



Enhancing Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

For Prelims: [Central Public Works Department](#), [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, of 2016](#), [Accessible India Campaign](#)

For Mains: Significance in promoting inclusivity and equal rights for PWDs, Government Policies & Interventions

Source: IE

Why in News?

Recently, the [Central Public Works Department \(CPWD\)](#) has prioritised improving **accessibility for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in public buildings**. Despite the enactment of the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016](#), challenges remain, leading the CPWD to implement measures to ensure adherence to accessibility standards.

What is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwDs) Act, 2016?

▪ About:

- The RPwDs Act, 2016, implements the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), ratified by India in 2007.
 - It replaced the **Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995**.
- In India, there were around 26.8 million **persons with disabilities or Divyangjan**, constituting **2.21% of India's total population (2011 Census)**.
- The [National Sample Survey Office \(NSSO\)](#) estimates that 2.2% of the Indian population is disabled.
 - NSSO 76th round, 2019 states that additionally, the incidence of disability in the Indian population during a 365-day period per **1,00,000 people was recorded to be 86**.

▪ Expanded Definition of Disability:

- Disability is defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- In the RPWD Act, 2016, the types of disabilities increased from 7 to 21, with a provision for the Central Government to add more.

▪ Rights and Entitlements:

- Appropriate governments tasked with **ensuring equal rights for persons with disabilities**.
- Additional benefits such as **reservation in higher education** (minimum 5%), **government jobs** (minimum 4%), and **allocation of land** (minimum 5%) provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs.
- **Free education guaranteed for every child** with a benchmark disability between 6 and 18 years.
 - Government-funded and recognized educational institutions mandated to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities.

- Emphasis on making public infrastructure and facilities accessible to persons with disabilities, enhancing their participation and inclusion.
- **Mandates for Public Buildings:**
 - Rule 15 of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017** mandates the central government to establish guidelines and **standards for public buildings to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.**
 - These standards encompass the physical environment, transport, and **information and [communication technology](#)** for persons with disabilities.
 - Every establishment, including public buildings, must adhere to these standards based on the 2016 harmonised guidelines.
 - **Recent amendments to Rule 15** require establishments to comply **with the 2021 harmonised guidelines**, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.
 - The comprehensive guidelines cover planning, tendering, and specifications for various accessibility features such as ramps, grab rails, lifts, and toilets with considerations for persons with disabilities.
 - All building plans must align with these guidelines to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities.
 - Existing buildings are mandated to **undergo retrofitting within five years to meet accessibility standards**, promoting better inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

Note

- The **21 disabilities, in RPWD Act, 2016, include** Blindness, Low-vision, [Leprosy Cured Persons](#), Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), Locomotor Disability, Dwarfism, **Intellectual Disability**, Mental Illness, Autism Spectrum Disorder, [Cerebral Palsy](#), Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological Conditions, **Specific Learning Disabilities (Dyslexia)**, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language Disability, Thalassaemia, Hemophilia, [Sickle Cell Disease](#), Multiple Disabilities including deaf-blindness, [Acid Attack victim](#), and [Parkinson's disease](#).

What are the Other Initiatives Related to the Empowerment of the Disabled?

- [Unique Disability Identification Portal.](#)
- [DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme.](#)
- [Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/fitting of Aids and Appliances.](#)
- [National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities.](#)
- [Divya Kala Mela 2023.](#)
- [Accessible India Campaign](#)

What are the Concerns Regarding Accessibility in Public Buildings?

- PwDs and activists report that the guidelines established in 2016 have **not been effectively implemented**. Furthermore, the newer 2021 guidelines are facing similar neglect from state governments.
 - Analysts state that **no state has yet incorporated the harmonized guidelines into their building by-laws**, indicating a widespread failure to address accessibility issues.
- Experts highlight a **lack of awareness and accountability** among engineers of public works departments responsible for implementing accessibility guidelines.
- Funds for retrofitting projects are available, but many states and cities have **not submitted applications for them**, indicating a failure to prioritise accessibility initiatives.
- The Central Public Works Department's **memo lacks clarity and may lead to unnecessary resource wastage**, further hindering the effective implementation of accessibility measures.

Central Public Works Department (CPWD)

- The CPWD was originally established in July 1854 as the Ajmer Provisional Division. Its primary

objective was to execute public works, encompassing disciplines such as **architecture, engineering, project management, and building construction and maintenance.**

- Currently, CPWD operates under the Ministry of Urban Development and has a nationwide presence.
- CPWD serves as the prime engineering bloc of the Union government, consisting of three divisions: Buildings and Roads (B&R), Electrical and Mechanical (E&M), and Horticulture.
- In 2016, CPWD embraced **modern dust-free construction methods**, particularly the monolithic system, for all projects exceeding a budget of Rs 100 crore.
 - The **monolithic system involves pouring concrete for beams and slabs together**, forming a unified construction component.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. India is home to lakhs of persons with disabilities. What are the benefits available to them under the law? (2011)

1. Free schooling till the age of 18 years in government run schools.
2. Preferential allotment of land for setting up business.
3. Ramps in public buildings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Does the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 ensure effective mechanism for empowerment and inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in the society? Discuss. (2017)