



Disabled Persons and their vulnerability in India

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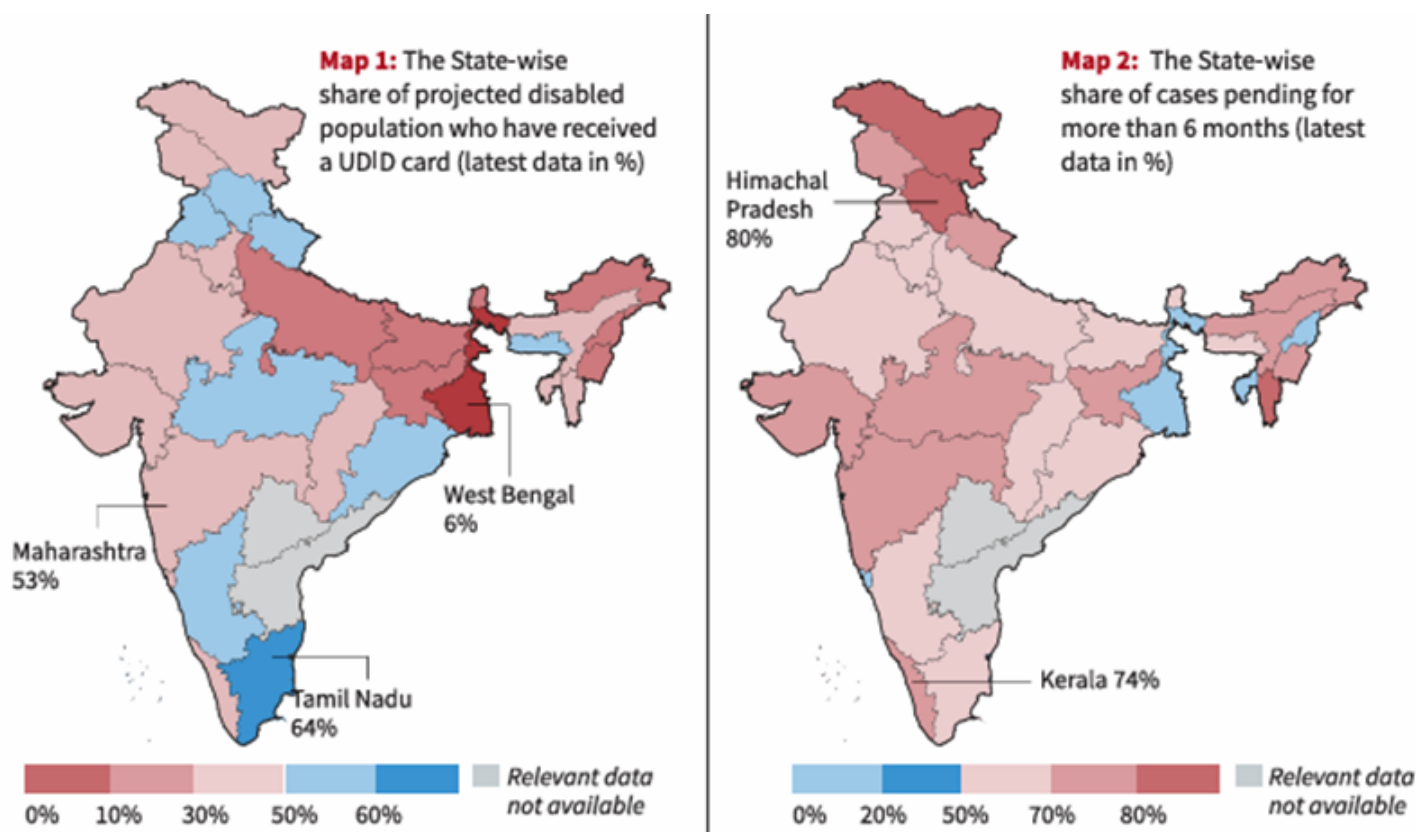
Introduction

Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India constitute a significant section of society, recognized as among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. According to the 2011 Census, India has about 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, though estimates by the WHO and other agencies suggest higher numbers due to underreporting.

The Indian Constitution, through Article 41 (Directive Principles), and legislations such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, emphasize the right of PwDs to equality, dignity, education, employment, and social participation. India is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), reflecting its global commitment.

Statistics

As per Census 2011, the number of Persons with Disabilities in the country is 2.68 crore, which is 2.21% of the total population of the country



Less than 40% of India's projected population of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) have been issued a Unique Disability ID (UDID) Card

Disabilities are highest in the age group 10-19 years (46.2 lakh people). 69% (18 million) of persons with disabilities reside in rural areas.

However, a 2019 WHO survey found severe disability prevalence among Indian adults to be 16%.

Challenges faced by Persons with Disability

1. Social Exclusion & Stigma

PwDs often face discrimination, stereotyping, and social isolation.

Example: A 2023 NCPEDP report noted that job interviews often exclude PwDs due to bias rather than competence.

2. Barriers in Education

Lack of inclusive schools, trained teachers, Braille materials, and assistive technology.

Example: Only 61% of disabled children (5–19 years) attend school (UNICEF, 2022), with girls facing double discrimination.

3. Employment Challenges

Despite a 4% reservation under the RPwD Act (2016), many government and private sector jobs remain unfilled.

Example: As of 2023, over 40% of posts reserved for PwDs in central government were vacant (DoPT data).

4. Accessibility Barriers

Public spaces, transport, and digital platforms remain largely non-compliant with accessibility norms.

Example: The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat) has achieved less than 30% of its targets (Parliament Standing Committee Report, 2022).

5. Healthcare Gaps

Limited rehabilitation centres, assistive devices, and disability-friendly hospitals.

Example: During COVID-19, PwDs faced disproportionate barriers in vaccination and healthcare access (NHRC report, 2021).

6. Legal & Policy Implementation Deficit

Strong laws like the RPwD Act (2016) exist, but implementation is weak at state and local levels.

Example: Many states are yet to notify rules for Disability Rights Commissions, delaying grievance redressal.

7. Economic Vulnerability

Higher poverty incidence due to unemployment, dependence, and inadequate social security.

Example: World Bank (2022) estimated PwDs are more likely to be below poverty line compared to general population in India.

Initiatives taken to address their vulnerability

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1. Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016

It has been enacted to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its features:

It defines 'person with disability' as a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which hinders his/her full and effective participation in society equally with others

It also defines "person with benchmark disability" as a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability. It recognizes 21 categories of disabilities

It prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all aspects of life, including employment, education, and healthcare.

Institutional Mechanisms for PwDs in India

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD)

Established in 2012, under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Nodal department for all policies, programs, and legislation concerning PwDs.

Coordinates with states, NGOs, and international bodies (like UNCRPD).

Runs schemes such as

It Accessible India Campaign

It ADIP Scheme (assistive devices)

It Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)

It Unique Disability ID (UDID).

District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRCs)

Grassroots institutions for rehabilitation, awareness, and counseling.

Provide services such as:

It Early detection and intervention for disabilities.

It Therapeutic services like physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy.

It Vocational training for economic empowerment.

It Assistance in accessing UDID cards, pensions, scholarships.

2. Social Security Measures

Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) under NSAP – provides financial assistance.

State Schemes like Telangana's Aasara Pension and Odisha's Madh Bab Pension Yojana extend direct income support.

Way forward

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1.Strengthen Implementation of Laws

Ensure strict enforcement of the RPwD Act, 2016 across all states.

Mandate periodic compliance audits for accessibility in govt. and private institutions.

2.Capacity Building of Institutions

Provide adequate funding and trained manpower for DDRCs and State Commissioners.

Regular training for officials to handle PwD-related grievances sensitively.

3.Technological Integration

Expand digital accessibility—screen readers, sign-language interpreters, and AI-based assistive tech.

4.Leverage tele-rehabilitation platforms for rural PwDs.

Convergence with Other Schemes

Integrate disability inclusion in education, health, skilling, and social security schemes like Ayushman Bharat, PMKVY, etc.

5.Ensure disability-responsive budgeting.

Awareness & Community Participation

Nationwide campaigns to counter stigma and discrimination.

Involve civil society and PwD-led organizations in monitoring and policymaking.