

Standing Committee Report Summary

Assessment of Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (SIPDA)

- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (Chair: Mrs. Rama Devi) submitted its report on “Assessment of Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (SIPDA)” on August 6, 2021. SIPDA is an umbrella scheme fully funded and implemented by the central government. It provides for financial assistance to implement various components of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. These include: (i) creation of barrier free environment, (ii) Accessible India campaign, and (iii) district disability rehabilitation centres. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Frequent revisions of SIPDA:** Since the Act was implemented, sub-schemes under SIPDA have been revised several times. Currently, there are 13 sub-schemes under SIPDA. The Committee observed that frequent amendment of SIPDA has led to complications in implementation and made it difficult for stakeholders and implementing agencies to understand new processes and guidelines.
 - Further, the Committee noted that the Central Advisory Board (the apex policy recommending body on disability matters) was not consulted before revising the sub-schemes. It recommended that the Board should play a proactive role in major policy decisions on various aspects of SIPDA.
 - **Fund allocation for SIPDA:** The Committee noted that sub-schemes under SIPDA have more than doubled (from six to thirteen) between 2016-17 and 2021-22. However, in this period, the budgetary allocation for SIPDA has increased from Rs 193 crore to Rs 210 crore (an increase of only about 9%).
 - Further, the Committee noted that SIPDA gets a single allocation of funds annually, which is divided among different sub-schemes based on expected demand. If a sub-scheme receives lesser funding proposals, the unutilised funds of such sub-scheme may be transferred to other sub-schemes receiving higher proposals. This diversion of funds from one sub-scheme to another may dilute the objectives of SIPDA, under which all sub-schemes play a distinct role for empowering disabled persons. The Committee, thus, recommended the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) to re-examine its decision of having a single allocation for SIPDA vis-à-vis separate allocations for each sub-scheme under it.
- **Barrier free environment for disabled persons:** The Creation of Barrier Free Environment sub-scheme seeks to enable access to infrastructure (such as buildings and websites) for disabled persons. The Committee noted that since 2017-18, only 11 states/union territories have applied for and received grants under this sub-scheme. Further, no funds have been released for making government websites accessible for disabled persons. It recommended: (i) reworking the methodology of fund allocation for enabling access to websites, (ii) expediting pending proposals by states under this sub-scheme, and (iii) expanding the coverage of this sub-scheme in other states (for instance, by setting annual targets and advising states on preparation of viable proposals).
- **Accessible India Campaign:** This campaign is aimed at ensuring universal access for disabled persons to certain pre-identified buildings and places (such as airports and railway stations). The Committee noted that since its launch in December 2015, only about 30% of the buildings and 65% of the websites identified under this campaign have been made accessible to disabled persons, despite extending the target date from July 2016 to June 2022. It recommended that the DEPwD should adhere to deadlines without further extensions, and penalties under the Act should be invoked if timelines are not met. It also recommended the various government Ministries/Departments to urgently finalise sector-wise accessibility standards.
- **National Action Plan for Skill Development for disabled persons:** This Plan is aimed at skill development of disabled persons to ensure their self-reliance. The Committee noted that several states have not received any funds under the Plan since its inception (2016-17). Further, these states either do not have empanelled training partners (ETPs) or have centres run by ETPs registered in other states. The Committee recommended: (i) promoting training organisations in all states where ETPs do not exist, and (ii) discouraging ETPs from operating centres in states where they are not registered. It also recommended the DEPwD to adopt the means employed by advanced countries for training of disabled persons during the pandemic.

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