

Government launches ‘Inclusiveness and Accessibility Index’ as part of Prime Minister’s ‘Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan’ for Persons with disabilities

Government launches ‘Inclusiveness and Accessibility Index’ to mark the next chapter of its flagship Campaign, the ‘Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan’. The Index, prepared in collaboration with The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) was launched by Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Hon’ble Minister of Urban Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Parliamentary Affairs at a function held here today. Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar also graced the occasion.

The ‘Inclusiveness and Accessibility Index’ helps the industries and corporates to participate in the Accessible India Campaign (AIC) by voluntarily evaluating their readiness for making the workplace accessible for Persons with Disabilities. The Prime Minister made a call to the Corporate Sector to come forward and support the Campaign during his speech on the occasion of the launch of AIC on 3rd December 2015, which also marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



Shri Venkaiah Naidu, Union minister for Urban Development addressing the gathering at the launch of Accessibility Index.

Speaking on the occasion of the launch, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu congratulated the Ministry and DEPwD for taking the Accessible India Campaign to the next level of inclusivity by introducing the Inclusiveness and Accessibility Index. He recounted that there are numerous persons with disabilities who have never let any form of disability come in their way of success and have left an indelible mark in their respective fields. He added that society’s inadequate and improper responses to the disabled make their lives more difficult and challenging; therefore the need of the hour is to change the mindset of the people, which will be the right step forward to the social integration of PwDs into the mainstream. Emphasising on the need of nurturing the talent of PwDs he said that they should be equipped with skill training to make optimum use of their potential, and it is only then that the country will transform into an inclusive India and give true meaning to the clarion call of “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas”.

He informed the audience that his ministry - Urban Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation – has recently come out with ‘Harmonised Guidelines for Barrier Free Built Environment for Persons with Disability and Elderly Persons’ to be followed by CPWD. These guidelines have special emphasis on safety and dignity, independence of movement and maintaining architecture quality. He also added that his Ministry has made an earnest beginning in addressing Accessibility related concerns for the Smart City Mission and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). Shri Naidu also said that the collective mission of the society should be towards ‘Making of a developed India (MODI)’. He added that the Index has been prepared with a holistic approach and may be applied and used by organisations irrespective of their size and scale. Adding that the issues of PwDs are now being addressed with redoubled passion and energy under the guidance of the Hon’ble Prime Minister, the Minister emphasised that joint efforts of all stakeholders including central and state governments are required to effectively implement AIC and for transformation of ‘India’ into an ‘Inclusive India’.



Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar, MoS, SJ&E addressing the gathering while launching Accessibility Index

Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar, informed the gathering that Accessibility is the key to inclusion and equal access for people with disabilities is the mantra for Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan. An accessible barrier-free environment is the first step towards fulfilling the right of people with disabilities to participate in all areas of community life. It is with this objective that DEPwD’s Accessible India Campaign was launched on 3rd December, 2015. Further, he added that the Campaign is a nation-wide programme for achieving ‘Universal Accessibility’ for ‘Persons with Disabilities’ (PwDs) with a focus on three verticals: Built Environment; Public Transportation and Information & Communication Technologies. He said that the Index is a first-of-its-kind initiative in the country and will be a potential game changer for the integration, assimilation and inclusion of Persons with Disabilities into the mainstream. The Index enables the organisations to introspect over their inclusive policies and organisational culture in aid of PwDs, employment of such workforce and adaptations to meet the needs of PwDs.

The Index toolkit aims at assessing the current stage of inclusiveness and accessibility of persons with disabilities by an organisation. It can also act as a guide for taking progressive steps to increase support, inclusiveness and accessibility towards persons / employees with disabilities. The toolkit is based on research, and the best examples and experiences of organisations that have taken initiatives to increase accessibility of persons with disabilities and have benefited from such initiatives. The study will prioritize constructing the Accessibility Index for corporates to measure sensitivity towards persons with disabilities which will benchmark corporates operating in a given sector with their national peers. Extensive stakeholder consultations with NGOs and corporate sector will be held to ensure that the Index accommodates wide-ranging views of all stakeholders and is a robust document. At the second stage, the study will examine the role of state and NGOs in creating an enabling environment and executing the intent of regulations in promoting accessibility of disabled persons.

The absorption and recognition of the Index by the Corporate Sector and public sector organisations will benefit them immensely by –

- (a) Being the benchmark
- (b) Take Progressive steps to increase support
- (c) Fully utilise diverse talent pool
- (d) Reduce employee turnover, increase employee loyalty and increase morale and productivity of other employees in the organisation.
- (e) Create a positive brand image.
- (f) Expand customer base through new products and services.
- (g) Enhance shareholder value.
- (h) Above all, the Inclusiveness and Accessibility Index shall promote human dignity and social cohesion where all citizens have equal access to opportunities to fully realise their potential.

Stating the Targets of AIC Dr Vinod Agarwal, Secretary, DEPwD informed the audience that under Built Environment Accessibility audit, 25 to 50 most important government buildings and converting them into fully accessible buildings by July 2016 in 50 cities of the country. To enhance the Accessibility of public transportation systems - accessibility audit of all the international airports and converting them into fully accessible international airports by July 2016 and that of all the domestic airports and converting them into fully accessible airports by March 2018. It will also include ensuring that A1, A & B categories of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible railway stations (July 2016) and that 50% of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible railway stations by March 2018. 10% of Government owned public transport carriers in the country are also to be converted into fully accessible carriers March 2018. Whereas, under the Information and Communication Technology vertical the accessibility audit of 50% of all government (both Central and State Governments) websites and converting them into fully accessible websites by March 2017 and also train and develop 200 additional sign language interpreters by March 2018. The Secretary also informed that DEPwD has already enrolled 18 Access Auditors in its panel, who will be leading the Access Audits across the country. Quoting the Hon'ble Prime Minister's visionary message of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' he appealed to the corporate representatives in the gathering to come forward and lead the change.

The launch function also witnessed distinguished participant speakers from the Corporate sector who shared inspiring stories of change on how inclusion of PwDs has positively impacted the company and led to an overall holistic overhaul in their best practises.
