

The Draft National Policy on Disability

Why in news?

The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has invited public feedback on the new draft national policy on persons with disabilities (PwD).

What is the status of PwD in India?

- The 2011 Census puts the number of persons with disabilities at 2.68 crores implying **2.21%** of Indian population has some form of disability, as compared to global average of **15%**.
- As per Census, 2011, literacy rate of the total PwD population is about 55% (male - 62%, female -45%).
- As regards higher education, only about 5% of PwD are graduate and above.
- Census data of 2011 further shows that about 36% of the total PwD are employed (male -47%, female-23%).

What efforts were taken for PwD?

Relief to persons with disabilities is a state subject by virtue of entry 9 of List II of the Constitution.

- The **Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995** was enacted for creating an inclusive environment for PwD which recognized 7 categories of disabilities.
- In 2006, Central Government formulated the **National Policy for Persons with Disabilities** based on the principles of equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals.
- In 2007, India became a party to the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**.
- Sustainable Development Goals adopted by United Nations in 2015 that seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.
- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** recognizes 21 categories of disabilities.
- India is a party to the '**Incheon Strategy for Asia Pacific Decade for PwD: 2013-2022**' prepared under the aegis of UNESCAP which identifies 10 goals for the Asia-Pacific countries to ensure inclusion and empowerment of PwD.
- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities started implementing the **Unique Disability ID (UDID)** project for creating a national database for persons with disabilities.



What is the current draft about?

- A committee headed by Anjali Bhawra, secretary, the Department of Empowerment of PwD, was formed to come up with the draft.
- **Revision of existing policy**- The Draft National Policy on PwD, 2021, said a revision was required as the existing national policy on disability was drafted in 2006.
- **Expansion of causes**- The draft moved beyond the traditional causes by including other causes of disability, such as malnourishment, medical negligence, socio-cultural factors and impairment caused by disasters.
- **Prevention**- It called for a comprehensive national programme on prevention that would include the disabilities added in the RPD Act and other medical conditions that are risk cases.
- The draft stated that one-third of most disabilities in children were preventable, if detected early.
- **Permission/recognition to educational institutions**- The policy said the States and Union Territories should add a provision on compliance with the RPD Act when granting permission or recognition to educational institutions.
- **Module on disability**- A module on disability should be included in MBBS and other medical courses.
- **Accessible vehicles**- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will issue necessary guidelines for making modification in the personal vehicles being used by persons with disabilities as per requirement.
- **Comprehensive development**- The policy document highlights a detailed commitment to education, health, skill development, employment, sports, culture, social security, accessibility and other institutional mechanisms.

What are the challenges faced by PwDs regarding political inclusion?

- **Political empowerment**- The Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Incheon goals, etc. promote the participation of PwDs in political processes and in decision making.
- India does not have any policy commitment that is aimed at enhancing the political participation of disabled people.
- The barriers to participation in party politics or a lack of representation at the local, State or national levels have all aggravated the marginalisation of the disabled.
- **Inaccessibility in voting**- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act prescribes that the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions shall ensure that all polling stations and electoral process are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- However, there is no widespread adaptation of braille electronic voting machines and even wheelchair services at all polling centres.
- **No data**- The lack of live aggregate data on the exact number of the disabled people in every constituency only furthers their marginalisation.
- **Inadequate representation**- Disabled people are not represented enough at all three levels of governance.
- The first visually disabled Member of Parliament in independent India, **Sadhan Gupta**, hardly finds mention in our political or disability discourse.
- However, few States have begun the initiative at local levels to increase participation.
 - For instance, Chhattisgarh started the initiative of nominating at least one disabled person in each panchayat.

What is the need of the hour?

- To achieve political inclusion, the policy can follow a four-pronged approach.
 - Building the capacity of disabled people's organisations and empowering their members through training in the electoral system and government structure
 - Creation, amendment or removal of legal and regulatory frameworks by lawmakers and election bodies to encourage the political participation of the disabled
 - Inclusion of civil societies to conduct domestic election observation or voter education campaigns
 - Framework for political parties to conduct a meaningful outreach to PwDs when creating election campaign strategies and developing policy positions
- Political rights/political participation will only conform to the universal principle on disability, i.e., **"Nothing about us. Without us."**

References

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