Disability Rights

What is the issue?

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- The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is being observed on December 3.
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- In this context, it is imperative to assess the progress of legal protections in place and their actual effect in the society.
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What are the legal protections?

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- **International** - The disability rights movement gained momentum in the 1970s when disability was started to be seen as a human rights issue.
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- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2006 was a significant step in this regard.
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- The Convention gave way to the perception of considering differently abled persons as “subjects with rights” and not “objects of charity”.
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- Further, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development mentioned that persons with disabilities must be both “beneficiaries and agents of change”.
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- **India** - India is a signatory to the UNCRPD and ratified it in 2007.
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- In 2016, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was moved forward, replacing the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995.
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- The Act recognises 21 kinds of disabilities compared to the previous seven.
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- It includes a wide range of categories such as dwarfism, speech and language disability, and three blood disorders.
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- It also increased the quota for disability reservation in higher educational institutions from 3% to 5%.
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- And reservations in government jobs from 3% to 4%.
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What is the state of the differently abled?

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- Despite legislations, the differently abled continue to face difficulties with an abysmal implementation record.
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- E.g. Around 85% of seats for persons with disabilities lie vacant in top universities.
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- Attitudinal, institutional, and infrastructural barriers remain as roadblocks for a disability inclusive society.
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- Evidently, World Bank has stated that 15% of the world's population experience some form of disability.
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- And that they "on average, as a group, are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities".
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- In India, according to the 2011 Census, 2.21% of the population has one or multiple types of disabilities.
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- This makes India home to one of the largest disabled populations in the world.
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- However, disability activists see this as a low count and say that in Indian culture there was a tendency to hide disability.
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What could possibly be done?

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- **Inclusive workplace** - Solutions to enable people with disabilities to seamlessly interact with their environment and colleagues in workplace can increase their participation.

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- Some of them include:
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i. having braille labels and audio support in lifts for visually and hearing impaired people
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ii. providing disabled-friendly restrooms
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iii. conducting sensitisation training for leaders and managers
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iv. hiring a sign language interpreter
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v. designing the entrance, attendance and access machines, dimensions of passageway and tables, etc in a disabled friendly manner
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vi. facilitating assistive hardware solutions like screen readers, magnifiers, adaptive keyboards and mouse, etc in technology driven workplaces
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vii. ensuring accessibility guidelines and standards in web-based technologies. E.g. Web Content Accessibility Guideline 2.0 by the World Wide Web Consortium.
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- **Public amenities** - Government should ensure that facilities at bus stops, railway stations and airports are disabled friendly.
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- Steps to make them conform to the accessibility standards relating to parking spaces, toilets, ticketing counters and machines should be taken.
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- Also, there should be accessible roads to address mobility needs for persons with disabilities, as prescribed in the disability rights act.
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- It is also highly essential that the currency is made disabled friendly for easy identification, in terms of size and other features.
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- While there is a long way to go in implementing the laws, it must be kept in mind that a one-size-fits-all approach is less relevant for disabled persons.
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- The differences in levels and types of disabilities should be acknowledged while offering protections and taking measures.

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Source: The Hindu

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