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New Draft Guidelines for Accessibility Standards

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Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** has issued draft guidelines for new accessibility standards.

- Under these **almost all television channels** are required to ensure that they either **carry captions or sign language** to help the hearing impaired understand the programming.
- Earlier, the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to make NCERT textbooks accessible to hearing-impaired students in sign language.

Key Points

- **About Draft Guidelines:**

- **Objective:** The draft is released in process to get the “**Accessibility Standards for Television Programmes for Hearing Impaired**”.

These standards will be notified under the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, to make television content more inclusive for persons with hearing disabilities.

- **Scope:** All programming or content like music shows, debates, scripted/unscripted reality shows, etc.; and advertisements and teleshopping content will have to adhere to these standards.

- **Exemptions:**

- **Live and deferred live content/events** such as sports: live news, events like live music shows, award shows, live reality shows, etc.
- Channels which have **less than 1% average audience share** for all households over a year.

- **Type of Service:** The service providers or broadcasters will have the right to choose any one or more options from “**Closed Captioning, Subtitles, Open Captioning and/or Sign Language** (not only hand but facial expression also).

Open captions always are in view and cannot be turned off, whereas closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer.

- **Responsibility:** The **creators of the content will be responsible** to create the content for these services and deliver it to the concerned channels and broadcasters.

- **Earlier Instances to Support Hearing Impaired:**

- **Doordarshan has been carrying sign language** interpretation of the address of President of India on the eve of Independence Day and Prime Minister's address from the ramparts of Red Fort on Independence Day every year.
- Recently, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has asked **Private Satellite News TV channels** also to telecast a short programme on Independence Day Celebrations, along with corresponding sign language interpretation, in the afternoon/evening of 15th August.

Constitutional and Legal Framework for Disabled People

- **Article 14:** The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

In this context, Persons with Disabilities should have similar and equal rights in the eyes of the Constitution.

- **UN Convention the Right of Persons with Disabilities:** India is a signatory to the **United Nations Convention the Right of Persons with Disabilities**, which came into force in 2007.

The Convention recognizes accessibility as a human right and requires signatories to adopt appropriate measures to ensure access by persons with disabilities.

- **Accessible India Campaign:** The 'Accessible India Campaign' also known as the **Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan** to enable Persons with disabilities to gain universal access, equal opportunity for development.
The campaign seeks to enhance accessibility by making significant changes to the infrastructure, information and communication systems.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:** The Government of India enacted The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which is the principal and comprehensive legislation concerning persons with disabilities.
 - The Act defines the responsibilities of the Central and State governments with regard to the services for persons with disabilities.
 - The Act also recommends creating a **barrier-free environment** by removing all type of discrimination against persons with disabilities where they can share the development benefits which a normal person enjoys .

Source: IE