

## **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan) to make India Disabled – Friendly**

<b>Special Feature</b>
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Getting around the physical built-up environment is something most of which take for granted. Stairs, sidewalk, gratings, obstructions, curves, narrow passages etc. are barriers, we walk over, around, or through any routine course. But, for those with disability, a curb or few stairs can be a big barrier. We seldom pay attention to traffic signals, audio announcements, signs which give us information or direction to use various facilities. Signs, no matter how well placed and how much information rich are users for persons with visual impairment or hearing impairment unless designed properly

We are all physically disabled at some time in our lives. A person with a broken leg, a child, a mother with a pram, an elderly gentleman etc. are all disabled in some way or another. Thus, Needs of the disabled coincide with the needs of majority, and all people are at ease with them. As such, designing the facilities for the majority implies designing and planning for people with varying abilities and disabilities.

An important aim of the society is to integrate persons with disabilities in the society so that they can actively participate in society and lead a normal life. Ideally, a disabled person should be able to commute between home, work place and other destinations with independence, convenience and safety. The more persons with disabilities are able to access physical facilities, the more they will be part of the social mainstream.

With firm commitment of the government towards socio-economic transformation of the persons with disabilities there is an urgent need to create mass awareness for universal accessibility. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 9 of UNCRPD casts an obligation on all the signatory governments to take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

Subsequently, governments of ESCAP region gathered in Incheon, Republic of Korea from 29.10.2012 to 02.11.2012 and adopted the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Rights Real” for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. The Incheon Strategy builds on the UNCRPD and provides the first regionally agreed disability inclusive “Development Goals”. Goal No. 3 of the Incheon Strategy mentions that access to the physical environment, public transportation, knowledge, information and communication is a pre-condition for persons with disabilities to fulfill their rights in an inclusive society. The accessibility of urban, rural and remote areas based on universal design

increases safety and ease of use not only for persons with disabilities, but also for all other members of the society.

Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 under Section 44, 45 and 46 also categorically provides for non-discrimination in participation, non-discrimination of the roads and built up environment. As per Section 46 of the PwD Act, the States are required to provide for :

- i) Ramps in public buildings
- ii) Provision of toilets for wheelchair users
- iii) Braille symbols and auditory signals in elevators or lifts
- iv) Ramps in hospitals, primary health centres and other rehabilitation centres.

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has formulated the Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), as a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility for PwDs. The campaign targets three separate verticals for achieving universal accessibility namely the built up environment, transportation eco-system and information & communication eco-system. The campaign has ambitious targets with defined timelines and will use IT and social media for spreading awareness about the campaign and seeking commitment / engagement of various stakeholders. The Department has asked various State Govts. to identify about 50 to 100 public buildings in big cities and also identify citizen centric public websites, which if made fully accessible would have the highest impact on the lives of PwDs. Once identified, "Access Audit" of these buildings and websites will be conducted by professional agencies. As per the audit findings, retrofitting and conversion of buildings, transport and websites would be undertaken by various government departments. This will be supported by the Scheme of Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA), an umbrella scheme run by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) for implementing various initiatives for social and economic empowerment of PwDs.

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities is collaborating with Ministry of Home, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Tourism for creating 'Accessible police stations', "Accessible hospitals" and 'Accessible tourism' respectively across the country. The Department is also coordinating with the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting for enhancing accessibility of Television programmes by incorporating features like captioning, text to speech and audio description.

DEPwD is also in the process of creating a mobile app, along with a web portal for crowd sourcing the requests regarding inaccessible places. With the app, downloaded on his/her mobile phone, any person would be able to click a photograph or video of an inaccessible public place (like a school, hospital, government office etc.) and upload the same to the Accessible India portal. The portal will process the request for access audit, financial sanction and final retrofitting of the building to make it completely accessible. The mobile app and portal will also seek engagement of big corporates and PSUs to partner in the campaign by offering their help to conduct access audit and for accessibility- conversion of the buildings/transport and websites.

As an offshoot to the campaign, Department has also sought Expression of Interest from IT firms to prepare a mobile app in all Indian languages to locate nearest accessible places. With this mobile app, any disabled person would be able to locate an accessible bank counter, restaurant, ATM or theatre (and similar facilities) nearby. The mobile app will also have provision of evaluating / rating the accessible place by the users.

DEPwD is intensively engaging with public even before launching the campaign. For example, the department sought inputs for the logo and tagline of the Accessible India Campaign on MyGov platform and received more than 500 entries for each of these.