economy”, in (eds) “Disability and Intersecting Statuses, Research in Social Science and Disability” (Vol. 7) Emerald Group Publishing Limited, p. 295-324, December 27, 2013, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290052340_Disability_gender_and_caste_intersections_in_Indian_economy (accessed on March 7, 2025)

³⁵ Parliament of India, The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, No. 33, September 11, 1989, <https://socialjustice.gov.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/The%20Scheduled%20Castes%20and%20Scheduled%20Tribes.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

the aggravated discrimination faced by *Dalit* and *Adivasi* persons with disabilities. The invisibility of caste and tribal social identity in disability-related policies and data collection further exacerbates exclusion.

Specific allocations to persons with disabilities decline from 0.008% to 0.007% of GDP in 2025-2026. The total specific allocations include allocations for the department for the empowerment of persons with disabilities, allocations for mental health, vide the Ministry of Health and the *Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme* (IGNDPS) from the Ministry of Rural Development. Samagraha Shiksha Abhiyan has an inclusive education component.³⁶ However, the budget allocation to the component is not disaggregated in the budget documents. This budget allocation falls far short of the financial requirements for implementing laws protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, limiting prospects of implementation and realisation of India's legislative promises. Relatedly—since allocations fall far short of the amount required to fully roll out legal protections—there has also been a consistent underutilisation of funds allocated by persons with disabilities: 64 percent underutilisation in 2020-21, 86% in 2021-22, 79% in 2022-23, and 93% in 2023-24. To realise India's legislative commitments to protecting and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, the government must allocate sufficient funds and ensure effective utilisation to facilitate implementation.

Data collection gaps

The lacuna in counting persons with disabilities presents a significant hurdle to providing adequate services and a lack of attention to their needs in government policies and programmes. India's National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) periodic employment surveys exclude disability indicators,³⁷ and the National Crime Records Bureau does not include disaggregated data for persons with disabilities.³⁸ Similarly, the *National Food Security Act, 2013* (NFSA), aimed at advancing universal food security, fails to provide beneficiary data disaggregated by disability.³⁹ While the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) included disaggregated data on disability in 2018 in response to campaigns from persons with disabilities and OPDs, disability-specific data has not been collected in subsequent and ongoing surveys.⁴⁰

³⁶ "Union Budget has ignored mental health, persons with disabilities, laments think tank," DTNEXT, February 4, 2025,

<https://www.dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/union-budget-has-ignored-mental-health-persons-with-disabilities-laments-think-tank-821696> (accessed on June 27, 2025)

³⁷ Ramya Narahariseti & Marcia C. Castro, BMC Public Health, "Factors associated with persons with disability employment in India: a cross-sectional study," October 7, 2016,

<https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3713-6#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20the%20National%20Sample%20Survey%20has,education%20and%20level%20of%20income%20were%20included.> (accessed on June 27, 2025)

³⁸ Meghna Sharma and Niharika Das, "Invisible Victims' of Violence: A Gender and Disability Perspective of Coronavirus in India," EPW Engage, April 17, 2021, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/invisible-victims-violence-gender-and-disability> (accessed on June 27, 2025)

³⁹ Dept of Food and Public Distribution (India), National Food Security Act (NFSA), July 5, 2013, <https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/nfsa-act> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁴⁰ "Making disability count: On why NFHS will yield more robust data on the disability sector," *The Hindu*, July 3, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/making-disability-count-the-hindu-editorial-on-why-nfhs-will-yield-more-robust-data-on-the-disability-sector/article67034559.ece>

Moreover, while the RPD recognises 21 disabilities, government data collection and disaggregation continue to recognise only a limited subset as laid out in the *Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*. This leads to ongoing underreporting in government data and corresponding failure to allocate resources sufficient to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. For instance, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) report was limited to data collection for mental, hearing, speech, visual, locomotor and 'other' disabilities. As a result, the NFHS 2019 to 2021 Report found just 1 percent of the *de jure* household population had any disability. While this data set failed to include information on at least 14 legally recognised disabilities, it took methodological steps forward in disaggregating data by age, state, and rural and urban areas.

Current legal landscape

The following is a brief overview of laws in the country that pertain to persons with disabilities.

Legislation

In December 2016, India enacted the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016* (RPD), which marks a significant shift from the *Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*. The RPD:

- advances the right to legal equality (Section 3);
- recognises the legal capacity of persons with disabilities (Section 13);
- provides for limited guardianship in line with the CRPD (Section 14);
- advances protection for persons with disabilities from abuse, violence and cruel or inhuman treatment (Sections 6 and 7);
- criminalises atrocities against persons with disabilities (Section 92);
- provides for inclusive education in mainstream schools (Section 16), free education for children with benchmark disabilities (Section 31), and 5% reservation in government higher educational institutions (Section 32);
- mandates inclusive workplaces (Section 20) and provides for a 4% reservation in government jobs (Section 34);
- requires accessibility and inclusion (Sections 40-46);
- supports non-discriminatory access to justice (Sections 7, 12, 23, 75, 80, 84, and 85);
- establishes a government duty to uphold the right to health and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities (Section 25, 27);
- mandates social security benefits—including pensions, insurance, unemployment and unemployment allowances for persons with disabilities and their families (Sections 24, 26); and
- guarantees the right to participate in political and public life by safeguarding the right to vote (Section 37).

The *Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992*, is tasked with regulating and monitoring the training of rehabilitation professionals and promoting research in rehabilitation and special education. This includes determining education and qualification standards, conducting inspections and examinations, registering rehabilitation professionals, and ensuring professional conduct.

The *National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999* aims to advance the welfare of persons with disabilities living with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities. The Act aims to support independent, family, and community-based living and registered organisations providing services; facilitate equal opportunities; protect rights and full participation of persons with disabilities; and establish procedures for the appointment of guardians and trustees for persons with disabilities when required.

The *Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA), 2017*, aims to protect and promote the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities, ensuring that they receive quality care. MHCA also decriminalises suicide attempts and provides rehabilitation opportunities for people who have attempted suicide. Key features of the MHCA include the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities to make decisions about their mental health care, live with dignity without discrimination, maintain confidentiality about their disability and treatment, and make advance directives and nominate representatives for shared decision-making.

The *Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009* guarantees free and compulsory education to all children, including those with disabilities. RTE also makes provisions for children with disabilities, who are entitled to free and compulsory admission, attendance, and completion of elementary education. The *Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS)* scheme helps students with disabilities complete secondary schooling in a general education setting, and the *Samagra Shiksha* programme aims to include all children with disabilities in grades 1 to 12. The *National Education Policy, 2020*, commits to free education for children with disabilities between the ages of 6 and 18 and reserves 5% of seats in government and government-aided higher education for students with disabilities.

India's Criminal Law Amendments, 2013, took major steps forward in the protection of women with disabilities by providing accommodations to support women with disabilities to access the criminal justice system. The *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*, also introduced specific accommodations for children with disabilities.

Despite these advances, gaps in legal protections for persons with disabilities persist. The *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005*, fails to address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities or the distinct nature of domestic violence they experience.⁴¹ Similarly, the *Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013*, lacks provisions for necessary accommodations for women with disabilities during inquiries.

Discrimination against persons with disabilities in India's laws and proposed laws also persists. For instance, in the medical termination of pregnancy law, the only circumstance in which medical termination is permitted after 24 weeks of gestation is in case of a "foetal abnormality" as diagnosed by a medical board. By permitting abortions after 24 weeks in

⁴¹ DPI India, "Joint Submission on India by Disabled People's International India (DPI India) to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Pre-session Working Group for the 58th session," September 16, 2013, https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/migrated/DPI%20India_CEDAW%20Report.doc (accessed on March 7, 2025)

this limited circumstance, the law furthers the prejudice that disability is an adverse, exceptional situation.

Guidelines, initiatives, and advancements at the government level

The Accessible India Campaign (*Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan*) is a nationwide flagship initiative launched in 2015 and aimed at achieving universal accessibility. The campaign sought to ensure equal opportunities, independent living, and full participation in all aspects of life within an inclusive society for persons with disabilities. Under the Accessible India Campaign, the *Sugamya Bharat App*, a crowdsourcing mobile platform, is designed to allow people to report accessibility issues related to infrastructure and transportation systems to authorities, facilitating public participation in advancing accessibility for persons with disabilities.⁴² In a review meeting for the Accessible India Campaign held by Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) in 2024, the review panel noted that funds were provided “for making 1,314 state government buildings accessible and 623 have been made barrier-free. State governments have made 358 of their 2,851 premises accessible with their own resources”.⁴³ Participants of the consultations reported that a lot more needs to be done in terms of improving built area accessibility, especially among the private sectors.

In May 2025, DEPwD launched the technology initiative, 'Mission AI Accessibility', an effort along with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to “enhance digital inclusivity across platforms”.⁴⁴ The ‘Mission AI: Implementation of AI in Assistive Technology and Tools for Empowering Persons with Disabilities’, was aimed to focus on “utilising AI to design and scale assistive solutions” for persons with disabilities.⁴⁵

In May 2023, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment legally enforced the accessibility standard for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) products and services in India, known as IS-17802, with the notification of the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Rules, 2023*. In February 2024, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) issued *Accessibility Standards and Guidelines for the Banking Sector*.⁴⁶ In October 2025, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) released Guidelines for Accessibility of Content on Platforms of Publishers of Online Curated Content (OTT Platforms) for Persons with Hearing and Visual Impairment. The guidelines focus on ways to make the OTT

⁴² Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), “Accessible India Campaign”, Dec 3, 2015, <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2023/10/202408141618446982.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁴³ Sultan, P., “Urban ministry told to amend bylaws for easy accessibility to the disabled,” *The New Indian Express*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Feb/12/urban-ministry-told-to-amend-bylaws-for-easy-accessibility-to-the-disabled>

⁴⁴ Asra Mavad, & Asra Mavad. (2025, May 30). AI chatbot for disability support unveiled. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/bengaluru/ai-chatbot-for-disability-support-unveiled-3565209>

⁴⁵ ibid

⁴⁶ Ministry of Finance, *Accessibility Standards and Guidelines for Banking Sector*, <https://financialservices.gov.in/beta/sites/default/files/2024-08/Guidelines-for-Banking-Sector.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

platforms accessible to persons with disabilities through features like captions, audio descriptions, and Indian Sign Language (ISL) interpretation.⁴⁷

In many individual initiatives taken up by state governments we see progressive policies being implemented. For example, the Bihar government's cabinet in September 2025 approved the Divyangjan Civil Seva Protsahan Scheme, under which persons with disabilities will receive Rs 50,000 & Rs 1 lakh on passing the preliminary stages of UPSC & BPSC exams.⁴⁸ In addition, Delhi government is currently putting together a scheme where persons with disabilities will receive financial assistance to avail themselves of caregiver services.⁴⁹

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have signed a memorandum⁵⁰ in June 2025 to expand and establish Special Accredited Institutions for Education of the Divyangjans (SAIEDs) and offer a range of educational programmes including Open Basic Education (Levels A, B, and C), Secondary, Senior Secondary, and vocational courses.

Following Supreme Court orders in favour of reservations in promotions for persons with disabilities in 2016 and 2020, the Department of Personnel and Training, Government of India took initiative to release guidelines to provide reservation for those with benchmark disabilities⁵¹. These guidelines prescribe 4% reservation and provide insight on how to proceed for Group A, B and C.

Advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities in the courts

In the last two decades, the Supreme Court of India has passed significant judgments advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in the following key areas: reasonable accommodation, reservations for persons with disabilities in public employment, non-discrimination at workplaces, reservations and admissions in higher education, equal access to quality education in an inclusive setting, access to healthcare, access to justice, accessible public information, facilities and recreation, discrimination against women with disabilities, discrimination against persons with mental and psycho-social disabilities, appointment of

⁴⁷ Venkitesh, R. (2025, October 9). India's I&B Ministry Proposes Accessibility Guidelines for OTT Platforms: A Step Towards Inclusive Digital Entertainment. Leader in Offshore Accessibility Testing | Section 508 Compliance | WCAG Conformance | BarrierBreak. <https://www.barrierbreak.com/india-ib-ministry-proposes-accessibility-guidelines-ott-platforms-inclusive-digital-entertainment/>

⁴⁸ Ani (2025, July 8). Bihar cabinet approves 35% job reservation for native women, youth commission, diesel subsidy for farmers. ThePrint. https://theprint.in/india/bihar-cabinet-decisions-2025/2683664/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁴⁹ Tnn. (2025b, June 6). Caregiver support scheme likely for those with benchmark disabilities. The Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/caregiver-support-scheme-likely-for-those-with-benchmark-disabilities/articleshow/121683415.cms?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

⁵⁰ Tripartite MoU signed between DEPwD, NIOS and NCERT to promote Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities. (n.d.). https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2137424&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email®=3&lang=2

⁵¹ Central Ministry departments to provide reservation in promotion to persons with benchmark disabilities. (2022, May 21). BusinessLine. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/central-ministry-departments-to-provide-reservation-in-promotion-to-persons-with-benchmark-disabilities/article65442396.ece>

Commissioners and establishment of grievance redressal under the RPD, the right to procedural relaxation in recruitment and appointment, and the rights of persons with disabilities to access audio-visual entertainment in an accessible format.⁵² These advancements are covered in detail in the annexure. Below are a few monumental ones.

In November 2024, a three-bench judge of the Supreme Court in *Rajive Raturi v. UOI & Ors.* confirmed that a disabled person's right to access environments, services, and opportunities is an essential and fundamental right. The Supreme Court established a clear mandate for the state to develop rules that give form to this principle: the ruling mandates the creation of enforceable accessibility norms, integrating assistive technology and universal design while linking accessibility rights to Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Constitution.⁵³ Following this on April 30, 2025, the Supreme Court delivered in the case of *Pragya Prasun & Ors. vs. UOI & Ors.*, along with *Amar Jain vs. UOI & Ors.*, the right to digital access as an intrinsic component of the right to life and liberty. This was a landmark case in ensuring that all the Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures are made fully accessible to persons with disabilities.⁵⁴

In February 2025, the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) fined 155 establishments, including central ministries and private organisations, INR 10,000 each for failing to meet digital accessibility standards. The CCPD warned of stricter penalties in future reviews and emphasised the urgency of ensuring digital accessibility, particularly for persons who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind.⁵⁵

Gaps in implementation

Mechanisms to advance SDGs for persons with disabilities in India under the RPD require implementation. Numerous states have yet to implement the RPD. In April 2024, the Supreme Court of India described the implementation of the RPD as "dismal." The bench said that Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, and Chandigarh have not appointed state commissioners; while Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Kerala, West Bengal, Delhi, Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have not yet constituted prescribed funds. Additionally, special courts for speedy trials in cases involving persons with disabilities have not been established in Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal, and public prosecutors have not been appointed in Chhattisgarh and Daman & Diu.⁵⁶

⁵² Kothari J, Rajshekhar NR, et. al., Centre for Law & Policy Research, "Disability Justice: Court Decisions on Disability Rights in India", December 2024, https://clpr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Disability-Justice_Accessible-Soft-Copy-1.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁵³ Kavita Bajeli-Datt, "Disability Groups Applaud the SC Ruling Declaring Accessibility a Fundamental Right," *The New Indian Express*, November 15, 2024, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Nov/15/disability-groups-applaud-the-sc-ruling-declaring-accessibility-a-fundamental-right>

⁵⁴ Lanka, S. N. (2025, May 26). When KYC becomes a barrier: Supreme Court's stand for digital inclusion. Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF). <https://internetfreedom.in/when-kyc-becomes-a-barrier-supreme-courts-stand-for-digital-inclusion/>

⁵⁵ Pandit, A, "155 Establishments Fail to Meet Digital Access Standards, Fined," *Times of India*, February 19, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/155-establishments-including-central-ministries-fined-for-failing-to-meet-digital-accessibility-standards/articleshow/118374730.cms>

⁵⁶ PTI "SC expresses displeasure over 'dismal' implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act," *Economic Times Legal World*, April 22, 2024, <https://legal.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/litigation/sc-expresses-displeasure-over-dismal-implementation-of-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-act/109508581>

In July 2021, the Centre informed the Rajya Sabha that Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu have not framed rules under the RPD—although at the time of writing, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh had since issued rules. Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Pratima Bhoumik, also singled out the few states that have successfully set up special courts under the Act, including Assam, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, she noted that the post of CCPD has been given to the Secretary of the DEPwD.⁵⁷

RPD provisions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the implementation of schemes and programmes also require implementation. According to the Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and the DEPwD, 230 schemes and programmes currently include provisions to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, to achieve an adequate standard of living and enable independent and community-based living.⁵⁸ Specifically, the RPD calls for allocations for persons with disabilities under these schemes at a rate 25% higher than similar schemes applicable to others;⁵⁹ and 5% reservations for persons with disabilities under schemes pertaining to agricultural land, housing, development, poverty alleviation, and land allocation for housing, shelter, occupational development, business, enterprise, recreation, and production.⁶⁰ As detailed in this report, however, where state-level data on implementation is available and disaggregated by disability, allocations fall far below RPD mandated benchmarks. Where social protection programmes are in place, persons with disabilities face challenges in accessing information and enrolment.

Challenges and Recommendations

The sections that follow review persistent challenges that undermine access to SDGs for persons with disabilities in India. In some sections, we address linked SDGs together, underscoring the interrelation between Goals.

Goals 1 and 2: End poverty in all its forms and end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition for persons with disabilities

Status

According to NSS 2018 data, persons with disabilities incur an average monthly expense of ₹2,477 related to their disability—₹3,112 in urban areas and ₹2,117 in rural areas.⁶¹

⁵⁷ PTI, “Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra haven't framed rules under Disabilities Act: Union govt,” *The New Indian Express*, July 29, 2021, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/Jul/28/andhra-pradesh-maharashtra-havent-framed-rules-under-disabilities-act-union-govt-2336789.html>

⁵⁸ See Department of Persons with Disabilities list of schemes, <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2024/12/202412111222128691.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁵⁹ RPD, Chapter V(24)(1)

⁶⁰ RPD, Chapter VI(37)(a-c)

⁶¹ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (India), “Persons with Disabilities in India: NSS 76th Round,” July-December 2018,

Notably, subsequent civil society studies have found that costs vary significantly according to disability, with costs to families of supporting children with disabilities beginning at ₹19,776 monthly at the lowest level of support to deaf-blind children with disabilities, and ranging to ₹3,61,990 monthly at the upper level of support for children with disabilities having complex medical conditions.⁶²

The RPD calls for allocations for persons with disabilities at a rate 25% higher than similar schemes applicable to others;⁶³ and 5% reservations for persons with disabilities under schemes pertaining to agricultural land, housing, development, poverty alleviation, and land allocation for housing, shelter, occupational development, business, enterprise, recreation, and production.⁶⁴ Where central and state-level data on implementation is available and disaggregated by disability, however, numerous schemes fall far short of meeting RPD mandated benchmarks.

Pensions

While the *Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)* aims to support persons with disabilities below the poverty line, in some states it provides as little as ₹300 in a monthly pension between the ages of 18 and 80, and ₹500 for recipients over 80.⁶⁵ Though state governments are advised to top up this pension amount, the lack of a mandate causes pension amounts to fluctuate drastically, between ₹300 in Bihar⁶⁶ and ₹6000 in Andhra Pradesh⁶⁷. The minimum allocation by the central government has not been adjusted since 2012, and there is no increase in allocation under the Union Budget 2025-26,⁶⁸ functionally capping the number of persons with disabilities who can enrol in and receive benefits under IGNDPS. As a result, the scheme caters to only about 4% of persons with disabilities identified by the 2011 census, leaving a vast majority excluded.⁶⁹ In a recent report by PACTA, it was analysed that in terms of “budgetary allocation, disability-related social protection schemes amount to only 0.2% of the total disbursements and 0.04% of

https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_583_Final_0.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁶² Center for Inclusive Policy, *The Direct Costs of Disability to Families in Tamil Nadu*, 2024, https://inclusive-policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Direct-Costs-of-Disability-to-Families-in-Tamil-Nadu_June-2024.pdf

⁶³ Chapter V(24)(1)

⁶⁴ Chapter VI(37)(a-c)

⁶⁵ National Rural Development Program, National Social Assistance Programme Guidelines, https://nsap.nic.in/Guidelines/nsap_guidelines_oct2014.pdf (accessed on June 1, 2025)

⁶⁶ Riddhi Lakhiani, “Where India’s disability pension scheme falls short,” *The Times of India*, October 14, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/developing-contemporary-india/where-indias-disability-pension-scheme-falls-short/>

⁶⁷ MD Ilyas, “AP Issues Orders for Hike in Social Security Pensions from July 1”, *Deccan Chronicle*, June 14, 2024, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/southern-states/andhra-pradesh/ap-issues-orders-for-hike-in-social-security-pensions-from-july-1-899043>

⁶⁸ Ministry of Finance, Expenditure Budget 2025–2026, <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/eb/allsbef.pdf>, (accessed on June 1, 2025)

⁶⁹ “Budget 2023-24 has very little to offer for marginalised, say rights groups,” *Deccan Herald*, February 2, 2023 <https://www.deccanherald.com/business/union-budget/budget-2023-24-has-very-little-to-offer-for-marginalised-say-rights-groups-1187146.html>

GDP in India, compared to the average public spending on social protection for persons with disabilities across 56 countries which was 1.23% in 2014".⁷⁰

For instance, in Andhra Pradesh—the state with the highest paying disability pension scheme—the pensions were raised, ranging from ₹6,000 to ₹15,000 in three tiers. However, the overall number of beneficiaries has decreased due to inadequate budget allocations.⁷¹ In other states too, there have been moves to raise the pensions. Persons with over 60% disability who are currently receiving ₹5,000 per month in Delhi will now receive up to ₹5,500 per month under the revised scheme.⁷²

IGNDPS, moreover, is exclusionary in nature. To qualify, persons with disabilities must have a disability certificate (the percentage varies depending on the state), must be below the poverty line (BPL), and be over 18 years of age. States like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, etc. have relaxed the eligibility criteria by providing pensions to persons with benchmark disability as well (40% and above).⁷³ These conditions exclude persons with disabilities above the poverty line, in states where the percentage is as high as 80%, it also excludes persons with disabilities below that and children with disabilities—thereby presenting financial challenges for their parents. Accordingly, rather than helping to lift persons with disabilities out of poverty—in line with SDG 1, IGNDPS provides minimal support to those already below the poverty line.

Persons with disabilities also experience challenges accessing disability pensions under IGNDPS at the state level⁷⁴—including enrolment challenges, pension distribution based upon outdated BPL survey lists, payment of pensions at stagnant rates despite notified increases, caps in the number of beneficiaries, difficulties in accessing pensions due to lack of bank access, and access disruption linked to UDID and Aadhaar. Special pensions for persons who become disabled under the *Employees Provident Fund* and for unorganised construction workers are also challenging to access, said participants of the consultation.

Food security

In the domain of food security, persons with disabilities face challenges in access and implementation. The *Antyodaya Anna Yojana* (AAY), initiated in 2000, is one of the largest public distribution schemes (PDS) in India. It aims to ensure food security by supplying food and other commodities at subsidised rates. Persons with disabilities can apply for the

⁷⁰ Lakhiani, R., Nivedita Krishna, & Krithika Sambasivan. (2023). Strengthening the implementation of India's National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) - a policy memo. Pacta. https://e6a1ddce-638a-4c2a-a468-3bb06cb66ec2.filesusr.com/ugd/0e1e8f_0ed2685e87314bb883f55aa28bd85831.pdf

⁷¹ MD Ilyas, "AP Issues Orders for Hike in Social Security Pensions from July 1", *Deccan Chronicle*, June 14, 2024, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/southern-states/andhra-pradesh/ap-issues-orders-for-hike-in-social-security-pensions-from-july-1-899043>

⁷² Tnn. (2025, May 30). Govt to raise pension for senior citizens. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/govt-to-raise-pension-for-senior-citizens/articleshow/121504851.cms>

⁷³ Lakhiani, R., Nivedita Krishna, & Krithika Sambasivan. (2023). Strengthening the implementation of India's National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) - a policy memo. Pacta. https://e6a1ddce-638a-4c2a-a468-3bb06cb66ec2.filesusr.com/ugd/0e1e8f_0ed2685e87314bb883f55aa28bd85831.pdf

⁷⁴ Risha Chitlangia, "Pension payments for over 2,000 dead people — CAG report flags lapses in govt welfare schemes," *The Print*, August 8, 2023, <https://theprint.in/india/governance/pension-payments-for-over-2000-dead-people-cag-report-flags-lapses-in-govt-welfare-schemes/1706064/>

scheme, but there is no separate allocation or target for persons with disabilities, reflecting a failure to update the scheme following the passage of the RPD.

Children with disabilities in home-based education programmes miss out on the provision of mid-day meal schemes. Persons with disabilities also report exclusion from benefits if they were not notified as disabled during the 2011 census, as well as physical accessibility barriers in accessing ration shops and relief centres.⁷⁵ Food insecurity and challenges in accessing relief were underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein persons with disabilities faced challenges in accessing essential support and relied upon CSOs for food access.⁷⁶

Poverty alleviation programmes

In other poverty alleviation programmes, persons with disabilities are excluded from allocation structures and implementation data. For instance, the *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana* under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) allows states to formulate their own state-specific poverty-reduction plans with an agenda to cover 7 crore rural poor households across 600 districts, 6000 blocks, 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, and 6 lakh villages through the establishment of self-help groups (SHGs) and federations. DAY-NRLM, however, has no specific allocations for persons with disabilities and does not report on disbursement to persons with disabilities.⁷⁷

Marriage incentive or assistance schemes

Nineteen states in India have implemented marriage incentive or assistance schemes. The schemes have been introduced with the objective of “achieving greater social inclusion” and some even say to support the married lives of persons with disabilities. These schemes provide financial support ranging from INR 30,000 to INR 2,50,000 where most of them are only applicable when a non-disabled person marries a person with disabilities. In some cases, such as Telangana⁷⁸, we see that even couples with disabilities can access these schemes or assistance. The schemes themselves often have a “lock-in” period after which only the money will be disbursed to the couple.

A recent study⁷⁹ shows us the impact of such schemes in Kerala and Bihar where we see that one scheme (Bihar) is gender neutral (available to all persons with disabilities) while the other one (Kerala) is only applicable for women with disabilities. The scheme in Kerala is

⁷⁵ UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, “Disability and Development Report: Realising the SDGs by, for and with persons with disabilities,” December 1, 2018, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/publication-disability-sdgs.html> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁷⁶ Pankhuri Yadav, “For The Disabled, Food Is a Bigger Worry Than Covid”, *The Times of India*, May 20, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/for-the-disabled-food-is-a-bigger-worry-than-covid/articleshow/82781831.cms>

⁷⁷ [Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission \(DAY-NRLM\)](#)

⁷⁸ Correspondent, (2025, May 20). Deccan Chronicle. Deccan Chronicle. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/southern-states/telangana/telangana-government-expands-marriage-incentive-scheme-to-include-couples-with-disabilities-1880189>

⁷⁹ CREA, Disability, marriage, rights. <https://www.creaworld.org/media/pdf/resources/publications/DMR-Handout-2.pdf>

limited to persons with physical or locomotor disabilities while most of the other schemes are applicable to any disability. Women with disabilities who participated in the study shared that they were “keen to utilise the money received under the scheme, irrespective of the amount received – to fund further education, set up a source of livelihood for themselves, to pay for hospital expenses involved in the delivery of their child, to pay off part of the loan their family might have taken to fund their wedding”.⁸⁰ It is yet to be studied how these schemes impact the ongoing power imbalance between persons with disabilities and their non-disabled spouses.

Recommendations

- Develop social protection frameworks for persons with disabilities that maximise inclusion in line with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines.⁸¹ Promote a lifecycle approach to social protection that supports persons with disabilities from birth until death, including early diagnosis, food security, disability support, and elder support.
- Collect updated census data on persons with disabilities in line with the full range of disabilities recognised under the RPD.
- Ensure BPL data is updated to reflect the number of persons with disabilities in line with the RPD.
- Determine pension allocations based on targeted studies that identify specific services required by persons across disabilities and associated costs. Fund disability pension schemes to include all persons with disabilities. Ensure pensions are uniformly linked to the consumer price index and rate of inflation.
- Ensure timely disbursement and accessibility in pension distribution for effective reach.
- Ensure financial allocation and resources for disability-inclusion in poverty alleviation programmes in line with the RPD Act. Ensure that allocations are sufficient to cover heightened costs associated with disabilities, including assistive devices, accessible housing, and comprehensive medical coverage.
- Extend all social safety nets in both scope and allocation to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, especially those with high support needs and revise to include the additional costs incurred by persons with disabilities in overcoming barriers to participation.
- Provide social insurance coverage, benefits or allowances to compensate for income loss due to caregiving responsibilities incurred by caregivers, including family members of persons with disabilities. Provide care protection coverage for women and girls with disabilities who are carers, particularly mothers.
- Ensure physical accessibility of food distribution points and develop specialised nutritional support programmes for persons with disabilities with specific dietary needs and particularly expecting mothers with disabilities.
- Design measures to include children with disabilities in mid-day meal schemes.

Goal 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all persons with disabilities at all ages*

⁸⁰ ibid

⁸¹ UNICEF/ILO, *Towards Inclusive Social Protection Systems Enabling Participation and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*, <https://www.social-protection.org/qimi/ShowResource.action?id=58145>

Status

Exclusion from flagship health policies

None of the flagship health policies and programs of the Government of India—including the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), the Integrated Child Development Scheme, *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, or *Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram*—address access to services specifically for Persons with disabilities. As such, persons with disabilities often experience healthcare discrimination, lack accessible medical facilities, and face exclusion from health insurance coverage.⁸²

Inadequate rehabilitation services

Healthcare infrastructure shows significant gaps, particularly in rehabilitation services, including physical, occupational, and speech therapies and community support designed to help persons with disabilities live independently and participate in their communities. As a result, essential medical services are out of reach for persons with disabilities. Notably, these health outcomes vary by state. For instance, a study in Telangana reported 76% coverage of persons with disabilities for medical rehabilitation services.⁸³

From 2020-2024, the *Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)*, which supports persons with disabilities through financial aid to CSOs, benefited between 30,000 and 35,000 people annually. Despite increased expenditure over the last five years—from 77.42 crores in 2020-2021, to 100.89 crores in 2021-2022, to 114.69 crores in 2022-2023, and 129.97 crores in 2023-2024—beneficiaries under DDRS were not higher than 35,349 in 2022-2023.⁸⁴

In May 2021, the government established the *Community Based Inclusive Development Programme (CBID)*, initiating six-month-long training programmes to develop cadres of frontline community-based rehabilitation workers charged with community assessment and mapping for early identification, intervention, and development of persons with disabilities. While the Rehabilitation Council of India reports 80.266 lakh expenditure in 2022-2023, this budget allocation falls far short of addressing the needs of the 90 to 95% of persons with disabilities, who are unable to access rehabilitation services.⁸⁵

Healthcare access challenges

⁸² Kavita Bajeli-Datt, “Over 80 per cent of disabled people lack health insurance in India: Survey,” *The New Indian Express*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Mar/26/over-80-per-cent-of-disabled-people-lack-health-insurance-in-india-survey>

⁸³ Mactaggart I, Polack S, et al., International Centre for Evidence in Disability and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, “Telangana Disability Study, India” (sic), 2014, <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/India-Country-Report.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁸⁴ Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, India, “Annual Report 2023-2024”, Section 8.1, <https://divyangjan.depwd.gov.in/content/upload/uploadfiles/AnnualReport2023-24English.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁸⁵ Rehabilitation Council of India, “Annual Report 2022 - 2023”, Page 213, https://rehabcouncil.nic.in/sites/default/files/2024-07/AR_EG_2223.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

Medical facilities at all levels fall short of meeting accessibility benchmarks. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, shortages of trained healthcare professionals and weak referral systems contribute to the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. For instance, a 2023-2024 study of health care access for persons with disabilities in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi, Karnataka, found a lack of infrastructure and facilities that cater to the needs of persons with disabilities at healthcare centres.⁸⁶ Specific issues include the absence of accessible toilets, ramps, and wheelchairs; and a lack of essential services and healthcare professionals in government hospitals and rehabilitation centres, including the unavailability of physiotherapists and a lack of assessment tools and arrangements for monitoring the needs of persons with disabilities.⁸⁷ Emergency helplines—including for women, children, and access to police, ambulances, and suicide prevention—are not accessible across disabilities, leaving some persons with disabilities unable to access emergency services, said participants of a consultation.

Healthcare access is also limited by the prohibitive cost of medication and treatment, particularly for some conditions. Persons with disabilities in Karnataka report being unable to afford private healthcare services, limiting access to care.⁸⁸ Medications for conditions like multiple sclerosis, thalassemia, and haemophilia are particularly expensive, leaving persons with disabilities to rely upon NGOs to access medical care.⁸⁹

Lack of accessible transport, moreover, may prevent persons with disabilities from reaching medical facilities. Participants of a consultation reported that barriers to accessing healthcare closer to persons with disabilities often lead to delays in accessing care, which results in worsened conditions. Persons with disabilities in the Eastern region of India, for instance, report that hospitals are not accessible in rural areas.⁹⁰ High costs associated with transportation to healthcare facilities also undermine access to care.⁹¹

Persons with disabilities report the need for training among healthcare providers in understanding, assessing, certifying, and treating people across the 21 types of disabilities.⁹² Especially, the absence of adequate training across disabilities, communication barriers between healthcare providers and persons with disabilities can result in delayed or

⁸⁶ NCPEDP. "Research study to understand the health status of Persons with Disabilities in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi Districts of Karnataka." 2023-2024. <https://ncpedp.org/publications/?query-10-page=2> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

⁸⁷ NCPEDP. "Research study to understand the health status of Persons with Disabilities in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi Districts of Karnataka." 2023-2024. <https://ncpedp.org/publications/?query-10-page=2> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

⁸⁸ NCPEDP. "Research study to understand the health status of Persons with Disabilities in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi Districts of Karnataka." 2023-2024. <https://ncpedp.org/publications/?query-10-page=2> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

⁸⁹ NPRD. Progress Report on the Implementation of India's SDG Commitments from the Disability Lens for the Northern Region of India. 2022.

⁹⁰ Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

⁹¹ NCPEDP. "Research study to understand the health status of Persons with Disabilities in Bengaluru and Kalaburagi Districts of Karnataka." 2023-2024. <https://ncpedp.org/publications/?query-10-page=2> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

⁹² NPRD. Progress Report on the Implementation of India's SDG Commitments from the Disability Lens for the Northern Region of India. 2022.

inadequate medical care, negatively impacting their overall health and well-being⁹³. Social stigma further undermines healthcare access for persons with disabilities, especially in the arena of SRHR services, and in the case of Acid Attack Victims.⁹⁴ Stigma associated with certain conditions also leads to discrimination in healthcare settings. Persons with disabilities are often denied or receive substandard treatment due to negative attitudes and misconceptions among healthcare providers. Women and persons with disabilities also face challenges accessing health information since most health materials are not accessible across disabilities, especially in the domain of sexual health.

Inadequate mental health services

The National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) 2016 by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) found that 15% of India's adult population experiences mental health issues requiring intervention. As per 2025 reports, 70 to 92% of people with mental health conditions do not receive proper treatment due to a lack of awareness, stigma, and professional shortages.⁹⁵ Therapy and counselling are also out of reach for many persons with disabilities due to communication barriers between providers and persons with disabilities.

In 2020, the Kiran helpline was launched in 13 languages to provide support to provide mental health support in the COVID-19 context,⁹⁶ but there was little to no promotion or awareness. In 2022, the Kiran helpline merged with the newly launched Tele MANAS,⁹⁷ a service that is far better known.⁹⁸ Participants of the consultation reported that information about this helpline has still not reached persons across disabilities due to a lack of information dissemination in accessible formats.

Barriers to accessing health insurance

Persons with disabilities also continue to face challenges in accessing health insurance.⁹⁹ The *Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana* (AB-PM-JAY), India's flagship

⁹³ 14 15

⁹⁴ NPRD. Progress Report on the Implementation of India's SDG Commitments from the Disability Lens for the Northern Region of India. 2022.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, "Advancing Mental Healthcare in India", February 7, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseFramePage.aspx?PRID=2100706> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

⁹⁶ PIB. "24x7 Toll-Free Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline Kiran (1800-599-0019) launched in 13 Languages." September 8, 2020. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1652240> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

⁹⁷ Government of India, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, "Advancing Mental Healthcare in India," February 11, 2025. [https://mohfw.gov.in/?q=pressrelease-206#:~:text=The%20KIRAN%20Helpline%20\(1800%2D599,integrated%20with%20India's%20healthcare%20system](https://mohfw.gov.in/?q=pressrelease-206#:~:text=The%20KIRAN%20Helpline%20(1800%2D599,integrated%20with%20India's%20healthcare%20system) (accessed on April 23, 2025.)

⁹⁸ Reddy, V. Shivani, "Inter Students Keep Tele Manas' Phones Busy," *Deccan Chronicle*, April 21, 2025, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/southern-states/telangana/inter-students-keep-tele-manas-phones-busy-1874276> (accessed on April 23, 2025);

Rajput, K, "Over 525 individuals receive mental health support in UP daily." April 9, 2025, <https://medcialdialogues.in/news/health/over-525-individuals-receive-mental-health-support-in-up-daily-146301> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

⁹⁹ NPRD. Progress Report on the Implementation of India's SDG Commitments from the Disability Lens for the Northern Region of India. 2022.

health insurance scheme aimed at achieving universal health coverage,¹⁰⁰ does not include specific allocations for persons with disabilities.¹⁰¹ Persons with disabilities who seek enrolment in AB-PM-JAY, moreover, report being denied health coverage. In a 2025 survey, which included responses from 5,000 persons with disabilities living in 34 states and union territories, 42% of respondents had not heard of the AB-PM-JAY.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, private insurers openly discriminate against persons with disabilities, denying coverage or charging exorbitant premiums. In 2022, the Delhi High Court in *Saurabh Shukla v. Max Bupa Health Insurance Co. Ltd. & Ors.* called upon the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) to modify the terminology "sub-standard lives" in their regulations to ensure that such "unacceptable terminology" is not used to refer to persons with disabilities.¹⁰³ A 2023 Behan Box report shows that private insurers continue to deny healthcare insurance to children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.¹⁰⁴ The 2025 health insurance-related survey reported that over 80% of persons with disabilities, especially those with multiple disabilities, lack health insurance. The survey also revealed that 53.2% of respondents were not able to secure a policy because of their disability.¹⁰⁵

While the IRDAI has issued guidelines prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities, these protections are not implemented. For instance, people with conditions like dwarfism are disqualified from insurance because of their disability.¹⁰⁶ Further, persons with disabilities face heightened challenges pursuing insurance claims due to accessibility challenges, including physical accessibility and barriers to communication for deaf persons.

Recommendations

- Incorporate disaggregated data collection, including across all 21 types of disabilities in the NFHS.
- Strengthen active case-finding efforts in areas with high precedence of certain conditions to ensure early diagnosis and treatment

¹⁰⁰ Persons with disabilities highlighted the importance of understanding universal health coverage as all people, without discrimination, being able to access healthcare services without financial difficulty, including health promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.

¹⁰¹ Bindu S Perapaddan, "Persons with disabilities seek inclusion in AB-PMJAY scheme without any income, age criteria," *The Hindu*, October 4, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/persons-with-disabilities-seek-inclusion-in-ab-pmjay-scheme-without-any-income-age-criteria/article68709522.ece>

¹⁰² Bajeli-Datt, Kavita. "Over 80 per cent of Disabled People Lack Health Insurance in India: Survey," *The New Indian Express*, www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Mar/26/over-80-per-cent-of-disabled-people-lack-health-insurance-in-india-survey. (accessed on June 16, 2025)

¹⁰³ PTI, "HC pans IRDAI for calling disabled "sub-standard lives", says they can't be denied health cover," *The Economic Times*, December 15, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/banking/finance/insure/hc-pans-irdai-for-calling-disabled-sub-standard-lives-says-they-cant-be-denied-health-cover/articleshow/96256767.cms>

¹⁰⁴ Eisha Hussain, "Indian Insurers Are Denying Health Cover For Intellectual, Developmental Disabilities" Behan Box, January 13, 2023, <https://behanbox.com/2023/01/13/indian-insurers-are-denying-health-cover-for-intellectual-developmental-disabilities/>

¹⁰⁵ Bajeli-Datt, Kavita. "Over 80 per cent of Disabled People Lack Health Insurance in India: Survey," *The New Indian Express*, www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Mar/26/over-80-per-cent-of-disabled-people-lack-health-insurance-in-india-survey. (accessed on June 16, 2025)

¹⁰⁶ Anoo Bhuyan, "COVID-19: Insurers Are Denying Policies To Disabled Despite Govt Strictures", *India Spend*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.indiaspend.com/covid-19-insurers-are-denying-policies-to-disabled-despite-govt-strictures>

- Provide comprehensive rehabilitation and support services to address the physical, social, and psychological impact of disabilities.
- Ensure health infrastructure at all levels is accessible to persons with disabilities. This includes physical and digital health infrastructure—such as diagnostic centres, medical reports, medical clinics and hospitals; access to information; and community-based rehabilitation and public health initiatives.
- Promote access to information on health services at the district level. For instance, district-level websites can include accessible information on rehabilitation centres, therapists, disability certification centres, etc.
- Implement universal health coverage (UHC) and enforce regulations that end discrimination in insurance access and coverage.
 - Ensure government and private health insurance schemes cover general and disability-specific health services required for all persons with disabilities, such as rehabilitation services, assessment and diagnostic services, assistive aids/devices and quality health services. For instance, the process/ protocol for applying for a Ayushman Bharat card needs to be disability-inclusive so that it does not exclude individuals with deformities.
- Build required infrastructure at the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) level for early identification and intervention for children with disabilities.
- Bring disability certification to the Primary Health Centre (PHC) level and include at least one person with disabilities on the medical board.
 - Establish and implement clear and comprehensive systems for assessment and verification of persons with disabilities, especially those with blood and neuromuscular disorders.
 - Take steps to ensure that no certification process can be misused to procure fake disability certificates.
- Advance last-mile health delivery services. Ensure that all health-related services, including mental health services, are accessible to persons with disabilities near where they live. Invest in developing community-based healthcare, rehabilitation, and social support systems, including but not limited to home care, local healthcare services, and peer support networks.
- Develop therapy units at a village level and provide caregivers of persons with disabilities with training on the basics of physical therapy so that there are no disruptions in therapy in the absence of professional therapists.
- Ensure information about health care, diseases, vaccinations, measures and services, including helplines, are disseminated in accessible formats, including clear information and campaigns specific to the theme being served.
- Strengthening healthcare systems at all levels, to provide comprehensive care, including early screening, diagnosis, and post-care services with trained professionals, including care support and training for family caregivers. While this recommendation has emerged particularly in the context of specific health conditions, such as dementia, and diseases such as leprosy, it is a universal recommendation that requires ongoing resource investments and inputs.
- Conduct regular and ongoing training and skill update sessions for all healthcare workers to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge on how to support persons with disabilities in obtaining optimal health outcomes.
 - Ensure training includes awareness of protections under RPD and MHCA.

- Review and update Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) accreditation for rehabilitation professionals and support persons to ensure skilled personnel in adequate numbers.
- Promote employment of persons with disabilities within the health sector.
- Shift toward community-based mental health services with peer support, and train professionals on rights-based, non-coercive alternatives to institutionalisation.
- Initiate care service providers and personal assistance services. Develop and implement an appropriate policy for the same.
- Develop and implement public health campaigns to raise awareness. These campaigns should state facts, actively counter stigma and discrimination and be available in accessible formats.

Goal 4: Inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all persons with disabilities

Status

National data on enrolment and educational outcomes in the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2024, does not include disaggregated data for children with disabilities, which creates challenges in systematically assessing India's progress toward inclusive and equitable quality education. Further, India currently lacks adequate data collection metrics to track progress on participation and presence, including retention and engagement in all academic and non-academic activities in schools, which participants reported in the consultation.

Absent systematic data on educational access and achievement for children with disabilities, reporting to the Rajya Sabha in 2023, the Ministry of Education reported that the enrolment of children with disabilities was 0.89% of the total enrolment of children in 2021-2022. Further, according to Ministry of Education data, 6,053 children with disabilities appeared for class 10 board examinations with a 93.42% pass rate, and 4,395 children with disabilities appeared in class 12 board examinations with a 93.11% pass rate.¹⁰⁷ While these pass rates are high, there was a notable decline in the number of children with disabilities who appeared for class 10 and 12 exams, i.e. in 2024, 5,057 students registered, 5,019 students appeared, and 4,548 cleared the Class 12 exams. This was a decline from 2023, when 5,757 students had registered, 5,645 appeared, and 4,924 had cleared the exams.¹⁰⁸ Further, these numbers do not shed light on what percentage of children with disabilities are even enrolled in school.

Exclusion from Anganwadi Centres

¹⁰⁷ Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, Education of Children with Disability, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3208 answered on 29/03, 2023, available online, <https://sansad.in/getFile/annex/259/AU3208.pdf?source=pqars#:~:text=As%20per%20UDISE%202021%2D22,CWSN%20in%20percentage%20is%20annexed>. See also Ministry of Education, Education of Divyang Children, 12 December 2022, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1882766>.

¹⁰⁸ Himanshu Chauhan & Siddhivi Singh, "Improvement in Performance of Students with Disabilities in CBSE Class XII Exams," *Times of India*, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/improvement-in-performance-of-students-with-disabilities-in-cbse-class-xii-exams/articleshow/110095853.cms, (accessed on June 27, 2025)

In November 2023, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Zubin Irani launched the National Outreach Programme on the Anganwadi Protocol for children with disabilities.¹⁰⁹ This new protocol was designed to enhance the well-being of children by providing early intervention, specialised support, and services for infants and young children with disabilities. The protocol also involved tracking developmental milestones of children with disabilities on the Poshan tracker and using the data to further support convergence between relevant Ministries, including the Ministry of Home Welfare, Department of School Education and Literacy, and the Department of Persons with Disabilities. However, there isn't any information on the progress made under this initiative, including whether Anganwadi workers were trained in being able to identify early signs of impairment or progress in milestones. Meanwhile, participants reported that children with disabilities are still not included in Anganwadi Centres, where they face both access as well as participation challenges.

Barriers to accessing equitable quality education

Participants in consultations reported that family and social mindsets suggest that children with disabilities cannot achieve education and employment, compounded for girls with disabilities, create a primary barrier to attendance. Despite increased enrolment of children with disabilities at a primary level, enrolment remains low, and participation and progress of children with disabilities in school are lagging due to discrimination and significant and unaddressed barriers to accessibility. For instance, participants shared that schools are often reluctant to admit children with disabilities due to reluctance or perceived inability to provide the extra support they will require to succeed.

Children with chronic health conditions—including cancer, thalassemia, and Japanese encephalitis—face a complex web of challenges in accessing education, including frequent and prolonged absences due to medical appointments, hospitalisations, and recovery periods, which lead to significant learning gaps and difficulties maintaining continuity with the curriculum. These absences are further complicated by physical and emotional fatigue, cognitive impairments, and side effects from treatments, making it difficult to concentrate, participate in class, and retain information. Further, the social isolation and discrimination experienced due to their condition, compounded by a lack of awareness and support from school personnel and peers, create additional barriers to full inclusion and successful academic outcomes.¹¹⁰

The *National Education Policy (NEP), 2020*, while aiming for inclusive education,¹¹¹ falls short of holistically addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities, focusing primarily on basic physical accessibility and enrolment while overlooking broader inclusion

¹⁰⁹ Kavita Bajeli-Datt, "Centre launches new protocol, Anganwadi workers to identify and support children with disabilities," *The New Indian Express*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/Nov/29/centre-launches-new-protocol-anganwadi-workersto-identify-and-support-children-with-disabilities-2637254.html>

¹¹⁰ Aggarwal, S., Bhutani, R., & Alkazi, R. M. (2023, September). *Navigating Health and Education: Exploring the Journeys of Children with Disabilities and Children Requiring Regular Medical Care*. New Delhi, India: ASTHA.

¹¹¹ ASER Centre, "Annual Status of Education Report 2024", <https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/India.pdf>, (accessed on June 1, 2025)

requirements and systems for evaluating learning outcomes.¹¹² Lack of attention to learning outcomes has lifelong consequences for the learning and employment potential of persons with disabilities.

Despite NEP mandates, however, India's schools are falling short of providing basic accessibility. The central government sponsored *Samagra Shiksha* scheme mandates and provides for aids, appliances, assistive devices, teaching and learning materials, transportation, and other support for all children with one or more disabilities as designated by the RPD. However, studies and reports from persons with disabilities indicate significant gaps in implementation. A 2023 audit of schools in Karnataka by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India found that ramps and accessible toilets were not present in schools, and where present, they were not well maintained.¹¹³ The audit also found that between 2017 and 2022, no aids and appliances were released to any students with disabilities despite budget allocation for the same. Further, it found that interventions appropriate to students with blindness, deafness, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, specific learning disabilities, and physical/motor disabilities, etc., were not developed by the Department.

In order to further implement NEP, in April 2025, the Government launched the Prashasth initiative to promote early identification and inclusive education for children with disabilities. As part of this effort, the Directorate of Education has directed all schools, government, aided, private, and those run by local bodies, to screen every student for 21 types of disabilities as defined under the RPD.¹¹⁴ Using the Prashasth mobile app and checklist, teachers are tasked with observing indicators, such as poor handwriting, difficulty with eye contact, disorientation, falling, or signs of struggling in the classroom. This initiative aims to ensure timely support and the integration of children with disabilities into inclusive educational environments. It is yet to be seen how this app will be implemented, and the training for teachers will be undertaken to support them in proper identification and implementation.

Addressing critical gaps in information on the experiences of children with disabilities, 947 parents of children with disabilities attending government schools were surveyed through a collective effort of 41 organisations and individuals supporting children with different disabilities and their families across 23 Indian states:¹¹⁵ 56% of these children studied in primary classes with a sharp drop in enrolment in higher grades, 4% of the students never went to school even though enrolled, some because schools asked them not to come and some because of inaccessible transport. The study also found that basic accessibility is

¹¹² Cambridge Network for Disability and Education Research, "Examining Disability Inclusion in India's New National Education Policy", <https://canderesearch.wordpress.com/2020/08/12/examining-disability-inclusion-in-indias-new-national-education-policy/>, (accessed on May 28, 2025)

¹¹³ Comptroller and Auditor General of India, "Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Functioning of Primary Educational Institutions in Karnataka," 2024, https://cag.gov.in/webroot/uploads/download_audit_report/2023/PRIMARY-EDUATION-Report-No.-6-Eng-0675bfc96174733.79140937.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹¹⁴ Sugandha Jha, "Students to Be Screened for 21 Disabilities," *Times of India*, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/students-to-be-screened-for-21-disabilities/articleshow/120651849.cms, (accessed on June 25, 2025)

¹¹⁵ Kavya Mukhija and Reena Mukhija, *Present but Forgotten: CDS Report on Access to Education of Children with Disabilities in Government Schools in India*, ASTHA, May 16, 2024, https://docs.google.com/document/d/17ogvWVGwLrtkQCqDZwQZY7rE6wwl0frBS_YhBeJpW0/edit?tab=t.0.

lacking, evidenced by the fact that only 2% of surveyed schools offered accessible toilets. Just 47% of schools presented adequate learning materials. While 45% of students required accessible learning material such as books in Braille, large print, audio, or digital formats, only 17% were provided with these by the school, and 64% of these students still could not study because the available formats were not accessible. The lack of resources, untrained personnel, and negative attitudes contribute to a situation where many students with disabilities are excluded from education, leading to high dropout rates and unfulfilled potential.

The RTE mandates admission of children with disabilities in private schools, which the NEP further endorses. In September 2018, the Directorate of Education called for entry-level admissions for children with disabilities in private schools in Delhi, requiring schools to reserve 3% of all seats at entry level for children with disabilities. However, by September 2019, the education department reported that they received applications for less than 1% of the reserved seats, suggesting limited outreach and support to families of children with disabilities in seeking enrolment.¹¹⁶ In March 2025, however, 1,307 children with disabilities were selected for admission to Delhi private schools in an admissions draw.¹¹⁷ Five years after the institution of the NEP and seven years after the mandate for inclusion in Delhi, this initiative is welcome, however inadequate the process. Further data and reporting are required to understand the national situation on admission of children with disabilities in private schools, and the outcomes for these children once admitted. For instance, it has been reported that private schools in Jammu and Kashmir have been reluctant to admit children with disabilities.¹¹⁸

Children with disabilities also face challenges in reaching schools due to a lack of accessible transportation options. Notably, in rural areas, gaps in basic infrastructure, such as linking schools to communities by roads, present a primary access challenge. Falling short of basic accessibility, India's schools are also unable to provide equal access to playgrounds, sports facilities, computer resource rooms, and other educational facilities.

Aiming to address gaps in access to Braille materials, the DEPWD launched a Project for Support for Establishment/Modernisation/Capacity Augmentation of Braille Presses. As of 2023-2024, 28 Braille presses received financial support for these purposes.¹¹⁹ These advances, however, fall far short of meeting the extensive need for essential learning support for children with disabilities.

Beyond basic accessibility metrics, moreover, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, India's school systems require an investment in curriculum and evaluation that

¹¹⁶ Express News Service, "Delhi: For 5,600 private school seats for disabled, education dept receives 44 applications," *Indian Express*, September 25, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-for-5600-private-school-seats-for-disabled-education-dept-receives-44-applications/>.

¹¹⁷ "1,307 special-needs children take admission in Delhi private schools," *India Today*, March 21, 2025, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/1307-special-needs-children-take-admission-in-delhi-private-schools-2697079-2025-03-21>.

¹¹⁸ Maitri Porecha, "J&K schools reluctant to admit children with special needs," *The Hindu*, July 13, 2023

¹¹⁹ Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, "Annual Report 2023 - 2024", December 3, 2023, Section 8.4.5.5, <https://divyangjan.depwd.gov.in/content/upload/uploadfiles/AnnualReport2023-24English.pdf> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

are sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities.¹²⁰ There have been judicial decisions which bring us closer to realising the rights of persons with disabilities. In February 2025, in *Anmol v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the rights of persons with disabilities to reasonable accommodation in education. Striking down the outdated “both hands intact” rule for medical admissions and emphasising functional assessment over rigid disability criteria, the Court directed the National Medical Commission to revise its guidelines to ensure inclusivity.¹²¹ This came after two previous, progressive Supreme Court judgments in October 2024 in the cases of Om Rathod¹²² and Omkar Ramchandra Gond¹²³ — both persons with disabilities who were denied admission to the MBBS course on the basis of eligibility criteria set out by the National Medical Commission. In both cases, the Supreme Court critiqued these guidelines, directed that they be revised, and upheld the right of both candidates for admission to the MBBS programme.

Impacts on children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic serve as a critical reminder of their unique vulnerabilities, especially considering the deeply interconnected relationship between disability and poverty, where disability can be both a cause and consequence of financial hardship. For instance, a study of children with disabilities in five districts in Bihar during COVID-19 revealed that school closures and economic disruptions disproportionately impacted these already marginalised children, limiting their access to education, resources, healthcare, and social support, while also increasing their risk of food insecurity, social isolation, and discrimination. This study ultimately underscored the urgent need for targeted interventions that address systemic inequities in order to ensure the educational rights and well-being of children with disabilities.¹²⁴

Insufficient access to special educators

The ratio of special educators to children with disabilities in India’s schools is dismal. For instance, persons with disabilities report that in Chhattisgarh, 49,000 children with disabilities (6-18 years) are supported by just 165 special educators. In Jharkhand, 48,000 children with disabilities are supported by only 384 special educators. Since schools are largely unable to provide support from special educators within mainstream classrooms,

¹²⁰ UNICEF. Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in India, www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16996/file/Country%20Profile%20-%20India.pdf (accessed on June 27, 2025)

¹²¹ Supreme Court of India, *Anmol v. Union of India* on 21 February 2025, Civil Appeal No. 14333 of 2024, https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2024/50998/50998_2024_1_1501_59688_Judgement_21-Feb-2025.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025); V Venkatesan, “SC Reiterates Direction to National Medical Commission to Revise Disability Guidelines”, Supreme Court Observer, February 25, 2025, <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/sc-reiterates-direction-to-national-medical-commission-to-revise-disability-guidelines/> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹²² Rathod O, Singh S, Dhawan P, Bajaj R. Assessment for inclusion: Promoting equity and justice in Disability Assessment Boards in India. *Indian J Med Ethics*. Published online first on February 21, 2025. DOI: 10.20529/IJME.

2025.015 https://ijme.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/LAW-CASE-STUDY-Rathod-Singh_21-2-2025.pdf (accessed on April 16, 2025)

¹²³ Disability Rights India, “Supreme Court - Benchmark disability no ground to render a candidate ineligible to pursue MBBS,” 2024. <https://www.disabilityrightsindia.com/2024/10/supreme-court-benchmark-disability-no.html> (accessed on April 16, 2025)

¹²⁴ Astha & Right to Education Forum, Bihar. (2024, January). *कोविड-19 महामारी के दौरान बिहार में समावेशी शिक्षा की स्थिति* [The state of inclusive education in Bihar during the Covid-19 pandemic]. (p. 15). New Delhi, India: Astha & Right to Education Forum, Bihar.

children with disabilities who have the potential to thrive in mainstream settings are assigned to special education sections where educators give scant attention to meeting educational benchmarks.

In 2023, the Supreme Court mandated that schools appoint one special education teacher for every 10 children with disabilities studying in classes 1 to 5, and for every 15 children with disabilities studying in classes 6 to 8 to support inclusion in mainstream education. However, schools are yet to receive a formal directive from the RCI mandating these appointments.¹²⁵

While several special schools in India are funded by the DEPwD, their functioning and impact remain largely unassessed. Notably, special schools fall under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment rather than the Ministry of Education. Due to an absence of integration and oversight by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, persons with disabilities report that these schools have a charitable orientation rather than a rigorous, quality-focused approach to education outcomes.

Moreover, special schools are challenging to access. In Chhattisgarh, participants shared that only seven special schools with around 35 teachers aim to meet the needs of 1,800 children with disabilities. Special schools are also overwhelmingly located in district centres, making them largely inaccessible to children with disabilities living in rural areas.

Barriers to accessing higher education

According to the All-India Survey on Higher Education (2021-22),¹²⁶ the enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education remains alarmingly low, consistently ranging between just 0.19% and 0.22% of the total student population. Of this number, only 42% are women with disabilities. This disparity continues despite policy-level efforts promoting inclusion in higher education. In Odisha, for example, less than 2% of university admissions between 2014-2020 were students with disabilities.

As a primary barrier to entry, persons with disabilities report that even online application processes are often inaccessible. Among persons with disabilities who do enrol in higher education programmes, they describe challenges in accessibility, securing critical accommodations, and affordability, which limit their prospects for success. For instance, as reported by participants from Bihar, no universities in urban areas have accessible toilets. Scholarship programmes for students with disabilities have been discontinued, and students with disabilities do not have access to transportation or transportation allowances.

¹²⁵ Aditya Wadhawan, "Schools will soon have to appoint special educators for differently abled students," *Times of India*, January 25, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/news/schools-will-soon-have-to-appoint-special-educators-for-differently-abled-students/articleshow/97316488.cms>

¹²⁶ Department of Higher Education "All India Survey on Higher Education 2021-2022," January, 2024, <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s392049debbe566ca5782a3045cf300a3c/uploads/2024/02/20240719952688509.pdf> (accessed on May 30, 2025)

Persons with disabilities who attempt to secure their right to a higher education through legal channels report enforcement fatigue, where the burden of litigation drains the students, impacting their realisation of the rights these judgments are meant to protect.¹²⁷

Lifelong learning

Persons with disabilities are excluded from meaningful mainstream opportunities to advance career trajectories. At best, they are channelled into basic employment with little scope for professional advancement. At worst, they are excluded from skill development altogether. These challenges are rooted in a lack of attention to and strategic planning for skilled persons with disabilities. For the most part, mainstream skill development programmes fail to include persons with disabilities. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and vocational training centres remain physically inaccessible or do not accommodate diverse disabilities. Skill development programmes targeting persons with disabilities, moreover, are few and largely ineffective. Programmes designed for persons with disabilities are most often short-term and focused on basic skills like basket making or tailoring, rather than market-driven skills, limiting employment opportunities.

Recommendations

- Create awareness to remove stigma and promote the mindset that children with disabilities can achieve education and employment, through public information campaigns aimed at reaching families and caregivers. Provide financial incentives to families who send children with disabilities to school.
- Include children with disabilities in ASER data collection and reporting. Incorporate data collection metrics to track progress on participation and presence for children with disabilities, disaggregated by 21 disabilities under the RPD Act.
- Ensure equitable, inclusive, and accessible education through adequate funding in educational, research and training institutions across all levels in terms of design, infrastructure, and information communication technologies. This should include access to reading-teaching materials online and offline, assistive devices, classrooms, toilets, exams, laboratories, libraries, exhibitions, exposure visits, physical education, and sports, etc., for all children and adults with disabilities.
- Establish clear protocols and corresponding budget allocations for reasonable accommodations in mainstream public and private schools.
- Improve disability sensitisation for teachers, school managers, special educators and personnel, including information on all disabilities certified under the RPD Act.
 - Update diploma and degree programmes, including B.Ed. curricula, to include mandatory training on supporting the educational achievements of children and youth with disabilities.
 - Conduct regular and ongoing training and skill update sessions for all school personnel in government and special schools to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge on how to support persons with disabilities in educational achievement. Ensure training includes awareness of protections under the RPD Act and RTE Act.

¹²⁷ Anchal Bhatheja, “Merit vs Box-Ticking: How Exclusionary Norms Drain Students With Disabilities,” *The Wire*, May 16, 2025, <https://thewire.in/rights/merit-vs-box-ticking-how-exclusionary-norms-drain-students-with-disabilities>

- Conduct regular audits with teams of persons with disabilities to measure accessibility across all educational institutions, including Anganwadi centres, schools, colleges, and universities.
- Develop time-bound plans and models for achieving inclusive education for students with disabilities from pre-primary to post-secondary levels, including costs and required timelines for achieving implementation at scale.
- Implement home-based learning systems for students with disabilities who cannot commute. Ensure quality and accessibility in the educational material and teaching imparted.
- Hire teachers with disabilities. Ensure that training and skill-based programmes for teaching staff are accessible and accommodate the needs of teachers with disabilities.
- Expand scholarships and financial aid for students with disabilities.
- Ensure concentrated efforts to identify and support students who dropped out or out of school, with emphasis on disabled children of vulnerable groups like migrant labourers' children, marginalised genders, and minority religions.
- Support lifelong learning opportunities for persons with disabilities through the creation and implementation of skill development and vocational training programmes aimed at providing robust and long-term employment opportunities with career trajectories. Implement RPD inclusion mandates across all central and state skill development schemes.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls with disabilities

Status

Exclusion from social policy schemes

The specific needs of women with disabilities were first recognised and addressed by the government of India in the National Disability Policy, 2006. However, disaggregated data on the needs of women and girls with disabilities is inadequate and budgetary allocations within schemes and departments are often neither gender specific nor disability inclusive.¹²⁸ Limited targeted schemes for women and girls with disabilities, combined with the separation of gender and disability issues in policy frameworks, create significant gaps in protection and support services. This systemic oversight perpetuates the cycle of discrimination and exclusion, highlighting the urgent need for intersectional approaches in both policy and practice.¹²⁹

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2011) mentions women with disabilities only once, under maternal health, ignoring key areas like information access, skill development, SHGs, and crime prevention. Correspondingly, schemes designed to promote the safety, security, and empowerment of women, with few exceptions, fail to provide allocations for women with disabilities. For instance, *Mission Shakti*, a comprehensive scheme launched by the government of India to promote the safety, security, and empowerment of women by strengthening women's helplines, emergency response services, legal aid, and economic independence includes limited provisions for women with

¹²⁸ Shadow Report by Women with Disabilities India Network to UNCPRD (2019 Feb)

¹²⁹ Shadow Report by Women with Disabilities India Network to UNCPRD (2019 Feb)

disabilities,¹³⁰ even though its statement of objectives specifically mentions "differently abled, socially and economically marginalised and vulnerable groups."¹³¹ It only mentions that "special preference would be given to beneficiaries with physical disabilities, in case there is a shortage of accommodation".

Exclusion from protection and support services reinscribes the systematic marginalisation of women and girls with disabilities. They are denied access to education, health services and rehabilitation, vocational training, employment, transportation, and housing.¹³² Women and girls with disabilities who transcend these access barriers all too often lack access to devices for online education and employment, and experience discrimination and violence across life domains.¹³³ These exclusions undermine their ability to be self-sufficient, contributing members of households and communities. Exclusion is exacerbated for women and girls with disabilities who experience other forms of marginalisation, putting them at risk of heightened disadvantage and intersectional forms of discrimination.¹³⁴ As a result of discrimination and exclusion, women and girls with disabilities often lack the skills, resources, opportunities, and confidence to access information and become effective advocates for their own rights."¹³⁵

Poverty reduction

In the arena of poverty reduction, women with disabilities report receiving lower pension allocations, in violation of the RPD Act. For instance, persons with disabilities from Madhya Pradesh raised concerns about the *Laadli Behna Yojana* scheme, aimed at providing financial support to married, widowed, divorced, and abandoned women who are between 21 and 59 years old. While the scheme provides women without disabilities with ₹1,250 per month, women with disabilities who are eligible for this scheme were receiving only ₹1,100, which combined both the regular disability pension (₹300) and the *Laadli Behna Yojana Scheme* (₹800). Women with disabilities in the consultation reported that receiving both schemes in full was important because of the additional barriers and added disability costs for women with disabilities.

Health care access

¹³⁰ Ministry of Women & Child Development, Mission Shakti Guidelines 2022, https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/public/documents/whatsnew/Mission_Shakti_Guidelines.pdf (accessed on June 1, 2025)

¹³¹ Government of India. Ministry of Women and Child Development. Mission Shakti. <https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/about#:~:text=The%20objective%20of%20the%20Mission,their%20holistic%20development%20and%20empowerment> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

¹³² Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs," 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹³³ UNRCO, Rising Flame, "Western region consultation," 2022, https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Findings-and-Recommendations-from-Western-Region_RF.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹³⁴ Sightsavers India, Rising Voices, 2020, <https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/RisingVoices.pdf> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

¹³⁵ Sightsavers India, Rising Voices, 2020, <https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/RisingVoices.pdf> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

Women with disabilities in India face systemic barriers to health care access, particularly in accessing sexual and reproductive health services because of inaccessible facilities, lack of privacy, and existing biases on sexuality and the capability of women with disabilities among service providers.¹³⁶ These barriers violate their rights and restrict autonomy, underscoring the need for inclusive SRHR policies.¹³⁷

A news report outlines how this included forced or coerced abortions without their consent. Societal perceptions that disabled women cannot be mothers, inaccessible healthcare facilities, lack of sign language interpreters, and opaque, conflicting laws further restrict their agency and privacy.¹³⁸ Despite legal judgments affirming reproductive autonomy, forced abortions and the denial of informed consent continue, highlighting the urgent need for rights-based, accessible, and inclusive SRHR services for women with disabilities in India.¹³⁹ Section 92 (f) in RPD Act also reinforces the “need” for forced abortions in certain cases as the language of the law exempts the need to “express consent in cases where the medical procedure for termination of pregnancy is done in severe cases of disability where only the opinion of a registered medical practitioner and consent of the guardian of the woman with disability are required”.¹⁴⁰

Additionally, maternal health efforts seldom account for the needs of expecting mothers with disabilities, and women and girls with disabilities confront stigma from health care professionals, including the routine refusal by health workers to advise them on appropriate family planning services and methods.¹⁴¹

In an alternate report¹⁴² to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), participants highlighted that sterilisation using certain drugs is increasingly being used on women with disabilities instead of supporting menstrual hygiene management and protection from sexual violence. While a 1999 government order did not legally prohibit non-consensual sterilisation, the 2006 guidelines require informed consent, which is often ignored in practice. A news report in 2021 cites a special educator sharing “two instances in recent times where parents of girls with intellectual disabilities resorted to tubal ligation to stop their menstruation”. The educator did share that neither would go on record to admit it.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ TARSHI. (2018). Sexuality and Disability in the Indian Context 2018.

[https://www.tarshi.net/downloads/Sexuality and Disability in the Indian Context.pdf](https://www.tarshi.net/downloads/Sexuality_and_Disability_in_the_Indian_Context.pdf) (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹³⁷ ibid

¹³⁸ Raman, S. (2023, November 24). India’s laws fail to uphold abortion rights of women with disabilities. BehanBox. <https://behanbox.com/2021/11/11/indias-laws-fail-to-uphold-abortion-rights-of-women-with-disabilities/> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹³⁹ Raman, S. (2023, November 24). India’s laws fail to uphold abortion rights of women with disabilities. BehanBox. <https://behanbox.com/2021/11/11/indias-laws-fail-to-uphold-abortion-rights-of-women-with-disabilities/> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁴⁰ https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_25_54_00002_201649_1517807328299§ionId=12153§ionno=92&orderno=92

¹⁴¹ Rao, I. (2004). Equity to women with disabilities in India - A strategy paper prepared for the National Commission for Women.

¹⁴² Shadow Report by Women with Disabilities India Network to UNCRPD (2019 Feb)

¹⁴³ Mantri, G. (2023, November 10). “How will you manage?” how disabled women are forced into surgical procedures,” BehanBox, <https://behanbox.com/2021/11/24/how-will-you-manage-how-disabled-women-are-forced-into-surgical-procedures/> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

The Central Adoption Research Agency (CARA) guidelines also discriminate against disabled mothers who seek to adopt under the guise of the definition “fit to adopt.” Activists and persons with disabilities have called for clarity and guidelines on adoption by persons with disabilities to reduce the ongoing medicalised approach prevalent in adoption procedures.¹⁴⁴ Disabled couples also go through long waiting periods, face numerous rejections and are often not chosen to be parents.¹⁴⁵

Health access needs to consider gendered dimensions as far as women with disabilities are concerned, since many disabilities also have a higher prevalence in women. A 2022 study in India reported that women with Multiple Sclerosis (among other conditions) are 35% of cases compared to 26% in men, indicating a significantly higher presence among women.¹⁴⁶ This gendered disparity highlights the need for health services in India to recognise and respond to the specific impact of Multiple Sclerosis on women, particularly through targeted screening, education, and support frameworks within neurological care.

Violence and access to justice

National data sources like the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and NFHS do not provide disaggregated data on domestic violence faced by women with disabilities. Yet, reports from activists and women with disabilities themselves over the years show a heightened vulnerability and limited access to support and resources.¹⁴⁷ News reports suggest that intimate partner violence against women with disabilities is both widespread and underreported. They take on many forms other than those that are visible and physical, including acts of emotional cruelty, big and small, such as neglect, withholding of care, denial of financial support, and gaslighting, among others.¹⁴⁸ Participants reported that these factors limit accessibility and mobility, increase dependency, and make experiences of abuse and violence even more isolating for women with disabilities.

The *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005*, fails to address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities or the distinct nature of domestic violence they experience.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the *Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013*, lacks provisions for necessary

¹⁴⁴ M, M., “Experts, activists call for guidelines on adoption by persons with disabilities,” *The Hindu*, July 10, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/experts-activists-call-for-guidelines-on-adoption-by-persons-with-disabilities/article68386183.ece> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁴⁵ Shekhar, L., “Differently abled couples face uphill battle in adoption,” *Hindustan Times*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/differently-abled-couples-face-uphill-battle-in-adoption-101723488427544.html> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁴⁶ IANS, “Young, women more likely to suffer from multiple sclerosis: Experts,” *Mid-day*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.mid-day.com/lifestyle/health-and-fitness/article/young-women-more-likely-to-suffer-from-multiple-sclerosis-experts-23353576> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁴⁷ Mantri, G., “Why it is hard for disabled women, queer persons to leave abusive partners,” *BehanBox*, November 10, 2023, <https://behanbox.com/2022/06/16/why-it-is-hard-for-disabled-women-queer-persons-to-leave-abusive-partners/> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ DPI India, “Joint Submission on India by Disabled People’s International India (DPI India) to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Pre-session Working Group for the 58th session,” September 16, 2013, https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/migrated/DPI%20India_CEDAW%20Report.doc (accessed on March 7, 2025)

accommodations for women with disabilities during inquiries. Further, police do not maintain any disaggregated data on crimes against women with disabilities.¹⁵⁰

India’s Criminal Law Amendments, 2013, took major steps forward in protecting women with disabilities from violence by providing accommodations to support access to the criminal justice system. Despite these advances, however, the Criminal Law Amendments fall short of providing adequate provisions for counselling, rehabilitation, disaggregated data collection by disability and gender, and training of law enforcement officials and judges to address the needs of women with disabilities.¹⁵¹

According to the Human Rights Watch (2018) report,¹⁵² police often lack the training and support needed to handle cases involving women and girls with disabilities. Survivors are frequently denied specific protections under the 2013 legal amendments due to difficulties certifying their disability, while critical details are omitted from FIRs, and information on free legal aid is rarely provided.¹⁵³

State shelters for women in crisis also lack disability-friendly facilities, and police officers, particularly in rural areas, all too often lack awareness about the rights of women with disabilities. Addressing the nexus of violence, health, and access to justice, One Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs) provide support to women who have experienced violence under the Nirbhaya Fund—also known as Sakhi One Stop Centres. The Sakhi Scheme, however, includes no provisions for women with disabilities. Further, women with disabilities reported a recent investigation of OSCCs in four states and eight districts in India that found that centres across states are failing to meet the needs of women with disabilities including providing “safe, accessible, and coordinated support for survivors of gender-based violence”.¹⁵⁴ Physical access remains a crucial barrier while “lack of trained staff, proper systems, and formal services” means that even survivors with disabilities who reach an OSCC face delays, confusion, or are turned away. Additionally, services like counselling, legal aid, and follow-ups are either missing or informal.¹⁵⁵ Instead, discussions with the OSCC centre in charge during the investigation revealed massive gaps in understanding. For example, the centre in charge referred to placing a woman experiencing trauma due to domestic violence in a mental health facility rather than providing trauma management services¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁰ Swabhiman. “Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs,” 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹⁵¹ Nidhi Goyal and Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, “Invisible Victims of Sexual Violence: Access to Justice for Women and Girls with Disabilities in India,” Human Rights Watch, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/04/03/invisible-victims-sexual-violence/access-justice-women-and-girls-disabilities> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁵² “Invisible Victims of Sexual Violence: Access to Justice for Women and Girls with Disabilities in India,” Human Rights Watch, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/08/invisible-victims-sexual-violence/access-justice-women-and-girls-disabilities> (accessed on June 28, 2025)

¹⁵³ *ibid*

¹⁵⁴ CREA (2025). One Stop Crisis Centres: An analysis by the Women Gaining Ground Consortium. (accessed September 2025)

¹⁵⁵ CREA (2025). One Stop Crisis Centres: An analysis by the Women Gaining Ground Consortium. (accessed September 2025)

¹⁵⁶ CREA (2025). One Stop Crisis Centres: An analysis by the Women Gaining Ground Consortium. (accessed September 2025)

Elderly disabled women, particularly those with multiple disabilities, limited education, and lower economic status, are at significantly higher risk of abuse—up to three times more than men—according to research conducted in 2020.¹⁵⁷

Impacts on mobility

Participants report that accessibility and safety for women with disabilities are linked, as inaccessible spaces increase vulnerability to harassment and violence while seeking or refusing 'help'. News reports show that this vulnerability and the lack of accessible and/or reliable modes of transport force women and girls with disabilities to remain alert and limit their mobility and participation in society.¹⁵⁸ Inaccessibility also creates dependency, isolating women with disabilities from financial, social, and educational opportunities, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.¹⁵⁹

Recommendations

- Collect disaggregated data to track and improve access to social protection for women and girls with disabilities under all relevant central and state government schemes. Collect data in line with the 21 disabilities recognised under the RPD Act, along with gender and other social identity markers. For disability and women-specific schemes, collect disaggregated data to understand how many women with disabilities receive benefits.
- Encourage participation of women and girls with disabilities in public discourse by ensuring that all public communication is accessible across disabilities. Ensure that physical or virtual sites for meetings and consultations are safe, non-discriminatory, barrier-free, stigma-free and accessible, and provide information in accessible formats.
- Review mainstream schemes and programmes for women and girls to ensure allocations for women and girls with disabilities, both at the state and centre.
 - Ensure accessible and safe transport and mobility for women and girls with disabilities to support access to educational institutions, employment, social protection and inclusion.
 - Ensure that one-stop crisis centres and shelter homes are accessible and that staff are trained to address the needs of women and girls with disabilities.
- Promote reproductive health rights for women and girls with disabilities in all their diversities.
 - Ensure affordable access to essential obstetric care, including well-equipped obstetric services with sufficient staff, assisted delivery by qualified personnel, emergency obstetric care, and transport to higher-level care centres as required.
 - Ensure that sexual and reproductive health goods and services are physically and financially accessible, including access to family planning services, including abortion.

¹⁵⁷ Sathya, T., & Premakumar, R. (2020). Abuse among elderly persons with disabilities in India. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 9(5), 2244–2250. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32576146/> (accessed June 28, 2025)

¹⁵⁸ Lopes, F., “Women with disabilities have to constantly negotiate between isolation and intrusion,” BehanBox, November 10, 2023, <https://behanbox.com/2022/03/10/why-women-with-disabilities-have-to-constantly-negotiate-between-isolation-and-intrusion/>

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*

- Train Asha and Anganwadi workers to meet the specific needs of women with disabilities in prenatal and postnatal care.
- Ensure informed consent and supported decision making for women with disabilities, particularly women living with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, prior to initiating any health procedures or treatments.
- Provide access and support for gendered dimensions of health services. For instance, multiple sclerosis is known to impact women more than men.¹⁶⁰
- Advance inclusive legal frameworks and their implementation for women and girls with disabilities.
 - Ensure strict implementation of laws that address violence against women and girls with disabilities, including the Criminal Law Amendments and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO).
 - Amend laws providing gender protections to address the needs of women and girls with disabilities, including the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) and PWDVA.
 - Amend Section 92 (f) of RPD, and other laws such as personal laws that contain discriminatory language against women with disabilities, such as unsound mind, or that violate the agency of women with disabilities.
 - Amend RPD rules at the central and state levels to include women with disabilities and address their specific needs.
- Run public awareness campaigns to end the stigma facing women and girls with disabilities.
- Develop a digital resource hub with comprehensive information on rights and entitlements for women and girls with disabilities,¹⁶¹ including resources for women and girls with disabilities and training materials for state personnel.

Goals 6 and 7: Availability of water, sanitation, and sustainable energy for all persons with disabilities

Status

Water and sanitation (WASH)

Inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services—rooted in physical, institutional, social, and attitudinal barriers—present an active barrier to participation for persons with disabilities across arenas of life, including education, employment, travel and commuting,¹⁶² and social inclusion.¹⁶³ These barriers are heightened for women and girls with disabilities, and persons with disabilities living with high support needs. Further, information about safe water practices, sanitation, and hygiene promotion may not be

¹⁶⁰ NPRD. Progress Report on the Implementation of India's SDG Commitments from the Disability Lens for the Northern Region of India. 2022.

¹⁶¹ Rao, I. (2004). Equity to women with disabilities in India - A strategy paper prepared for the National Commission for Women.

¹⁶² Addlakha, R. "Disability and the Pursuit Of Mobility: Risks And Opportunities in the Indian Urbanscape." 2020. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. <https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/disabling-city/disability-and-the-pursuit-of-mobility/> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

¹⁶³ UNICEF. "The Case for Investment in Accessible and Inclusive WASH," 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/media/126056/file/%20UNICEF-The-case-for-investment-in-accessible-and-inclusive-WASH-Technical-paper.pdf> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

available in accessible formats. These barriers to clean water and accessible toilets have significant health impacts on persons with disabilities.¹⁶⁴ While draft accessibility guidelines¹⁶⁵ were developed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in 2022,¹⁶⁶ they lack enforcement.

Persons with disabilities struggle to fetch water from distant community sources due to mobility restrictions, visual impairments, or inaccessible infrastructure. Reaching water sources (wells, taps, community pumps) can be difficult or impossible for blind and low-vision individuals, those who have locomotor disabilities or any other mobility impairments. Distances, uneven terrain, and lack of accessible pathways pose significant barriers. Public water sources are often positioned too high or are barricaded, making them difficult to reach. The cost of accessing clean water, through piped connections or purchases, can be prohibitive.¹⁶⁷

Persons with disabilities also lack access to accessible and safe toilets. Government of India data on sanitation access under the *Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)* lacks disaggregated information on persons with disabilities, and participants reported that there is a lack of standardised criteria for classifying toilets as accessible. Addressing this gap in information, CSOs have raised concerns about the inaccessibility of toilets, including issues related to infrastructure design and access paths.¹⁶⁸ For instance, a study of 22 settlements with 8,381 households in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, found that access to WASH services for persons with disabilities fell short of Joint Management Programme (JMP) standards.¹⁶⁹ WASH access barriers are heightened for persons with disabilities in rural areas,¹⁷⁰ and access to toilets is particularly challenging for trans persons with disabilities.¹⁷¹ In climate emergencies, persons with disabilities face barriers to accessing WASH in shelters that are not equipped with accessible washrooms. In Gujarat, under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), the

¹⁶⁴ Tiwari, S. "Accelerating Change – Inclusive Sanitation For All: Webinar By CREA On World Toilet Day." November 21, 2023. CREA. <https://feminisminindia.com/2023/11/21/accelerating-change-inclusive-sanitation-for-all-webinar-by-crea-on-world-toilet-day/> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

¹⁶⁵ PTI. "Foot pedals, braille on taps: new draft guidelines of piped water supply for disabled, elderly" August 21, 2022. Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/foot-pedals-braille-on-taps-new-draft-guidelines-of-piped-water-supply-for-disabled-elderly/articleshow/93691592.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

¹⁶⁶ Government of India. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. "Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal accessibility in India 2021." March 2022. <https://niu.in/intranet/sites/default/files/2262.pdf> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

¹⁶⁷ CESS. (2023). Right to drinking water in India. CESS. <https://cess.unical.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CESS-Working-Paper-No.56.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹⁶⁹ Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹⁷⁰ Amar Seva Sangam, et al., Southern Regional Study and Follow up Plan on the Recommendation to the 2nd VNR and Disability Inclusive Resilient Road Map for COVID 19. 2022.

¹⁷¹ Das, S & Noronha, N. "How India continues to deny its genderqueer citizens access to toilets," Queerbeat, June 13, 2024, <https://www.queerbeat.org/stories/how-india-continues-to-deny-its-genderqueer-citizens-access-to-toilets> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

state had constructed more than 3,000 toilets specifically designed to cater to the needs of persons with disabilities, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.¹⁷²

An extensive survey was conducted in Dehradun and Ramnagar, Uttarakhand, to assess how public sanitation services currently address the needs of persons with disabilities.¹⁷³ Following which, a policy primer centring on public toilets and their accessibility for marginalised groups, with a particular emphasis on persons with disabilities, while also considering the needs of women, children, and the elderly, was built. Data was collected from at least 20% of public toilets in both cities. The study found that 60% of the toilets surveyed in Dehradun lacked inclusive and accessible provisions for persons with disabilities. Additionally, users highlighted that fair compensation for community members managing these facilities is essential to ensuring consistent and effective maintenance of accessible public toilets.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene programmes are often not inclusive of women and girls with disabilities reported by participants of the consultations. Studies have shown that women and girls with disabilities often make decisions about commuting and travel depending on the availability of accessible toilets.¹⁷⁴ During COVID-19, school closures and changes in supply cut off access to free or affordable menstrual products in rural India. Women and girls with disabilities faced added barriers, forcing many to use unhygienic alternatives.¹⁷⁵

Energy access

Persons with disabilities have unique energy access needs—including consistent access to electricity to use essential equipment such as aids, accessories, and assistive technology that are crucial to independence and quality of life.¹⁷⁶ Persons with disabilities also often spend more time at home, leading to higher electricity consumption for heating, cooling, and medical equipment. This results in higher energy costs, making affordability critical.

As of 2022, India had nearly universal access to electricity, with 99.2% of the population having access.¹⁷⁷ Government initiatives, such as the *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana*, aim to promote clean energy access by providing LPG connections. However, there is no usage data that disaggregates households with persons with disabilities, which would help understand

¹⁷² Jal Jeevan Mission. (2025b). Breaking Social Barriers.

https://jaljeevanmission.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_and_reports/JJM-Breaking-Social-Barriers.pdf (accessed on April 23, 2025)

¹⁷³ Mahreen Matto, Akhila Sivasdas, “Integrating community participation crucial for inclusive sanitation,” Down to Earth, January 22, 2025, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/waste/integrating-community-participation-crucial-for-inclusive-sanitation#google_vignette (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹⁷⁴ Ola Mobility Institute, “On The Move: Urban travel experiences of Persons with Disabilities and a path to build more inclusive transport systems,” November 2021, <https://olawebcdn.com/ola-institute/on-the-move.pdf> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

¹⁷⁵ “Neglected and Forgotten,” Rising Flame and Sightsavers, July 14, 2020, Retrieved February 17, 2022, from https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NeglectedAndForgotten_RFandSS.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

¹⁷⁶ United Nations (2024). Disability and development report 2024: accelerating the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities. New York.

<https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/DDR%202024%20Full%20report%20-%20Unedited.pdf> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

¹⁷⁷ Nileena Suresh, Living Conditions: Access to Electricity, Data for India, September 10, 2024, <https://www.dataforindia.com/access-to-electricity/>.

reach and penetration. India also lacks disability inclusive energy practices. Persistent reliance on traditional fuels like biomass and coal in rural areas increases exposure to indoor pollution, with heightened health impacts on persons with disabilities.¹⁷⁸

The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power—tasked with promoting research and development, use of energy efficient processes, equipment, devices and systems, and innovative financing of energy efficiency projects—mentions disability in the accessibility statement on its website.¹⁷⁹ However, in the scope of work, objectives and functions, there is no mention of disability or the unique needs of persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Collect and disseminate disaggregated data on water, sanitation,¹⁸⁰ and energy access for persons with disabilities. Notably, in the absence of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities more broadly, collecting data on their access to WASH and clean energy may not be feasible in the near term.
- Extend access to universally accessible and safe water and sanitation facilities in public and private spaces.
 - Follow universal design principles and standards for WASH facilities, for instance, facilities in Jaipur,¹⁸¹ designed by persons with disabilities, can be used as reference models in subsequent WASH initiatives.¹⁸²
 - Make public toilets universally accessible under the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*.
 - Explore community-based water and sanitation solutions that are affordable, accessible and can be adapted to local contexts and the needs of diverse users
- Provide subsidies to persons with disabilities to build accessible household toilets that accommodate their disabilities.
- Invest in developing energy-efficient equipment and assistive devices for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure access to sustainable energy for persons with disabilities. Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to information and enrolment in sustainable energy schemes. Encourage the adoption of renewable energy sources in healthcare and rehabilitation centres.

¹⁷⁸ Kanchan Kumar Sen, Bipasha Singha, Shamal Chandra Karmaker, Wasimul Bari, Andrew J. Chapman, Asaduzzaman Khan, Bidyut Baran Saha, "Evaluating the relationship between energy poverty and child disability: A multilevel analysis based on low and middle-income countries." *Energy for Sustainable Development*, Volume 77, 2023, 101331, ISSN 0973-0826, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esd.2023.101331>.

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0973082623001886>)

¹⁷⁹ Government of India, Ministry of Power, Bureau of Energy Efficiency. "Accessibility Statement."

<https://beeindia.gov.in/en/accessibility-statement> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

¹⁸⁰ UNICEF. "MAKE IT COUNT: Guidance on disability inclusive WASH programme data collection, monitoring and reporting" 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/media/114921/file/WASH%20Disability%20Toolkit.pdf> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

¹⁸¹ Water for Women. "Securing access to safe sanitation in Jaipur". November 13, 2023.

<https://www.waterforwomenfund.org/en/news/securing-access-to-safe-sanitation-in-jaipur.aspx> (accessed on April 17, 2025)

¹⁸² Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022.

https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

Goal 8: Inclusive economic growth and employment for persons with disabilities

Status

Only 36% of persons with disabilities participate in the workforce, compared to approximately 60% of non-disabled men and women. As of December 2024, only 47% of men with disabilities and 23% of women with disabilities had jobs.¹⁸³

Challenges in accessing employment schemes

Under the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA)*, persons with disabilities face difficulties in enrolment and are often forced to accept lower wages. Only 0.59% of the total workforce in 2018-19 were persons with disabilities. Awareness among implementers about accommodations and support under the scheme remains low, further excluding people with high-support needs. Further, despite demand for work under MGNREGA from persons with disabilities and others, allocations for the scheme are not set to increase and, in some states—for instance, West Bengal—allocations have been stopped entirely.¹⁸⁴ In states like Karnataka, despite the enrolment of over 80 lakh persons with disabilities for job cards in 2021, only 13,000 have managed to find jobs under MGNREGA.¹⁸⁵

Violating RPD provisions calling for disability inclusion and allocations, persons with disabilities at one of the consultations identified state-specific schemes aimed at addressing problems of unemployment that do not include allocations for persons with disabilities. For instance, the *Bihar Mukhyamantri Udyami Yojana*, aimed at reducing unemployment in Bihar and providing self-employment opportunities, selected 291 beneficiaries in 2024 but maintained no targets or data for persons with disabilities.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, the *Laghu Udyami Credit Card (LUCC)*, a government scheme offering credit to MSMEs, including small businesses, traders, village and handloom industries, and self-employed workers, provides no information on allocation for persons with disabilities, participants reported in the consultation.

Notably, some employment-incentive schemes at the state level do make specific provisions for persons with disabilities, demonstrating that with due care and attention, meeting RPD mandates is possible. *Bihar Startup Yojana*, a policy to boost entrepreneurship in Bihar by accelerating the growth of MSMEs, provides an additional 15% in grants, exemptions, and

¹⁸³ UNDP, “Bridging the Gap: Enabling Disability Inclusion in India’s Private Sector Workplaces,” (December 3, 2024) <https://www.undp.org/india/blog/bridging-gap-enabling-disability-inclusion-indias-private-sector-workplaces>

¹⁸⁴ Ministry of Rural Development, “Status of MGNREGS Jobcards and Funds Due for Allocation in West Bengal,” December 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1982799> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁸⁵ Sandeep Moudgal, “MNREGA Govt moves to enrol more people with disabilities”, Times of India, March 8, 2021 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/81389925.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

¹⁸⁶ Shiv Kumar Mishra and Sanjeev Kumar, “Bihar government is giving businesses 2 lakh Rupees for free, these are the documents necessary” (Translation from Hindi), *Jagran*, February 22, 2025, <https://www.jagran.com/bihar/jahanabad-mukhyamantri-laghu-udyami-yojana-nitish-kumar-government-is-giving-rs-2-lakh-for-free-apply-online-like-this-23888383.html>

subsidies for startups, including persons with disabilities.¹⁸⁷ *Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojna* in Uttarakhand aims to facilitate self-employment in rural and urban areas by providing business development grants. While general beneficiaries are required to contribute 10% of project costs, persons with disabilities are only required to contribute 5% of project costs.¹⁸⁸

While some programmes make specific provisions for persons with disabilities, complex loan processes present challenges for persons with disabilities in securing financial support, and programmes lack adequate safeguards to ensure persons with disabilities are actually engaged in business and entrepreneurship rather than being used in the application process and sidelined in practice. Further, participants reported in the consultation that in the absence of disaggregated data collection, it is not possible to determine either whether persons with disabilities were able to access these schemes or the outcomes for persons with disabilities who did secure access.

Limited private sector opportunities

Persons with disabilities who secure private sector employment are overwhelmingly concentrated in entry-level jobs such as front desk and executive assistant roles with high turnover rates, little career progression and few pathways to leadership roles. Many participants reported this in the consultations. Despite enabling policies and leadership commitment, most companies are still far from truly inclusive hiring. Even today, hiring is narrowly focused—hospitality, retail, and logistics sectors predominantly engage deaf talent, while IT and banking largely limit opportunities to individuals with mobility impairments. This approach reinforces stereotypes and excludes the wider disability talent pool.

While numerous job fairs are organised by NGOs and government agencies, the lack of advance preparation, particularly in sensitising recruiters, results in low conversion rates. Even among those selected, many do not join or drop off soon after, highlighting a critical gap in inclusive hiring readiness. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened employment conditions for persons with disabilities.¹⁸⁹ Many lost jobs during the pandemic and continue to struggle for opportunities, further compounded by the inaccessibility of most online job-matching platforms.

Employers often lack awareness of disability inclusion practices. Persons with disabilities who achieve mainstream employment report that reasonable accommodation has been reduced to technology access in large, compliance-driven companies, and physical accessibility through ‘mild’ accommodations for locomotor disabilities. For Indian women with schizophrenia and psychosocial disabilities, stigma further impacts their work. Working

¹⁸⁷ Govt of Bihar Dept of Industries, “Bihar Startup Policy 2022 Resolution”, June 27, 2022, https://state.bihar.gov.in/industries/cache/26/01-Jul-22/SHOW_DOCS/circular-td-1502-dtd-27-06-22%20English.pdf (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁸⁸ Directorate of Industries, Govt of Uttarakhand, “Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojana (MSY) (Uttarakhand)” August 1, 2014, <https://msy.uk.gov.in/frontend/web/index.php> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

¹⁸⁹ “Neglected and Forgotten,” Rising Flame and Sightsavers, July 14, 2020, Retrieved February 17, 2022, from https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NeglectedAndForgotten_RFandSS.pdf

conditions, including long working hours and expectations of constant output, further complicate workplaces for those living with schizophrenia.¹⁹⁰

Challenges accessing government reservations

Despite the 4% reservation for persons with disabilities in government hiring, failure to release vacancies and a significant backlog limit access to employment opportunities. Moreover, where vacancies are released, OPDs must advocate for recruitment reservations. In Chhattisgarh, as persons with disabilities reported in consultations, for instance, when vacancies were released in 2020, legal action was required to enforce reservations under the RPD. Further, reservations are selectively implemented and concentrated in education departments and entry-level positions. Fake UDID certificates, moreover, are used to secure reserved jobs, impacting genuine candidates.¹⁹¹

Challenges in Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) reporting on disability

Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) mandates require the top 1,000 companies to report, and 70% are in compliance. BRSR reporting contains four questions on disability, covering workers, employees, and accessibility provisions. However, access to data is poor, and reports are not made accessible in the public domain. As a result, people are largely unaware that these reports exist and about how they can access data.

Making inroads in addressing barriers to employment, in March 2025, the Supreme Court issued a landmark judgment for inclusive hiring practices. In *Judicial Services v. The Registrar General, the High Court of Madhya Pradesh*,¹⁹² the Supreme Court declared that physical disabilities cannot be the sole basis for denying a person consideration for recruitment in the judicial service,¹⁹³ thereby promoting greater representation of persons with disabilities in the judiciary.

Recommendations

- Enforce legal protections advancing workplace inclusion and ending discrimination across all public and private organisations.

¹⁹⁰ Riddhi Dastidar, “Why Workplace Support Is A Basic Need For Women With Schizophrenia”, India Spend, May 24, 2021

<https://www.indiaspend.com/gendercheck/why-workplace-support-is-a-basic-need-for-women-with-schizophrenia-750725>

¹⁹¹ “Centre instructs dept to find ways to detect fake disability certificates”, *Times of India*, July 3, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/centre-instructs-dept-to-find-ways-to-detect-fake-disability-certificates/articleshow/110648283.cms>

¹⁹² Supreme Court of India, “Recruitment of Visually Impaired in Judicial Services v. The Registrar General of the High Court of Madhya Pradesh”, SMW(C) No. 2/2024, https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2024/7900/7900_2024_1_6_53777_Order_16-Jul-2024.pdf, (accessed on March 7, 2025)

¹⁹³ Debby Jain, “‘None Should Be Excluded From Judicial Service Only Because of Disability’: Supreme Court Strikes Down MP Rule Barring Visually Impaired Candidates,” Live Law, March 3, 2025, <https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/supreme-court-ruling-madhya-pradesh-rule-excluding-visually-impaired-candidates-from-appointment-in-judicial-services-285406> (accessed on March 7, 2025)

- Mandate that all public and private organisations establish inclusion committees aimed at guiding the implementation of inclusion policies. These can be modelled after the mandatory committee structure under the *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*.
- Mandate disability inclusive hiring practices, reasonable accommodations, and robust and enforceable anti-discrimination policies for all job applicants and employees on the basis of disability and gender, and ensure inclusion of people across disabilities, especially those living with disabilities with greater social stigma. Job-slotting based on disability type is a discriminatory practice and must be explicitly prohibited in inclusive hiring frameworks.
- Identify and eliminate access barriers within the MGNREGA scheme to ensure greater inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities.
- Ensure schemes meant for persons with disabilities like Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS), National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC) and National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) converge with the MGNREGA scheme to enhance livelihood opportunities.
- Ensure governments and private entities create monitoring committees and grievance redressal mechanisms, as mandated by the RPD Act, to address the issues of employees with disabilities at the workplace.
- Ensure discrimination-free and hassle-free access to bank loans for self-employment and improve access to trainings and schemes for entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Provide tax benefits, workplace accessibility grants and outcome-based incentives to private sector employers with demonstrated commitment to long-term inclusive employment and career trajectories for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that disability inclusion data from the mandatory Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) is made publicly available and presented in a way that motivates peer companies, especially those lagging, to take meaningful action toward progress on disability inclusion.

Goals 9 and 11: *Build inclusive infrastructure, promote accessible innovation, and inclusive and accessible cities for persons with disabilities*

Status

Inaccessible infrastructure and transportation

Section 44, along with Section 45 of the RPD, speaks to accessibility of existing public buildings, and making the existing public infrastructure accessible, giving a timeline of 5 years, with extension of time to states on a case-by-case basis.¹⁹⁴ Government guidelines, including those from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), have also been issued to supplement compliance with the provisions of Chapter VIII, and in particular, Sections 40, 42, 44, 45 and 46 of the RPD together with Rule 15 of the RPD Rules, 2017.¹⁹⁵ Despite these

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Law Network. A Handbook on Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. 2018. <https://slic.org.in/uploads/2018/10/A-Handbook-on-Rights-of-Persons-with-Disabilities-Act-2016-1.pdf> (accessed on April 16, 2025)

¹⁹⁵ Government of India. Ministry of Home Affairs. "Accessibility Guidelines for MHA Specific Built Infrastructures & Associated Services for Police Stations, Prisons & Disaster Mitigation Centres under Accessible

provisions under the RPD Act, the most recent Central Advisory Board meeting concluded that progress was slow on many fronts, including on retrofitting existing buildings.¹⁹⁶ In February 2025, the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) fined 155 establishments, including central ministries and private organisations, INR 10,000 each for failing to meet digital accessibility standards.¹⁹⁷

The Supreme Court in November 2024, in *Rajiv Raturi v. Union of India*,¹⁹⁸ said that building plans must not be passed unless accessibility features are included. Further, the Supreme Court called for strict compliance with Sec 44 (2) of the RPD 2016, which mandates accessibility in every new public building and structure, including all forms of housing, developed by private developers or the government. Following this, the DEPwD, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, set up a call for experts in line with the Supreme Court's directions. The Expression of Interest (online form) was circulated among stakeholders to encourage voluntary participation and contributions for framing negotiable and non-negotiable rules under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Rules, 2017. Based on this exercise, 6 working groups have been formed with 2 Group Facilitators for each theme. The themes are: Built Environment, Transport Eco-System, Digital Environment (ICT), AT & Aids (Assistive Technology), Products and Services.¹⁹⁹ The Ministry has also nominated one of its officers as the Nodal Officer of the Department. The Core Group has been formed with those people who have committed 15 or more hours per week to the exercise.

Meanwhile, funding for the *Scheme for the Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act* (SIPDA), vital for the *Accessible India Campaign* and disability rights, has been cut from ₹240.39 crore in 2022-23 to ₹115.10 crore this year. Central Sector Schemes/Projects allocations also dropped from ₹758.01 crore to ₹741.80 crore. This is despite previous reports that present already existing disappointments and deficiencies.²⁰⁰

Cities, buildings and residences lack compliance with regulations and universal design standards. 2021 recommendations from the National Institute of Urban Affairs specifically mention the need for engagements and consultations with persons with disabilities to create enabling urban eco-systems for all.²⁰¹ However, the Smart Cities Mission lacks clear

India Campaign (AIC)". 2021. https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-11/Campaign_30112023.pdf (accessed on April 18, 2025)

¹⁹⁶ India Development Review. "A primer on India's disability law". April 18, 2024.

<https://idronline.org/article/rights/a-primer-on-indias-disability-law/> (accessed on April 18, 2025)

¹⁹⁷ Ambika Pandit, "155 Establishments Fail to Meet Digital Access Standards, Fined," *Times of India*, February 19, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/155-establishments-including-central-ministries-fined-for-failing-to-meet-digital-accessibility-standards/articleshow/118374730.cms>

¹⁹⁸ Disability Rights India. "Supreme Court in Rajive Raturi case holds the recommendatory nature of Sectoral Accessibility Guidelines under Rule 15 as ultra vires the RPWD Act. Grants 3 months to UOI to make corrections in consultation with stakeholders," November 8, 2024.

<https://www.disabilityrightsindia.com/2024/11/supreme-court-holds-recommendatory.html> (accessed on April 22, 2025)

¹⁹⁹ Accessibility Oversight Committee. "6 Working Groups on Accessibility." Access Oversight Committee, 3 March, 2025, accessoversightcommittee.wordpress.com/2024/12/26/6-working-groups-on-accessibility-sac-rajive-raturi/#group-a-built-environment (accessed on June 25, 2025)

²⁰⁰ Shishu Sarothi. "Multi-Stakeholder Regional Consultation for the Northeastern Region - On VNR and Covid-19". 2022.

²⁰¹ Government of India. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. NIUA. "Review and Evaluation of Policy Landscape for An Accessible, Safe & Inclusive City." 2021 <https://niua.in/intranet/sites/default/files/2186.pdf> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

guidelines on accessibility for persons with disabilities, and although some consultations had been held, there were no systematic enforcement mechanisms to ensure inclusivity.²⁰² Further, a 2025 study of the Smart Cities Mission found that it does not focus on the specific needs and rights of women, children, and marginalised groups, minorities, migrants, domestic workers, and persons with disabilities,²⁰³ raising significant questions on next steps since the deadline for the mission ended in March 2025.²⁰⁴

Inaccessible public infrastructure, transportation, and digital technologies limit the full participation of persons with disabilities in economic and social life and heighten challenges associated with independent living.²⁰⁵ Public transport is largely inaccessible due to factors including poorly designed transport facilities, non-functioning elevators and inaccessible metro and bus stations.²⁰⁶ Railway access remains challenging due to unhygienic and poorly maintained disabled coaches, use of disabled coaches by unauthorised passengers, and failure to enforce accessibility standards at railway stations. Discriminatory behaviour from transport staff heightens these challenges. Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) also remains a challenge due to difficulty in hailing rides, lack of accessible vehicles, and unsafe conditions. These challenges impact last-mile connectivity.²⁰⁷ These varied transportation challenges not only make travel inconvenient and cumbersome but also increase the risk of injury,²⁰⁸ impacting last-mile connectivity for health and other social services, access to education and employment, and independence and mobility.

Barriers to accessing housing

Central government quotas call for 5% of homes to be allocated to persons with disabilities under the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana* (PMAY) rural and urban schemes²⁰⁹—flagship schemes to facilitate access to affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents. In some instances, however, allocations for persons with disabilities fall short of RPD

²⁰² Ahmad, M., "No city can be smart if it ignores 30% of its people," *Times of India*, March 2, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/no-city-can-be-smart-if-it-ignores-30-of-its-people/articleshow/118661924.cms> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²⁰³ Chatterjee, P., "New report adds to mounting criticism of India's Smart Cities Mission," *Citizen Matters*, August 22, 2017, <https://citizenmatters.in/new-hrln-report-criticises-indias-smart-cities-mission/> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²⁰⁴ Policy Circle Bureau. "Smart Cities Mission: Lessons from the scheme's mixed legacy." April 2, 2025. <https://www.policycircle.org/policy/lessons-from-smart-cities-mission/> (accessed on April 25, 2025); Karandikar, M., "Urban Dreams, Distant Realities: The smart cities mission and India's top down urban failures." *Money Control*, April 2, 2025, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/urban-dreams-distant-realities-the-smart-cities-mission-and-india-s-top-down-urban-failures-13000464.html> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²⁰⁵ Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

²⁰⁶ Addlakha, R. "Disability and the Pursuit Of Mobility: Risks And Opportunities in the Indian Urbanscape." 2020. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. <https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/disabling-city/disability-and-the-pursuit-of-mobility/> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²⁰⁷ Ola Mobility Institute, "On The Move: Urban travel experiences of Persons with Disabilities and a path to build more inclusive transport systems," November 2021, <https://olawebcdn.com/ola-institute/on-the-move.pdf> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, "Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban", June 25, 2015, <https://pmaymis.gov.in/> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

mandates at the state level despite central government compliance with RPD mandates. In Odisha, based on the demands of *Odisha Viklang Manch*, the state government decided to gather data to improve the implementation and reach of these critical housing schemes for persons with disabilities.²¹⁰

Persons with disabilities also shared that they face challenges in availing PMAY due to criteria that functionally discriminate against them. For instance, under the current scheme, only people with family members qualify as households. Persons with disabilities, however, may face challenges in getting married due to difficulties in finding employment and social stigma, excluding them from access to PMAY. Further, houses constructed under PMAY do not meet minimum accessibility and universal design considerations, such as accessible toilets, entrance ramps, wider doors, and adequately sized bathrooms required to facilitate wheelchair access.

Further, persons with disabilities face layered challenges in accessing rental housing. Accessible rental units are difficult to find, and persons with disabilities are also all too frequently denied rentals²¹¹ due to housing discrimination.²¹² These challenges are particularly acute for persons with disabilities seeking to relocate to urban areas for work.

Inaccessible ICT and digital technologies

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays an increasingly vital role in all aspects of life, either facilitating or creating barriers for full social and economic participation.²¹³ For persons with disabilities, however, ICT all too often remains largely inaccessible despite initiatives like the National Policy on Universal Electronic Accessibility, released in 2013²¹⁴ and guidelines for government apps and websites. Inaccessible education and work platforms present challenges for both remote learning and employment. Additionally, the rise in usage of digital infrastructure has meant additional hurdles. Addressing this, the Supreme Court in April 2025 specifically highlighted the difficulties with digital KYC systems, pointing out that people with vision impairments – blindness and low vision or facial disfigurements cannot perform visual tasks like facial recognition, CAPTCHA, or face alignment. They are frequently refused basic services as a

²¹⁰ Express News Service, "Odisha to collect data of persons with disabilities not covered under PMAY," *The New Indian Express*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2023/Jan/31/odisha-to-collect-data-of-persons-with-disabilities-not-covered-under-pmay-2542992.html>

²¹¹ Wijunamai, V.Q. "Making Real Estates Work for Accessible Housing." National Institute of Urban Affairs. <https://niu.in/node/221#:~:text=Tiny%20rooms%20with%20not%20enough,an%20average%20dwelling%20in%20India.> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²¹² Robo Bionics. "How to Enforce Your Right to Accessible Housing in India." <https://www.robobionics.in/blog/how-to-enforce-your-right-to-accessible-housing-in-india/> (accessed on April 25, 2025)

²¹³ CHASE India, Sumatak Technologies & NAB. "INCLUSIVE DIGITAL INDIA: A Comprehensive Review of ICT Accessibility in Government Platforms." June 2023, <https://www.chase-india.com/media/vgydxbm/ict-accessibility-report-accessible-version.pdf> (accessed on April 15, 2025)

²¹⁴ Viswanathan A., The Centre for Internet & Society, "National Policy on Universal Electronic Accessibility – An Analysis," December 27, 2013, "<https://cis-india.org/accessibility/blog/national-policy-on-universal-electronic-accessibility-analysis> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

result.²¹⁵ The Court called for government and private digital platforms to adhere to accessibility norms, affirming that such exclusion breaches both constitutional rights and disability regulations including the UNCRPD and the RPwD Act, 2016.

Inaccessible financial institutions

Digital technologies are also increasingly crucial for payments and financial transactions, creating new challenges for persons with disabilities that threaten financial independence and inclusion.²¹⁶ Persons with disabilities report that in situations where they are not able to access financial services—whether due to transportation challenges or inaccessible ICT—they rely upon family members to withdraw pensions and earnings. This reliance deprives them of control over financial resources and, in some cases, can even expose them to theft and misappropriation of funds.²¹⁷

Addressing this challenge, an October 2024 RBI regulation, 'Facilitating Accessibility to Digital Payment Systems for Persons with Disabilities',²¹⁸ requires system and service providers to review their payment systems and devices and make necessary modifications so that these systems and devices are accessible. Further, the Government of India Department of Financial Services has issued accessibility standards and guidelines for the banking sector.²¹⁹ Implementation of these guidelines, however, requires further study.

ICT access challenges are heightened for women and girls with disabilities. Addressing the digital divide in the context of gender requires strategic measures so that women and girls with disabilities have the possibility to own, access and use technology by making it affordable and accessible to all.²²⁰ This requires investing in digital literacy for women and girls with disabilities, and mandatory digital accessibility that supports women with disabilities to live independently.

Barriers to accessing quality assistive devices

India lacks comprehensive data on the met and unmet needs for assistive technologies. However, persons with disabilities consistently report that access to quality assistive

²¹⁵ Lanka, S. N. (2025, May 26). When KYC becomes a barrier: Supreme Court's stand for digital inclusion. Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF). <https://internetfreedom.in/when-kyc-becomes-a-barrier-supreme-courts-stand-for-digital-inclusion/>

²¹⁶ Choudhary, A., "Insight into the current state of digital accessibility in the Indian banking sector," August 13, 2024, <https://www.deque.com/blog/insight-into-the-current-state-of-digital-accessibility-in-the-indian-banking-sector/> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²¹⁷ UNRCO, Rising Flame. "Western region consultation". 2022. https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Findings-and-Recommendations-from-Western-Region_RF.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

²¹⁸ Reserve Bank of India. "Annex 3 - Important Domestic Regulatory Measures." December 30, 2024. <https://m.rbi.org.in/scripts/PublicationReportDetails.aspx?ID=1289> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²¹⁹ Government of India. Department of Financial Services. "Accessibility Standards and Guidelines for Banking Sector." [/https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2024/09/202409171647156535.pdf](https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2024/09/202409171647156535.pdf) (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²²⁰ Rising Flame. Asia Pacific Declaration of Women and Girls with Disabilities: Beijing +30. November 2024. https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Asia-Pacific-Declaration-of-Women-with-Disabilities_Final.pdf (accessed on April 24, 2025)

devices, such as screen readers, digital devices, or alert systems for those with hearing disabilities, remains a challenge.

The *Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances (ADIP)* scheme aims to assist persons with disabilities in procuring durable, sophisticated, scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances that can promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation, by reducing the effects of disabilities and enhancing their economic potential. However, persons with disabilities report that assistive devices are often out of stock, and when they are available, they are of poor quality and not tailored to individual needs. Further, persons with disabilities report that despite government circulars, Members of Parliament are not utilising funds towards aids and appliances, and distribution camps are irregular.²²¹ People who receive assistive devices, notably tri-motorcycles, report that they are difficult to use, outdated, stop working within months and become dangerous to operate.²²² The five-year timeline for replacing devices leaves them without functional equipment since many cannot afford repairs. To meet these challenges, it is important to encourage innovation in research and engineering towards finding optional technological solutions.²²³

Notably, the National Health Policy 2017 and *Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PM-JAY) 2018* health insurance schemes do not include provisions for assistive devices. Further, as discussed in previous sections, a vast majority of persons with disabilities do not have healthcare²²⁴, and many are not aware of the central government's flagship programme for people's health.²²⁵

Recommendations

- Realise the goals of the Accessible India Campaign by providing budget allocations, technical input, and initiating monitoring and enforcement plans.
- Enforce accessibility standards across sectors, including housing, transport, ICT, health, water and sanitation, and financial services.
- Conduct regular independent accessibility audits of transport systems and address accessibility challenges. Institute a National Centre for Excellence (CoE) for inclusive

²²¹ Swabhiman. "Report of Eastern Region Consultations on Mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in the Implementation of SDGs". 2022. https://www.swabhiman.org/_files/ugd/50c137_8b42d0c46d9a410da6d3a1ef04f5fde9.pdf (accessed on April 12, 2025)

²²² Garande, Tatyaso & Sonawwanay, Puskaraj & Chavan, Sandip & Barpande, Girish. (2015). Review of Motorised Tricycle for the Disabled Person. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, Vol.4, Issue 2, Feb 2015. 4. 316-320. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296537613_Review_of_Motorized_Tricycle_for_the_Disabled_Person (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²²³ Kalshetti, A. Atole, B. Mhamane, Y. Naidu, V. & Patil, N. "Design and development of e-tricycle for physically challenged people". *International Research Journal of Modernisation in Engineering Technology and Science*. Volume:03/Issue:06/June-2021. https://www.irjmets.com/uploadedfiles/paper/volume3/issue_6_june_2021/13521/1628083527.pdf (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²²⁴ "Healthcare Gap for Persons with disabilities," *Daily Excelsior*, April 3, 2025. <https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/healthcare-gap-for-pwds/> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²²⁵ Rao, P.S.M., "Disabled Health Care," *The Statesman*, April 17, 2025, <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/disabled-health-care-1503421282.html> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

and accessible transport to develop scalable, India-specific public and private transport solutions.

- Ensure accessibility standards are implemented for physical and digital infrastructure in line with the *Rajiv Raturi vs Union of India* Supreme Court judgment of November 2024.²²⁶
- Ensure the mandatory observance of the standards provided in:
 - a) The National Building Code for physical environment;
 - b) The Indian Roads Congress guidelines for pavements and road-based infrastructure;
 - c) Guidelines for Indian Government Websites for websites and mobile applications.²²⁷
 - Prevent passage of building plans unless accessibility features are included, as specified in Sec 44 (1) of the RPD.
 - Ensure strict compliance with Sec 44 (2) of the RPD, including by ensuring accessibility in every new public and private building/structure from the planning stage.
 - Mandate the inclusion of accessibility experts and persons with disabilities in planning, developing, and auditing.
 - Make universal design and accessibility standards mandatory for all housing projects, infrastructure, and transportation projects of any size and scale.
 - Educate developers, designers, architects, and civil engineers on mandatory accessibility standards.
 - Impose financial penalties for non-implementation of accessibility standards and guidelines proportional to the cost of the project.
- Specify universal accessibility as an essential criterion in public procurement, whether for the built environment, technologies, products, or equipment etc.
- Ensure inclusive access to housing. Recognise persons with disabilities over 18 years old as single households in determining access to PMAY housing allocations. Make reservations in housing projects for women with disabilities. Include subsidies for retrofitting or modifying existing private houses for accessibility.
- Allocate resources for research, development, and promotion of affordable, quality assistive devices, technology, and advancements in inclusive infrastructure.
 - Ensure that the assistive devices, technology, and aids distributed under the ADIP scheme are of good quality, suitable and sturdy and meet the specific needs of individual persons with disabilities.
 - Provide timely, free maintenance and repairs of these devices provided under ADIP to ensure uninterrupted independent living for persons across disabilities
 - Subsidise the costs of assistive devices available through grants and low-interest loans.

²²⁶ Disability Rights India. "Supreme Court in Rajive Raturi case holds the recommendatory nature of Sectoral Accessibility Guidelines under Rule 15 as ultra vires the RPWD Act. Grants 3 months to UOI to make corrections in consultation with stakeholders" November 8, 2024. <https://www.disabilityrightsindia.com/2024/11/supreme-court-holds-recommendatory.html> (accessed on April 22, 2025)

²²⁷ "Finding Sizes for All - Report on the Status of the Right to Accessibility in India." Centre for Disability Studies by the Centre for Disability Studies, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad <https://accessoversightcommittee.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/finding-sizes-for-all-report-on-the-status-of-the-right-to-accessibility-in-india.pdf> (accessed on June 25, 2025)

- Broaden the list of assistive devices available, considering the diversity of persons with disabilities. Ensure access to maintenance services.
- Encourage investment in innovative solutions, assistive technologies, and accessible infrastructure to improve the quality of life for ageing populations.
- Train persons with disabilities on the use of assistive devices, especially in rural areas.
- Establish partnerships and provide incentives to startups and the industry to develop localised augmentative alternative communication tools, both low-tech and high-tech, that are accessible to individuals across disabilities.
- Develop plans to build technology solutions which promote independent living for persons with disabilities and make these technologies available, affordable and accessible.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality for persons with disabilities

Status

Barriers to accessing Unique Disability ID (UDID) Certification

UDID certification remains a challenge for persons with disabilities. While the UDID sub-scheme aims to encourage transparent and efficient support to persons with disabilities, challenges in accessing UDIDs act as a barrier to availing of schemes and programmes, including essential rehabilitation and therapy services. A newspaper report reveals that over 11 lakh applications for UDID cards are still pending, with more than 60% of them pending for over six months.²²⁸ The report also says that less than 40% of persons with disabilities have UDID which is linked to most services and schemes.²²⁹ In October 2025 however, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) issued a Revised Advisory and Standard Operating Procedure whose objective was to ensure that only “genuine” persons with disabilities received benefits.²³⁰ The outcome has been to verify UDID cards via the national portal but its implementation has been challenged by many organisations and persons with disabilities as it has resulted in additional barriers for persons with disabilities themselves²³¹.

Persons with disabilities across the country report a slate of challenges accessing UDID certification, including physical access barriers, ineffective online application processes, flawed assessments, complications in updating UDID certification for people with progressive disabilities, arbitrary assignment of disability percentages, time lags in receiving UDIDs, and corruption—including demands for bribes and issuance of false certificates.²³² For instance, participants reported that some UDID certification offices are physically

²²⁸ Francis, N. (2025, September 7). Less than 40% of disabled persons in India have the ID needed for benefits. *The Hindu*. https://www.thehindu.com/data/less-than-40-of-disabled-persons-in-india-have-the-id-needed-for-benefits/article70019908.ece?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

²²⁹ *ibid*

²³⁰ <https://swavlambancard.gov.in/uploads/news/176052297337Revised%20SoP.PDF>

²³¹ Kalyanikar, E. (2025, December 4). Maharashtra govt staff protest disability certificate reverification. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/maharashtra-govt-staff-protest-disability-certificate-reverification/articleshow/125745345.cms>

²³² Vrinda Tulsian, “House panel flags issues with UDID card for persons with disabilities”, *Hindustan Times*, March 18, 2025, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/house-panel-flags-issues-with-udid-card-for-persons-with-disabilities-101742269708653.html>

inaccessible, and in some districts, persons with disabilities must travel large distances to obtain a certificate.

Further, persons with disabilities report that doctors on assessment boards are not familiar with various conditions they experience, and that some doctors continue to grant UDID certification only for the 7 disabilities previously notified under the *Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1995*, rather than the 21 disabilities recognised by the RPD. Further, persons with invisible conditions—including but not limited to psychosocial disabilities—experience discrimination in UDID assessment processes, especially as they live with fluid or dynamic conditions where experiences vary from period to period. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges. During the pandemic, medical assessment boards were unavailable, impacting disability certification renewals. Persons with disabilities also report a significant backlog in applications, with more than one hundred thousand applications pending at the time of writing due to challenges accessing doctors.

These access challenges are compounded for persons with disabilities from rural and tribal areas who may have to travel long distances, incurring significant expenses to achieve UDID certification. Persons with disabilities who migrate for employment face further challenges in UDID certification due to same-day domicile checks in migration destination areas where they are unable to access proof of residence.

Barriers to accessing Aadhaar

Persons with disabilities face challenges in accessing Aadhaar due to difficulties with the biometric capture process, lack of accessibility features at enrolment centres, inadequate training of personnel, transportation issues, and sometimes, attitudinal barriers from staff, potentially requiring them to undergo the process repeatedly and causing inconvenience and frustration.²³³ Additionally, persons with disabilities shared that for those with conditions like arm amputations, retina detachments, etc., procuring an Aadhaar card proved difficult during verification.

In October 2023, the Government of India made Aadhaar details mandatory to apply for a UDID card. While the Aadhaar-UDID link aimed to make the process of getting a UDID simpler, persons with disabilities report barriers to accessing Aadhaar that, in turn, undermine access to UDIDs.²³⁴ In March 2024, the DEPwD mandated Aadhaar to avail scholarships, services under the *Deendayal Divyangjan Rehabilitation Scheme for adults and children, Niramaya, Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances*, District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRC), and residential care.²³⁵

²³³ Soumya Singhal, Social and Political Research Foundation, “Aadhaar, Accessibility, and Ableism: Gauging the Responsiveness of Public Services Frameworks towards PwDs”, July 2021, https://sprf.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/SPRF-2021_Comm_Aadhaar-and-Ableism_Final.pdf (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²³⁴ Abhinay Lakshman, “Government mandates Aadhaar for disability IDs; activists say mechanism inaccurate,” *The Hindu*, October 7, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/government-mandates-aadhaar-for-disability-ids-activists-say-it-will-only-make-things-worse/article67389177.ece>

²³⁵ PTI, “Govt mandates Aadhaar use for availing scholarships, benefit of schemes for disabled people,” *Deccan Herald*, March 14, 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/govt-mandates-aadhaar-use-for-availing-scholarships-benefit-of-schemes-for-disabled-people-2937137>

Accordingly, persons with disabilities facing challenges accessing Aadhaar cards are also barred from accessing these critical schemes.

Challenges to exercising the right to vote

Persons with disabilities facing challenges in accessing Aadhaar also risk being excluded from the right to vote. In February 2015, the Election Commission (EC) began the National Electoral Rolls Purification and Authentication Program (NERPAP), linking voter rolls to Aadhaar. Notably, while in September 2023, the Election Commission informed the Supreme Court that submission of Aadhaar is not mandatory to obtain a Voter ID card, Forms 6 and 6B required for voter enrolment have yet to be updated.²³⁶

Discrimination clause under RPD 3(3) Act

Section 3(3) of the RPD Act allows discrimination on the grounds that an “act or omission is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.” The UNCRPD monitoring committee has called for amending this section in its concluding remarks to the government of India in 2019.²³⁷

Institutionalisation

Persons with disabilities living within institutions lack safe reporting mechanisms for abuse and discrimination, leaving survivors vulnerable to ongoing harm. Further, implementation of legal incapacity laws prevents people with psychosocial disabilities from being recognised as full citizens, especially since a psychiatric diagnosis is often equated with ‘unsoundness of mind’ or ‘insanity,’ leading to assumptions of lack of insight or capacity. More about legal provisions is explored in Goal 16 of the report.

Participants reported that children and adults with disabilities, especially women with disabilities living in institutions, face significant challenges in re-entering independent and community-based living, including accessing identity proof—UDID and Aadhaar, ration cards, and accommodations, which they may lack due to long-term institutionalisation or previous wandering status. Government systems often lack provisions to issue new or duplicate citizenship documents was another concern raised by persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Take urgent action to streamline access to UDIDs for persons across disabilities. Address physical access barriers, ineffective online application processes, flawed assessments, complications in updating UDID certification for persons with progressive disabilities, arbitrary assignment of disability percentages, and time lags in receiving UDIDs.

²³⁶ Rangarajan R, “Should voter IDs be linked with Aadhaar? I Explained”, *The Hindu*, January 13, 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/should-voter-ids-be-linked-with-aadhaar-explained/article69093236.ece>

²³⁷ CRPD/c/IND/CO/1: Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of India (Advance Unedited Version) | OHCHR, www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/crpdco1-concluding-observations-initial-report-india-advance. (accessed on June 30, 2025)

- Streamline disability assessment and certification process and collect data on the specific support requirements of persons with disabilities. Use this data to inform policies, programmes and effective service delivery.
- Address barriers to securing UDIDs for migrant workers and those living in conflict zones by allowing them to provide proof of residence outside the state in which they apply for UDID certification.
- Address barriers to accessing Aadhaar for persons with disabilities. Ensure that persons across all 21 recognised disabilities can procure Aadhaar cards, particularly in light of the mandatory linkage of Aadhaar to UDID and access to disability benefits and schemes. Till full Aadhaar inclusion is reached, ensure alternative ways to access disability related schemes and benefits.
- De-link Aadhaar from access to UDIDs and Voter IDs.
- Amend Section 3(3) of the RPD to prohibit all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities.
- Develop a time-bound plan and allocate budgets to deinstitutionalise persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, through personalised support services, social protection measures, and supported and independent community-based living options.

Goals 12 and 13: Climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and responsible consumption and production for persons with disabilities

Status

Extreme weather events, which are on the rise, can take a heavy toll on the physical and mental health of impacted communities, especially persons with disabilities. At the onset of disasters, persons with disabilities face challenges in responding to inaccessible early warning systems, putting them at risk of missing evacuation orders in cases of emergencies. A training with District IAGs in Kerala on ‘Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction— Inclusive Contingency Planning for Emergency Preparedness and Response’ highlighted challenges faced by persons with disabilities, including inaccessible hazard areas, lack of timely evacuation, and the impact of disasters on response teams.²³⁸ Further, most shelters are inaccessible and may not provide privacy, especially to women. Research indicates that risks to persons with disabilities are heightened because they are more likely to be already at-risk, live in poverty, and face marginalisation. As a result, they are at higher risk of facing multiple and intersecting human rights violations, including violations of the right to life, health, food security, housing, water, and sanitation.²³⁹

²³⁸ Kerala State Disaster Management Authority et al., “Training on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Inclusive Contingency Planning for Emergency Preparedness & Response with District IAGs -Kerala”, March 2022, https://sdma.kerala.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Summary-Report_CBM-Training- Kerala-1.pdf (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²³⁹ “Leave No One Behind: People with Disabilities and Older People in Climate-Related Disasters,” Human Rights Watch, March 2021 - October 2022, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/11/202211drd_global_LeaveNoOneBehind.pdf

In India and elsewhere, in this decade, heat has been increasing,²⁴⁰ and research has indicated that persons with disabilities face heightened risks.²⁴¹ Persons with psychosocial disabilities, or mental health conditions, have a two to three times higher risk of death from heat.²⁴² This is due in part to the impact of certain medications on the body's ability to regulate heat, and challenges in accessing mechanisms required to cope with high temperatures. People with physical disabilities may be prone to greater pain and fatigue on hot days, and those with spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries may have greater difficulty cooling down due to an inability to sweat. Women with psychosocial disabilities who face disability and gender discrimination are often socially isolated, with only intermittent or no government support and repressed agency to adapt to the climate crisis, participants reported in the consultation.

Coastal erosion, melting snow, rain variability and flooding also disproportionately impact persons with disabilities who are particularly at risk in the aftermath of disasters. Following disaster events, persons with disabilities can face difficulty enrolling in social protection programmes or accessing health care. Persons with disabilities may also encounter heightened difficulty in securing resources or recovering from their losses when compared to other demographics.²⁴³ The needs of persons with disabilities continue to be excluded during long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts, thus missing another opportunity to ensure that physical infrastructure is accessible and inclusively resilient to future disasters.²⁴⁴

India's approach to Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) and climate change is shaped by international frameworks like the UNCRPD, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement. These protections are to be implemented under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities, and National and State Climate Action Plans. The RPD mandates equal protection for persons with disabilities in situations of risk, armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and natural disasters.²⁴⁵ Notably, however, the RPD does not explicitly mention climate-driven disasters. Nevertheless, in accordance with the inclusivity mandate

²⁴⁰ Zhao, Qi et al. 2021. Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019: a three-stage modelling study. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, Volume 5, Issue 7, e415 - e425

²⁴¹ Bull, Jonas 2023 In Heat Response, Include People with Disabilities. Publico. Human Rights Watch.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/04/heat-response-include-people-disabilities>;

Chakraborty, Jayajit 2025 Heatwave frequency and disability status: Thermal inequities in the U.S. South. *Disability and Health Journal*, Volume 18, Issue 1, January; Sayles *Michelle*. 2025 *Research on Heatwaves and Disability. How does extreme heat affect the disability community?* *Disability & Health Journal. American Association on Health and Disability*. <https://aahd.us/2025/02/dhjo-heatwaves/>

²⁴² "A Call for Disability-Inclusive Climate Action in India and Globally", Mariwala Health Initiative, <https://mhi.org.in/voice/details/call-disability-inclusive-climate-action-india-and-globally/>

²⁴³ World Health Organisation, "Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities", p. 82, December 2, 2022, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁴⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs—Disability, "Disability-Inclusive Disaster Reduction and Emergency Situations, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-and-emergency-situations.html> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁴⁵ Chapter II(8)

of the RPD, the NDMA issued National Disaster Management Guidelines—Disability and Disaster (2019)²⁴⁶ in the aftermath of severe flooding in Odisha.²⁴⁷

Despite initiatives on the ground, however, persons with disabilities continue to face widespread exclusion in the implementation of disaster risk reduction policies, climate change plans, and programmes.²⁴⁸ While policies have been updated to incorporate disability inclusion, challenges persist due to uneven resource allocation and limited awareness at the state and local levels. Persons with disabilities thus struggle to access shelters and other forms of assistance in the aftermath of disasters.²⁴⁹

Further, welfare perceptions among officials and a weak policy framework without concrete action plans hinder effective implementation. Despite national and state-level DiDRR policies mentioning persons with disabilities, their execution remains poor, with limited coordination between government bodies and OPDs. Participants reported that there are also additional resource constraints among NGOs and first responders, which further impede inclusive DiDRR efforts. Socioeconomic status also plays a key role, as marginalised rural communities, including families of persons with disabilities, often struggle to access DiDRR resources and response measures.²⁵⁰

Confronting these challenges, in the State of Assam, for instance, DiDRR is evolving from a charity-based approach to a rights-based framework, promoting equal participation for persons with disabilities. In Kerala, the Municipal Corporation of Thiruvananthapuram has prioritised the needs of persons with disabilities, and has publicly stated that the ultimate test of an early warning system is whether it provides timely and actionable information to all including persons with disabilities, for if they are not adequately informed and supported, the system as a whole must be judged to have failed.²⁵¹ Additionally, areas of Odisha that have had long experience with evacuations during cyclones have developed systems that support the needs of persons with disabilities in climate-based emergencies. Officials use a red and yellow flag early warning system to direct hearing-impaired persons with disabilities so that they respond immediately. Village-level volunteers have also been

²⁴⁶ Government of India. National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019, <https://www.ndma.gov.in/sites/default/files/PDF/Guidelines/DIDRR.pdf>.

²⁴⁷ National Disaster Management Authority, “Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction: Transformative Journey Towards a Disability-Inclusive Society”, <https://ndma.gov.in/sites/default/files/IEC/Booklets/Disability%20inclusive%20DRR.pdf> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁴⁸ World Health Organisation, “Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities” 2022, p. 83 available online, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>; Margaret Arnold, Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, “Five actions for disability-inclusive disaster risk management,” World Bank Blogs, July 4, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/five-actions-disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-management>

²⁴⁹ Farid Z et. al., “Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) in South Asia: Status, Prospects, and Challenges”, 2024, <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/trendsinternationaldisastermanagement/chapter/didrr-in-south-asia/> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁵⁰ Vivien Doll, Wageningen University and Research, “Leaving Nobody Behind? Investigating the Disability-Inclusiveness of Disaster Risk Reduction in Assam, India”, October 3, 2022, <https://edepot.wur.nl/580909> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁵¹ Municipal Corporation of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala; Gol-UNDP Project on Enhancing Institutional and Community Resilience to Disasters and Climate Change.

trained and tasked with supporting persons with disabilities to evacuate in cases of emergency.²⁵²

Since persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental disasters, they must be included as key stakeholders in mitigating climate change. Accordingly, environmental sustainability initiatives must include persons with disabilities. However, in India, research has shown that persons with disabilities in both rural and urban areas do not currently have access to information on sustainable energy and sustainable energy sources on an equal basis with others.²⁵³

Recommendations

- Amend the RPD Act to include climate-driven disasters.
- Develop the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the NDMA Guidelines on DiDRR.
- Include disability in the National and State legal frameworks, including the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and National and State Action Plans for Climate Change.
- Include persons with disabilities in adaptation measures, mitigation strategies, and policies to address displacement and migration.
- Emphasise and follow universal design practices in all aspects of disaster preparedness to anticipate and plan for the needs of persons with disabilities during climate and other disasters. Ensure relief shelters and emergency services are accessible and inclusive across disabilities.
- Ensure that early warning systems and disaster preparedness plans are accessible to persons across disabilities and provide persons with disabilities with detailed, broken-down information on these plans. Ensure thorough prior training so they are prepared when disasters strike.
- Invest in GPS and GIS systems to provide real-time data in climate and other emergencies to facilitate the evacuation of persons with disabilities.
- Provide access to health services and psycho-social care to persons with disabilities in disasters and climate change situations. Identify persons who need long-term counselling intervention and align them with community members.
- Provide training to National and State Disaster Management Authorities, police, and other emergency services involved in providing protection, relief and rehabilitation on the rights and needs of persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities are included in environmental sustainability and justice initiatives, including but not limited to climate action, reducing carbon emissions, renewable energy, transport, regenerative agriculture, and natural farming. Ensure that initiatives are made accessible to persons with disabilities by the concerned departments.

Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

²⁵² NDM. DRM Effectiveness in Responding “Phailin” in Odisha 2013, ndmindia.mha.gov.in/ndmi/images/pdf/PhailinReport-UNDP-Odisha.pdf. (accessed on June 30, 2025)

²⁵³ Sightsavers India, Consolidated Report on the follow up action plan on 2nd VNR Recommendations and COVID-19 forward looking strategies, p. 55.

Status

Limitations in the laws and in the functioning of disability rights institutions

In April 2024, the Supreme Court of India called the implementation of the RPD Act “dismal”.²⁵⁴ It noted that several states and UTs had failed to appoint state commissioners or set up the required funds, while special courts and public prosecutors for disability-related cases were still missing in many regions.²⁵⁵ Key offices such as the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities remain without full-time leadership²⁵⁶.

Stigmatising terminology like “unsound mind” still widely appears in Indian law.²⁵⁷ Despite the fact that Sec 3 (5) of the MHA also posits that no one shall be held to be of unsound mind merely due to a mental illness, however, it does add that the person could be declared so by a competent court.

The MHCA does not use the words ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ when speaking about institutionalisation. However, the law makes the distinction between ‘independent’ and ‘supported’ admissions, which is entirely dependent on whether the person is considered to have ‘capacity’ upon assessment by a mental health professional. This brings with it a lot of complications as news reports suggest that many persons with disabilities who are institutionalised “as a supported admission if they have attempted or are at risk of harming themselves or someone else or if they seem unable to care for themselves to a degree that puts them at risk of harm”.²⁵⁸

Discriminatory provisions remain under the RPD Act as mentioned in Goal 5 and Goal 10 of this report, which include Sec 3 (3) of the RPD Act and Sec 92 (f) of the RPD Act.

Both Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act 1992 and the National Trust (for the welfare of Cerebral Palsy, Autism, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities) Act 2000 are yet to be harmonised in lines with CRPD. Other laws, ranging from beggary laws, laws on political processes and participation, contract laws, banking laws, criminal laws, etc., which have discriminatory provisions against persons with different disabilities like leprosy, blindness, psychosocial disabilities, are not yet amended in line with India’s obligation under CRPD.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Bawa, A. K., & Law, L. Supreme Court laments “Dismal” implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, issues. . . Live Law, April 30, 2024, <https://www.livewlaw.in/top-stories/supreme-court-laments-dismal-implementation-of-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-act-issues-directions-to-states-255825>

²⁵⁵ *ibid*

²⁵⁶ “No Chief Commissioner of Persons with disabilities for over five years despite three attempts to fill the post, Centre tells RS”, *The Hindu*, December 4, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/no-chief-commissioner-of-pwds-for-over-five-years-despite-three-attempts-to-fill-the-post-centre-tells-rs/article68947110.ece> (accessed on March 8, 2025)

²⁵⁷ Of unsound mind or mentally ill: Analysing pronouncements in Procedural Criminal Law - P39A Criminal Law blog. (2024, December 18). P39A Criminal Law Blog. <https://p39ablog.com/2024/12/unsound-mind-or-mentally-ill/> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²⁵⁸ Dastidhar, R. Even under India’s new mental healthcare act, institutionalisation is still a problem. Medium, December 12, 2021, <https://medium.com/skin-stories/even-under-indias-new-mental-healthcare-act-institutionalisation-is-still-a-problem-a40d32d3ba16> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²⁵⁹ Sightsavers. (2022). Consolidated Report on the follow up action plan on 2nd VNR Recommendations and COVID-19 forward looking strategies. https://risingflame.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FINAL-REPORT_FORWARD-LOOKING-STRATEGY.pdf

Under the medical termination of pregnancy law, the only circumstance in which medical termination is permitted after 24 weeks of gestation is in case of a “foetal abnormality” as diagnosed by a medical board. In permitting abortions after 24 weeks in this limited circumstance, the law furthers the prejudice that disability is an adverse, exceptional situation.²⁶⁰ The legislative framework also fails to recognise other circumstances in which persons may require abortions after 24 weeks. Thus, moving away from women’s autonomy and choice to stigmatising and singling out foetal anomaly.

The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 (DPDP Rules) pose challenges for persons with disabilities in the context of legal guardianship.²⁶¹ The current concept of guardianship largely focuses on managing financial and property matters, without fully considering the individual's legal capacity to make decisions, including decisions about data processing. This approach complicates how guardians will navigate data-related decisions for persons with disabilities and doesn’t incorporate the rights-based approach of supported decision-making called for by disability rights advocates. It also doesn’t align with the RPD, which adopts a more progressive stance, enabling persons with disabilities to make their own decisions with the assistance of a legal guardian.²⁶² The misalignment between these two laws stands to complicate application when it comes to data and persons with disabilities.

Barriers to accessing justice

Persons with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing justice. Crimes against persons with disabilities are not systematically recorded, and proper records on cases of discrimination and abuse aren’t maintained.

There is also a lack of sensitisation among law enforcement and judicial officials, leading to systemic neglect of disability-related cases. Lack of sensitisation is compounded by subpar representation of persons with disabilities in the police, judiciary, and prison administration, despite 4% mandatory reservation under the RPD.²⁶³ Even physical access to police stations and courts has long since been identified as a challenge for persons with disabilities.²⁶⁴

Persons with disabilities may require accommodations—distinct types of support depending on their disabilities—that are procedural and age-appropriate. This may include access to sign-language interpretation, the presence of someone to facilitate communication (“special educator”), the use of simple language, and the option to file reports in braille. However, persons with disabilities are routinely excluded from accommodations based on their

²⁶⁰ Centre for Justice Law and Society and -, Jindal Global Law School (2023) Advocacy manual on legal regulation of Abortion in India: Complexities and challenges. Manual. Jindal Global Law School, Sonipat. <https://pure.jgu.edu.in/id/eprint/5990/1/Advocacy%2BManual%2Bon%2BLegal%2BRegulation%2Bof%2BAbortion%2Bin%2BIndia%2BComplexities%2Band%2BChallenges.pdf>

²⁶¹ Kanya Pandey, “How India’s Data Protection Law Infantilises Persons with Disabilities”, Medianama, February 11, 2025, <https://www.medianama.com/2025/02/223-how-indias-data-protection-law-fails-persons-with-disabilities-pwds/> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²⁶² Pathak, M. "Does the data protection law adequately address the needs of persons with disabilities?," The Leaflet, April 9, 2025, <https://theleaflet.in/digital-rights/does-the-data-protection-law-adequately-address-the-needs-of-persons-with-disabilities> (accessed on April 24, 2025)

²⁶³ Paliath, S. "The Missing Diversity In India’s Justice System." April 15, 2025. IndiaSpend. <https://www.indiaspend.com/governance/the-missing-diversity-in-indias-justice-system-949398> (accessed on April 22, 2025)

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

inability to certify a disability or when the police fail to include specific details in the First Information Report (FIR). Online legal access processes, including court websites and virtual hearing platforms, remain inaccessible, preventing persons with disabilities from fully participating in legal proceedings.²⁶⁵

Access to justice is particularly difficult for women and girls with disabilities in cases of violence, largely due to the stigma associated with their sexuality and disability. As a result, they often do not get the support they need at every stage of the justice process: reporting the abuse to police, getting appropriate medical care and navigating the court system.²⁶⁶

Inadequate access to services in vulnerable areas

Violence in Manipur since May 3, 2023, has led to rampant displacement with people leaving their homes, belongings and jobs and seeking shelter in relief camps. Persons with disabilities and especially women with disabilities face heightened challenges due to poor provisions for accessibility or privacy. They also have limited access to food and medical supplies, participants reported.

In states like Kashmir, where persons with disabilities have extreme access challenges, even government reports have mentioned that no support has been provided. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities' Annual Report mentions that no NGO in Jammu & Kashmir received government grants under the *Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme*. Without targeted action, persons with disabilities in vulnerable areas will continue to be left behind.

Challenges facing refugees with disabilities

While refugees can access free education until age 14²⁶⁷ and work in some informal sectors, significant challenges remain, especially for refugees with disabilities. In addition to facing compounded challenges with accessibility, stigma, and discrimination, they face significant challenges securing documentation.²⁶⁸ They often cannot obtain disability certificates or Aadhaar cards, making it even more difficult for them to access support and services. When it comes to livelihoods, refugees with disabilities face enormous barriers in finding jobs and achieving self-reliance. Women refugees are a particularly vulnerable group, many also being responsible for the care and welfare of children.²⁶⁹ Women with disabilities deal with

²⁶⁵ Nidhi Goyal and Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, *Invisible Victims of Sexual Violence: Access to Justice for Women and Girls with Disabilities in India*, Human Rights Watch, 2018.

²⁶⁶ Nidhi Goyal and Shikha Silliman Bhattacharjee, *Invisible Victims of Sexual Violence: Access to Justice for Women and Girls with Disabilities in India*, Human Rights Watch, 2018.

²⁶⁷ Migration & Asylum Project. "Refugee Protection in India: Access to Economic & Social Rights" <https://www.migrationandasylumproject.org/refugee-protection-in-india> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²⁶⁸ Brinham, N & Johar, A. "Refugee experiences of identity documents and digitisation in India and Myanmar" May 2024. *Forced Migration Review*. <https://www.fmreview.org/digital-disruption/brinham-johar/> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²⁶⁹ Malik, A. "Refugee rights, the gendered nature of displacement" *The Hindu*, August 10, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/refugee-rights-the-gendered-nature-of-displacement/article68506611.ece> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

additional layers of obstacles.²⁷⁰ Refugee children with disabilities²⁷¹ are also often neglected in policy and programmatic interventions.

Recommendations

- Ensure all laws are harmonised in accordance with CRPD and discriminatory provisions against persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, are removed.
- Enforce the proper implementation of supported decision-making as laid out under the RPD, and harmonise supported decision-making to be uniform across legislations, in a way that respects the autonomy and capacity of individuals with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities.
- Ensure higher budgetary allocations for the Department of Empowerment of Persons with disabilities and effective utilisation of the budgets through the timely implementation of the RPD and through strict monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Allocate budgets within each Ministry to ensure RPD implementation and mainstreaming of services to persons with disabilities in all schemes and government services.
- Appoint disability desks with disabled experts in each Ministry to ensure full inclusion of persons with disabilities in government programming. Create a single window system to facilitate streamlined access to social protection.
- Conduct targeted disability sensitisation training for all personnel in government ministries at the centre and state levels regularly and on an ongoing basis.
- Improve the functioning of essential disability rights institutions
- Mandate the collection of up-to-date gender, age, and disability (GAD) disaggregated data in the upcoming census for effective policy making and budgetary allocations.
- Ensure all emergency helplines are accessible across disabilities (including but not limited to women's helplines, Childline, police, ambulance, suicide, and mental health helplines). This includes having text-based options and sign language video calling options for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons.
- Address barriers to accessing justice for persons with disabilities throughout the justice pipeline. Regularly sensitise and train police officers, lawyers and judges on the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. Provide regular and ongoing training of all personnel involved in the administration of justice on the needs of persons with disabilities, including law enforcement, judicial officers, and court personnel.
- Mandate systematic recording of crimes against persons with disabilities by the Offices of the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) and police.
- Ensure that all courts are accessible across disabilities, which includes physical space access, process access, and access to justice.

²⁷⁰ Sarah Scheer, Eric Asaba, Thomas Buerk, Manuel Guerrero & Margarita Mondaca (26 Sep 2024): Striving in uncertainty: how disabled refugee women negotiate everyday activities and participation, *Disability & Society*, DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2024.2407816 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2024.2407816> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

²⁷¹ Allen, R. Cappa, C. Lindt, N. and You, D. "A Brighter Future for Migrant and Displaced Children with Disabilities: The First Step is Better Data," March 31, 2023. UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/data-for-action/a-brighter-future-for-migrant-and-displaced-children-with-disabilities-the-first-step-is-better-data/> (accessed on April 26, 2025)

- Notify and implement special courts in all districts, as mandated by the RPD Act.
- Ensure access to rehabilitation, schemes, and other support to persons with disabilities in conflict and vulnerable areas and refugees with disabilities.
- Ensure the safety of women and girls with disabilities in conflict and disaster-prone areas.

Goal 17: Partnerships with persons with disabilities for the goals

Status

There is no disability-disaggregated data available regarding SDG progress, making it difficult to identify and address gaps in attainment for persons with disabilities. This gap begins with data collection, wherein, from the list of indicators released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, only three indicators specifically mention disability, out of a list of more than 300. This data collection framework includes fewer indicators than mapped by the 2030 Agenda, which has specific mention of disability in seven targets and 11 indicators.²⁷²

Communication barriers, social stigma, and failure to ensure that government offices and political processes are accessible and inclusive also function to exclude persons with disabilities from consultative and decision-making processes related to achieving the SDGs. Women, tribal people, Dalits, LGBTQ+, and other persons with disabilities facing intersecting grounds of discrimination confront heightened exclusion and marginalisation.

Despite calls for a National Commission to oversee implementation of the RPD, the Office of the Chief Commissioner and State Commissioners remain tasked with monitoring implementation progress. Participants reported that these quasi-judicial bodies often have limited powers, inhibiting effective coordination with other Ministries and limiting the full realisation of disability rights.

The Legal and Treaties Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, which serves as the focal point for international law and advises the Government of India, did not mention any work related to the CRPD in its 2023-2024 Annual Report, which focused overwhelmingly on the G20 process.²⁷³

This was despite the formation of the Disability, Equity, Justice Working Group in April 2023 under the Civil 20/G20 processes, a historic step by Indian leadership in including the needs of persons with disabilities in Civil 20/G20 processes.²⁷⁴ Although the CRPD requires states

²⁷² Sightsavers India. Rising Voices. 2020.

<https://www.sightsavers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/RisingVoices.pdf> (accessed on April 23, 2025)

²⁷³ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Annual Report 2023-24.

https://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/37100_AR_2023_24.pdf

²⁷⁴ Pandit, A., "G20 process gets separate group to mainstream persons with disabilities," *Times of India*. April 25, 2023,

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/99755989.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

parties to establish an independent mechanism for its implementation, India has not implemented an independent monitoring system.²⁷⁵

The exclusion of persons with disabilities from the implementation of the RPD and international treaty obligations undermines the inclusive partnerships required to advance SDGs for persons with disabilities. Inclusive partnerships, moreover, are of critical importance in advancing SDGs for persons with disabilities since disability is a cross-cutting issue and exclusion of the voices and needs of persons with disabilities in international cooperation limits funding, advocacy, and policy alignment for persons with disabilities within global partnerships. Further, failure to collect and release disaggregated data by disability in relation to SDG achievement presents significant challenges in assessing progress and addressing strategic gaps.

It is equally important to emphasise that, as stated in the goals above, achieving health, education, employment, accessibility—and in short, the rights of persons across disabilities—requires active commitment and action from the private sector and civil society through robust public-private partnerships.

Recommendations

- Collect and disaggregate data on all SDGs (1-16) on the basis of type of disability, gender, age, and geography (urban, rural, and regional).
- Ensure that the upcoming census collects data disaggregated by disability, including all 21 types of disabilities under the RPD alongside age, gender, caste, tribal status, and other markers.
 - Ensure the questions around disability shift in approach to use the Washington Group Questions, which have been tested and proven to result in better responses and higher inclusion of experiences of persons with disabilities, resulting in better data.
- Establish a National Commission to oversee the implementation of the RPD, including persons across disabilities. This is essential in ensuring that approaches to advancing the SDGs are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.
- Establish accessible feedback mechanisms, including social audits of schemes, for persons with disabilities to provide feedback on policies and programmes, ensuring their voices are heard and needs are addressed.
- Foster collaboration between governments, the private sector, and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to drive inclusive development.

²⁷⁵ IDA's Compilation of CRPD Committee's Concluding Observations: Article 33 CRPD (National implementation and monitoring)

Annexure 1: List of key court judgments in 2020-2025

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
1	02-May-25	Supreme Court of India	Kabir Paharia v. National Medical Commission & Ors.	Education
2	30-Apr-25	Supreme Court of India	Pragya Prasun & Ors. v. Union of India and Amar Jain v. Union of India	Accessibility
3	03-Apr-25	Supreme Court of India	Kashmiri Lal Sharma v. Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd. & Anr.	Employment
4	03-Mar-25	Supreme Court of India	Judicial Services v. Registrar General of MP	Employment
5	03-Mar-25	Supreme Court of India	Alok Singh v. State of Madhya Pradesh	Employment
6	19-Feb-25	Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)	Suo-motu cognizance regarding the inaccessibility of websites, mobile applications and other digital platforms	Accessibility
7	03-Feb-25	Supreme Court of India	Gulshan Kumar v. Institute of Banking Personnel Selection	Employment
8	12-Nov-24	Supreme Court of India	Arushi Singh v. Union of India	Accessibility
9	08-Nov-24	Supreme Court of India	Rajive Raturi v. Union of India	Accessibility
10	25-Oct-24	Supreme Court of India	Om Rathod v. Director General of Health Services & Others	Accessibility
11	15-Oct-24	Supreme Court of India	Omkar Ramchandra Gond v. Union of India and Ors.	Education
12	08-Jul-24	Supreme Court of India	Union of India v. Pankaj Kumar Srivastava & Anr.	Employment
13	15-Mar-24	Delhi High Court	Akshat Baldwa & Others v. Yash Raj Films & Others	Accessibility

14	15-Jan-24	Delhi High Court	Nipun Malhotra v. Sony Pictures Films India Pvt. Ltd.	Non-Discrimination
15	18-Aug-23	Delhi High Court	Saurabh Shukla v. Max Bupa Health Insurance Co. Ltd.	Health
16	17-Jul-23	Supreme Court of India	Seema Girija Lal v. Union of India	Access to Justice
17	4-Jul-23	Supreme Court of India	Reserve Bank of India and Others v. A.K. Nair and Others	Employment
18	20-Dec-21	Madras High Court	M. Sameeha Barvin vs The Joint Secretary	Non-discrimination
19	17-Dec-21	Supreme Court of India	Ravinder Kumar Dhariwal v. Union of India	Non-Discrimination
20	29-Nov-21	Delhi High Court	Anmol Kumar Mishra v. Union of India & Others	Education
21	23-Nov-21	Supreme Court of India	Avni Prakash v. National Testing Agency	Education
22	27-Apr-21	Supreme Court of India	Patan Jamal Vali v. State of Andhra Pradesh	Access to Justice, Gender
23	11-Feb-21	Supreme Court of India	Vikas Kumar v. Union Public Service Commission	Education/Employment
24	29-Sept-20	Delhi High Court	National Federation Of The Blind vs Union Of India & Anr	Food Security



S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
1	02-May-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Kabir Paharia v. National Medical Commission & Ors.</u></p> <p>In a powerful ruling, the Supreme Court held that reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities is a fundamental right under Articles 14, 16, and 21 of the Indian Constitution, not a matter of charity. The case involved Kabir Paharia, a Scheduled Caste student with a locomotor disability, who was denied admission to the MBBS course at AIIMS, New Delhi, despite a higher merit rank than another admitted candidate in the SC-persons with disabilities category.</p> <p>The Court emphasised that arbitrary exclusion of qualified persons with disabilities candidates perpetuates historical injustice and violates the constitutional principle of substantive equality. The bench, comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, noted that Kabir had demonstrated full competence in clinical skills and that the only minor challenge he faced—wearing surgical gloves—was not sufficient grounds for disqualification.</p> <p>Calling the denial “grossly illegal and arbitrary,” the Court directed AIIMS to admit the appellant in the 2025 MBBS batch under the SC-persons with disabilities quota. It also ordered the National Medical Commission to revise its guidelines based on recent judgments to ensure no eligible persons with disabilities are denied admission.</p> <p>This judgment marks a significant step toward dismantling institutional bias and enforcing inclusive education in medical institutions.</p>	Education



S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
2	30-Apr-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Pragya Prasun & Ors. v. Union of India and Amar Jain v. Union of India</u></p> <p>In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court directed the government and regulatory bodies to make digital KYC (Know Your Customer) systems accessible to persons with disabilities, affirming that exclusion from essential services like banking and telecom due to inaccessible KYC procedures violates constitutional rights under Articles 14, 15, and 21. The court held that right to digital access is a part of fundamental rights framework with specific reference to Articles 14 (substantive equality and 15), 21 and 38. Para 17's relevant portion is extracted as: In such circumstances, the State's obligations under Article 21— read in conjunction with Articles 14,15 and 38 of the Constitution – must encompass the responsibility to ensure that digital infrastructure, government portals, online learning platforms, and financial technologies are universally accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all vulnerable and marginalized populations. Petitioners, including individuals with visual impairments and facial disfigurements resulting from acid attacks, highlighted how current KYC methods—live selfies, blinking detection, facial alignment, and biometric scans—systematically exclude those with non-normative bodies.</p> <p>The Court recognised that such technological barriers undermine equal access, dignity, and the right to life, and reinforced that accessibility is a constitutional mandate, not a matter of convenience. It issued 20 binding directives, including mandating paper-based/offline alternatives, accessibility audits, acceptance of thumb impressions, and removal of rigid “liveness” checks. Authorities like RBI, SEBI, and DoT must lead reforms.</p> <p>Importantly, the judgment calls for a human-centered design of digital infrastructure that accommodates not just legal disability but broader exclusions, including those due to age, manual labour, and poverty. It reframes</p>	Accessibility



S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>digital systems as constitutional interfaces rather than neutral administrative tools, setting a precedent for inclusive digital governance in India’s expanding digital public infrastructure. Bridging the digital divide is no longer merely a matter of policy discretion but has become a constitutional imperative. The right to digital access, therefore, emerges as an intrinsic component of the right to life and liberty, necessitating that the State proactively design and implement inclusive digital ecosystems.</p>	
3	03-Apr-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Kashmiri Lal Sharma v. Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd. & Anr.</u></p> <p>In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court held that prescribing different retirement ages for employees based on the type of disability violates Article 14 of the Constitution. The case involved Kashmiri Lal Sharma, a 60% locomotor-disabled electrician who was forced to retire at 58 years, while visually impaired or blind employees were allowed to serve until 60, under a 2013 Himachal Pradesh policy.</p> <p>A bench of Justices Manoj Misra and K.V. Viswanathan ruled that this distinction was arbitrary and discriminatory, reaffirming that all benchmark disabilities under the Persons with disabilities Act, 1995 and Rights of persons with disabilities Act, 2016 are entitled to equal treatment in employment benefits, including retirement age. The Court cited its earlier support of Bhupinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2014) to emphasise that disability-specific policies cannot favour one category over another without a rational basis.</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>Although the 2013 order granting the benefit was later withdrawn in 2019, the Court upheld Sharma’s legitimate expectation to be treated equally until that date and thus granted him relief.</p> <p>This judgment reinforces the principle of substantive equality and uniform application of rights for all persons with benchmark disabilities, setting an important precedent against intra-disability discrimination in service conditions.</p>	
4	03-Mar-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Judicial Services v. Registrar General of MP</u></p> <p>In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court held that persons with disabilities, including visually impaired and low-vision candidates, cannot be excluded from judicial service recruitment solely on account of their disability. The Court struck down Rule 6A of the Madhya Pradesh Judicial Services Rules, which had barred such candidates, and directed that they be entitled to reasonable accommodation and be evaluated under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.</p> <p>The bench emphasised that substantive equality requires removal of indirect discrimination, and directed that all persons with disabilities who had earlier participated in the process be considered for appointment if otherwise eligible. Rule 7’s restrictive conditions—requiring 70% marks in the first attempt or three years of practice—were also relaxed for persons with disabilities applicants.</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>The case arose from a suo motu petition after a blind candidate’s mother wrote to the Chief Justice. The Court’s verdict is a powerful affirmation of inclusive employment both with regards to in the judiciary and underscores that disability is no bar to competence or judicial excellence. The Court highlighted the duty of the State to provide affirmative action and reasonable accommodation for full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in public employment.</p>	
5	03-Mar-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Alok Singh v. State of Madhya Pradesh</u></p> <p>The Supreme Court struck down discriminatory provisions in the Madhya Pradesh Judicial Service Rules, holding that visually impaired candidates cannot be excluded from judicial recruitment. The petition, originally sparked by a mother’s letter on behalf of her blind son, challenged Rule 6A, which barred such candidates, and Rule 7, which imposed rigid first-attempt and practice requirements on persons with disabilities.</p> <p>A two-judge bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan ruled that such provisions violated Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The Court emphasised that judicial competence must be assessed on qualifications and individual abilities, not outdated assumptions about disability.</p> <p>The Court affirmed that separate cut-off marks and reasonable</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>accommodations are essential to uphold substantive equality. It also rejected the artificial distinction between persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities in public employment, calling for equal treatment and unified standards.</p> <p>The Court ordered the reinstatement of eligible disabled candidates, including Alok Singh and Ayush Yardi, and directed completion of the revised selection process within three months, ensuring they can compete fairly for judicial posts.</p>	
6	19-Feb-25	Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)	<p><u>Suo-motu cognizance regarding the inaccessibility of websites, mobile applications and other digital platforms by Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)</u></p> <p>In a significant move to enforce digital accessibility, the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) imposed penalties of INR 10,000 each on 155 establishments, including several central ministries, departments, and private companies, for failing to comply with digital accessibility standards mandated under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The penalties are to be deposited in the National Fund for Persons with Disabilities.</p> <p>Despite prior directions and an extended deadline till February 12, 2025, only 12 establishments appointed access auditors, and a mere 9 submitted access audit reports, indicating widespread non-compliance. Notable compliant entities include Ministry of External Affairs, Tata Digital, Reliance Jio, and Yatra Online. However, major government bodies—including ministries of defence,</p>	Accessibility

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>health, railways, finance, and NITI Aayog—have failed to meet requirements.</p> <p>This enforcement action underscores the urgent need for both public and private entities to uphold digital accessibility obligations, ensuring that persons with disabilities—particularly those who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind—can equitably access online services and platforms.</p>	
7	03-Feb-25	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Gulshan Kumar v. Institute of Banking Personnel Selection</u></p> <p>The Supreme Court delivered a crucial ruling affirming that examination accommodations such as scribes and extra time must be provided to all persons with disabilities, not just those meeting the 40% benchmark disability threshold. Gulshan Kumar, diagnosed with Focal Hand Dystonia and certified with 25% permanent disability, was repeatedly denied support in various competitive exams, including by IBPS, SBI, and BSSC.</p> <p>The Court held this denial as discriminatory and violative of Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Citing <i>Vikash Kumar v. UPSC (2021)</i>, it reaffirmed that reasonable accommodation is a right, not a privilege, and that disability-based exclusions—even those based on arbitrary thresholds—must not stand.</p> <p>The Court issued sweeping directions: revision of restrictive guidelines, establishment of grievance redressal portals, uniform implementation across</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>exam bodies, regular sensitisation programs, longer scribe certification validity, scribe training and incentives, and provision of flexible exam formats. The judgment marks a significant shift toward inclusive assessment systems, protecting the dignity and aspirations of all disabled candidates, regardless of percentage of impairment.</p>	
8	12-Nov-24	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Arushi Singh v. Union of India</u></p> <p>In a pivotal judgment, the Supreme Court directed the mandatory enforcement of disability-friendly guidelines at airports following a petition by Arushi Singh, a wheelchair user who faced discrimination during security screening at Kolkata Airport. The Court emphasised that the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities under Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 must be protected in all public spaces, including airports.</p> <p>Singh recounted being made to stand up multiple times during a CISF check despite disclosing her condition, highlighting the lack of sensitivity among airport personnel. Taking note of this and other systemic gaps, the Court accepted the Union Government’s joint proposal containing detailed recommendations—ranging from real-time wheelchair availability, mechanised assistance, and boarding pass disability codes, to integration of the UDID database, contactless kiosks, and regular staff sensitisation training.</p>	Accessibility

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>The Court ruled these measures as mandatory, extending their application beyond persons with disabilities to include the elderly and temporarily injured passengers. It underscored that physical assistance already being provided must continue and should not be scaled back under these reforms.</p> <p>The judgment reinforces inclusive travel infrastructure and marks a step toward institutionalising empathy and accessibility in civil aviation services.</p>	
9	08-Nov-24	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Rajive Raturi v. Union of India</u></p> <p>The Court affirmed the constitutional right of persons with disabilities to accessible public infrastructure, particularly roads and transport, as a core component of the rights to equality, movement, and dignity under Articles 19 and 21. Filed as a Public Interest Litigation by a visually impaired activist, the case demanded systemic reforms to ensure safe, inclusive, and barrier-free public spaces.</p> <p>Citing earlier rulings like Umed Ram Sharma and Jeeja Ghosh, the Court emphasised that for persons with visual impairments, accessibility is essential to living with dignity and participating in public life. The Court monitored government compliance over several years and ultimately issued time-bound directions to both Central and State Governments to implement accessibility standards.</p>	Accessibility

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
10	25-Oct-24	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Om Rathod v. Director General of Health Services & Others</u></p> <p>The Court ruled in favour of a medical aspirant with lower limb myopathy, reinforcing the right to reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in medical education. The appellant, despite securing high NEET-UG scores and possessing a valid disability certificate, was declared ineligible for admission to MBBS by AIIMS Nagpur’s Disability Assessment Board.</p> <p>The Supreme Court strongly criticised the discriminatory and opaque process used to deny admission, declaring that reasonable accommodation is not charity but a constitutional obligation under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21. Drawing from international best practices like the UK's "Welcome and Valued" framework, the Court called for systemic reforms, including disability-sensitive assessment, inclusion of doctors with disabilities in evaluation boards, and establishment of Enabling Units to support students throughout their medical education.</p> <p>The Court ordered AIIMS Nagpur to admit the appellant to a supernumerary seat, protect him from victimisation, and apply the judgment in rem, meaning it would impact future disability admissions across India.</p>	Accessibility
11	15-Oct-24	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Omkar Ramchandra Gond v. Union of India and Ors.</u></p> <p>The appellant, Omkar Gond, a meritorious student with 45% speech and language disability, qualified NEET-UG 2024 under the Person with disabilities category but was denied MBBS admission due to NMC regulations that excluded candidates with more than 40% disability. Challenging this rule, Omkar argued that such exclusion violated his rights under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and Articles 14 and 41 of the Constitution. The Bombay High Court dismissed his petition, prompting an appeal to the Supreme Court.</p>	Education

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>The Court held that disability assessment must go beyond percentage thresholds and include functional assessments of whether the candidate can successfully pursue the course. It directed a fresh evaluation by Maulana Azad Medical College, which confirmed his ability to study medicine. The Court granted Omkar admission and clarified that Appendix H-1 of the Graduate Medical Regulations must not be interpreted to deny all persons with 40%+ disabilities the benefit of the 5% Person with disabilities reservation.</p> <p>The Court emphasised that treating all persons with benchmark disabilities as a monolith violates the principle of substantive equality. It called for reasonable accommodation and judicial review of Disability Board decisions, setting crucial precedent for inclusive education under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.</p>	

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
12	08-Jul-24	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Union of India Pankaj Kumar Srivastava & Anr.</u></p> <p>In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to direct the appointment of visually impaired candidates—including the respondent, Pankaj Kumar Srivastava—who qualified the Civil Services Exam (CSE) 2008 but were denied appointments under the Persons with Disabilities quota.</p> <p>The respondent, a 100% visually impaired candidate, had challenged the non-filling of backlog vacancies under the 1995 persons with disabilities Act. Although the Central Administrative Tribunal and Delhi High Court ruled in his favour, the Union of India continued to deny appointments, arguing that posts like IRS (IT) and IRS (C&E) were exempted from persons with disabilities reservation. The Court rejected this, stating no valid notification was issued under Section 33's proviso to exclude such posts.</p> <p>The bench criticised the Union’s repeated failure to implement disability law and held that the State's apathy forced the candidate to seek justice for years. Citing systemic delay and injustice, the Court directed that Srivastava and 10 others from the VI category be appointed against backlog vacancies in suitable services.</p> <p>This judgment reinforces that rights of disabled candidates cannot be overridden by bureaucratic inertia, and upholds the spirit of affirmative action.</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
13	15-Mar-24	Delhi High Court	<p><u>Akshat Baldwa & Others v. Yash Raj Films & Others</u></p> <p>The Delhi High Court delivered a landmark ruling on March 15, 2024, affirming the right of persons with visual and hearing disabilities to access audio-visual content in accessible formats. The petitioners, persons with visual and hearing impairments, challenged the lack of accessibility features—such as audio descriptions, subtitles, and closed captions—in films like <i>Pathaan</i>, both in cinemas and on streaming platforms.</p> <p>Justice Pratibha M. Singh held that under Section 42 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the government is obligated to ensure that all audio, print, and electronic media content is made accessible. Acknowledging the widespread exclusion of disabled audiences from mainstream media, the Court directed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) to draft and notify accessibility standards.</p> <p>In compliance, MIB prepared the Draft Guidelines on Accessibility Standards in Public Exhibition of Feature Films, which the Court ordered to be notified by July 15, 2024, making accessibility features mandatory in cinemas.</p> <p>This judgment marks a critical move toward inclusive cultural participation, ensuring that entertainment is a right, not a privilege, for persons with disabilities in India.</p>	Accessibility

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
14	15-Jan-24	Delhi High Court	<p><u>Nipun Malhotra v. Sony Pictures Films India Pvt. Ltd.</u></p> <p>The Court examined the rights of persons with disabilities regarding their portrayal in films. The petitioner, disability rights activist Nipun Malhotra, objected to stereotypical and demeaning depictions in the film <i>Aankh Micholi</i> and sought judicial intervention to reform film certification and promote respectful representation.</p> <p>While the Court refused to grant specific reliefs—including altering the film, mandating guidelines, or including disability experts in the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)—it acknowledged that stereotypical portrayals violate the dignity of disabled individuals. The Court offered a general framework for respectful representation, urging filmmakers to avoid stereotypes, ensure authenticity, and include disabled voices.</p> <p>However, the ruling produced mixed signals: it stressed that freedom of speech does not include stereotyping disabled people, yet held that disparaging content could be protected if justified by the film’s overall message—leaving future protections ambiguous.</p>	Non-Discrimination
15	18-Aug-23	Delhi High Court	<p><u>Saurabh Shukla v. Max Bupa Health Insurance Co. Ltd.</u></p> <p>The Delhi High Court ruled that denial of health insurance to persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination and violates the right to health under Article 21 of the Constitution. The petitioner, who lives with tetraplegia, was denied insurance coverage by Max Bupa and Oriental Insurance despite repeated applications and a directive from the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD).</p> <p>Justice Pratibha M. Singh held that insurance companies must comply with the IRDAI Health Regulations, 2016, and its 2022 circular, which mandates coverage</p>	Health

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>for persons with disabilities, HIV, and mental illness. Citing <i>Vikas Gupta v. Union of India</i>, the Court emphasised that disability cannot be a ground for blanket exclusion, and risk assessment must be individualised, not generalised.</p> <p>The Court directed the insurers to process the petitioner’s application and instructed all insurance companies to design inclusive health insurance products. It also strongly criticised the use of the term “sub-standard lives” in IRDAI’s regulatory language and directed that it be amended to uphold dignity.</p> <p>This judgment reinforces non-discrimination in private sector healthcare and expands accountability under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, even for private entities regulated through statutory bodies.</p>	
16	17-Jul-23	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Seema Girija Lal v. Union of India</u></p> <p>This PIL was filed by disability rights advocates Seema Girija Lal and Suchitra Narayan, highlighting India’s systemic failure to implement the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Triggered by widespread abuse in unregulated therapy centres and lack of redress for persons with disabilities, the petitioners documented gaps across all 36 states/UTs: no disability commissioners in 13, absence of special courts or prosecutors in many, and non-operational Disability Funds in 16 states.</p> <p>The Supreme Court acknowledged that in the absence of grievance redressal bodies and functional enforcement mechanisms, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act remains toothless. It emphasised that denying reasonable accommodation violates Articles 14, 19, and 21, and erodes the dignity of disabled persons. While compliance reports were ordered, implementation remains patchy. Even where appointments exist, officials are unaware of their duties.</p>	Access to Justice

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>The Court has directed states to submit regular updates and take steps to operationalise institutional mechanisms. The petition highlights how implementation failures disproportionately harm poor and rural disabled populations and shows the urgent need for robust enforcement. Despite slow progress, the Court's active oversight offers cautious hope that states will be held accountable for delivering on the rights promised by the 2016 Act.</p>	
17.	4-July- 2023	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Reserve Bank of India and Others v. A.K. Nair and Others</u></p> <p>The Supreme Court Bench conclusively clarified that reservation in promotion for persons with disabilities under the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 applies retrospectively. By holding that the modified Department of Personnel and Training Office Memoranda of 29 December 2005 must operate from their inception, the Supreme Court reinforced the substantive equality mandate of the PWD Act and corrected long-standing administrative resistance to its full implementation. Relying on earlier precedents, including Rajeev Kumar Gupta and National Federation of the Blind, the Court affirmed that reservation in promotion was always contemplated by the statute, thereby strengthening the enforceability of disability rights in public employment and ensuring that beneficiaries were not denied advancement due to delayed or incorrect executive interpretation.</p> <p>At the same time, the judgment is significant for its nuanced engagement with the limits of horizontal reservations in promotion. In his concurring opinion, Justice Ravindra Bhat cautioned against an uncritical extension of horizontal reservations at the promotional stage, noting the potential unfairness of earmarking promotional opportunities exclusively for one horizontally reserved</p>	Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>category while excluding others such as women or ex-servicemen, who also benefited from horizontal reservation at entry level. This observation is important as it signals judicial sensitivity to balancing equality with fairness and highlights the need for coherent policy design in affirmative action, particularly where multiple forms of horizontal reservation intersect at higher levels of service.</p>	
18	20-Dec-21	Madras High Court	<p><u>M. Sameeha Barvin vs The Joint Secretary</u></p> <p>The Madras High Court single bench had earlier issued an interim order directing the All India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD) to permit 18-year-old athlete Sameeha Barwin to participate in the World Deaf Athletics Championship to be held at Lublin, Poland from August 23-28,2021. The representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports had said the ministry will abide by the court’s decision. The High Court issued the following directions to the respondent authorities for the purpose of streamlining the policy qua woman athletes with disabilities, in consultation with experts, so as to enable them to participate in all the events at State, National and International levels, with equality and dignity which included ensuring that women athletes with disability did not experience discrimination, provide adequate financial assistance and all other requisites, to follow proper selection process, to provide necessary training and free medical facilities, to provide all possible means to entertain women athletes with disabilities to utilise their fullest potential and capabilities, to provide all the disabled friendly materials, clothes, prosthetics and other accessories that may be required, to extend the financial assistance to one of the family members, who accompany the disabled female athletes to participate in the international games, to ensure safety and security of the women athletes with disabilities during their travel, to sensitise the male counter parts and inculcate the sense of equality in their mind and to reward all</p>	Non-discrimination

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			the disabled women participants in the international games, irrespective of their achievements.	
19	17-Dec-21	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Ravinder Kumar Dhariwal v. Union of India</u></p> <p>The Court addressed the right of persons with mental disabilities to be protected from workplace discrimination, especially through disciplinary proceedings triggered by their disability. The appellant, a CRPF serviceman, developed a mental illness during service and faced three disciplinary inquiries for his conduct, despite being later declared permanently unfit for duty by a government hospital.</p> <p>The Court held that such proceedings violated the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and India's obligations under the UNCRPD. It emphasised that mental disability must be understood through a social lens, not just a medical one, and that disciplinary actions arising from disability-linked behaviour are discriminatory unless reasonable accommodations are considered. The Court directed that the appellant be reassigned to a suitable post with equal pay and benefits, rather than punished.</p>	Non-Discrimination

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
20	29-Nov-21	Delhi High Court	<p><u>Anmol Kumar Mishra v. Union of India & Others</u></p> <p>The Delhi High Court upheld the rights of candidates with temporary disabilities to avail reservation benefits under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The petitioner, diagnosed with keratoconus, had a certified temporary 40% visual disability and was allotted a seat at an IIT under the persons with disabilities category. Despite submitting all required documents, his admission was rejected.</p> <p>Justice Prateek Jalan held that the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act does not differentiate between temporary and permanent disabilities for most categories. While “long-term impairment” is required to define a person with disability, the Court emphasised that only “speech and language disability” in the Act’s Schedule explicitly requires permanence. Since keratoconus is not among such exceptions, the Court ruled that a restrictive interpretation would defeat the purpose of the law, which is beneficial and inclusive in nature.</p> <p>The judgment reaffirms that temporary disabilities also impose social and systemic barriers, and that individuals with such conditions are equally entitled to support. This ruling has broader implications for extending disability rights to those who face short-term but significant impairments in education and public life.</p>	Education

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
21	23-Nov-21	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Avni Prakash v. National Testing Agency</u></p> <p>The Court dealt with the right of persons with disabilities to receive compensatory time during exams under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The petitioner, who had dysgraphia (Writer’s Cramp), was denied the additional one hour of compensatory time during the NEET-UG exam, and her answer sheet was forcibly taken away.</p> <p>The NTA claimed she hadn’t submitted the required disability certificate in the prescribed format, but the Court noted that such a certificate could only be issued after admission, not before the exam. Calling the situation a “tragedy of errors”, the Court held that her rights to reasonable accommodation, inclusive education, and non-discrimination had been violated. While it denied the request for a re-exam, the Court directed the NTA to explore remedies and ensure all ambiguities in exam bulletins are removed, along with mandatory sensitisation of staff.</p>	Education
22	27-Apr-21	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Patan Jamal Vali v. State of Andhra Pradesh</u></p> <p>The Court dealt with two critical issues: first, the attempt to discredit the testimony of a visually impaired Dalit woman who was raped, and second, the question of whether caste was a motivating factor behind the crime.</p> <p>The Court rejected the argument that the survivor’s testimony was unreliable due to her 100% visual impairment, affirming that persons with disabilities are entitled to equal evidentiary credibility under the law. The court also convicted the accused under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, noting that the survivor’s multiple marginalisations—as a woman, a Dalit, and a person with disability invokes the principle of intersectionality, recognising how these layers of disadvantage make such women especially vulnerable to sexual violence. It</p>	Access to Justice, Gender

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
			<p>called upon the judiciary to move beyond stereotypes and adopt a justice framework that is sensitive to structural and social realities.</p>	
23	11-Feb-21	Supreme Court of India	<p><u>Vikas Kumar v. Union Public Service Commission</u></p> <p>The Supreme Court of India held that a person with a Writer's Cramp (a neurological disability) is entitled to a scribe as a reasonable accommodation under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, The petitioner, Vikas Kumar, had requested a scribe to write the Civil Services Mains Examination, but UPSC denied it, claiming the condition was not listed in the government's notification.</p> <p>The Court overruled this reasoning, stating that the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act's goal is to ensure substantive equality, and reasonable accommodation is a right, not a privilege. It also emphasised that denying such support constitutes discrimination.</p>	Education/ Employment

S. No.	Year	Court	Judgment with Summary	Thematic Area
24	29-Sept-20	Delhi High Court	<p><u>National Federation Of The Blind vs Union Of India & Anr. on 29 September, 2020</u></p> <p>The court held that no disabled person otherwise eligible shall be denied inclusion subject to exclusion criteria, for coverage under National Food Security Act, 2013, especially on the ground that the State has exhausted its upper limit under NFSA. States shall revise their criteria and persons with disabilities shall be added as a separate class and they shall be considered for the benefits to be extended to the persons with disabilities of the Antyodaya Anna Yojna scheme as well as priority households. This judgment ensures coverage of persons with disabilities as a separate class under National Food Security Act. Directions have been issued under Section 38 of the Act, 2013, which requires the State Governments to comply with directions issued by the Union Government thereunder. These directions are thus bound to be followed by all the States and Union Territories.</p>	Food security