

Advancing Workplace Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities

Multi-City Workshops to Strengthen Organizational Readiness

Context

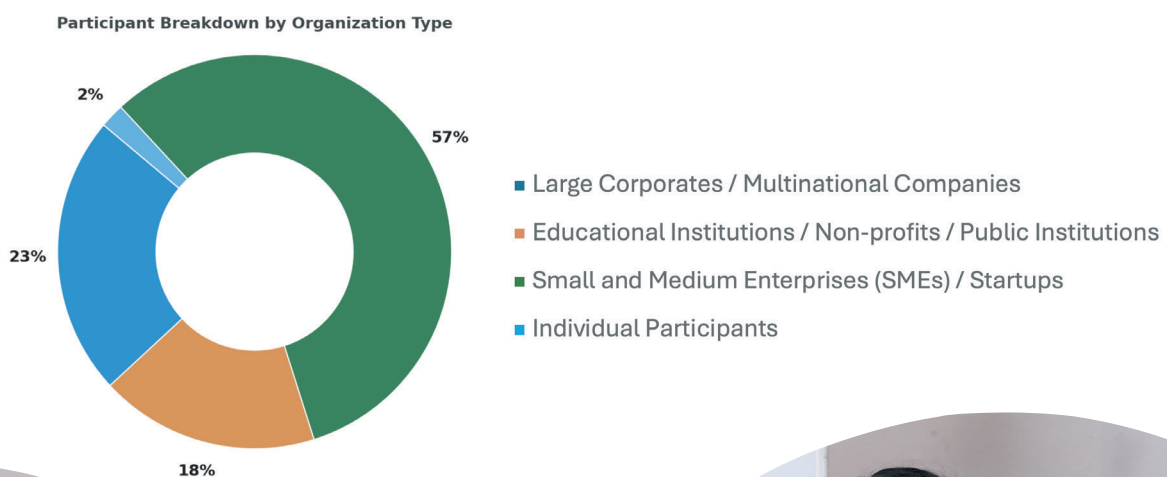
The workforce participation rate for persons with disabilities in India stands at around 36%¹, compared to approximately 60% for those without disabilities². The gap is even more pronounced by gender—while 47% of men with disabilities are employed, only 23% of women with disabilities hold jobs³. These disparities reflect entrenched structural barriers, including attitudinal biases, inaccessible infrastructure, educational inequities, and limited inclusive hiring practices.

India’s Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 mandates non-discrimination and equal opportunity for PwDs in both public and private sector workplaces. While 65% of organizations in a recent survey⁴—including MNCs, private companies, and public sector enterprises — report having inclusion policies in place, actual implementation remains limited. Key barriers include inadequate infrastructure, lack of staff training, and persistent stereotypes. HR leaders noted that leadership awareness and commitment are essential to translating these policies into meaningful disability inclusion⁵.

Capacity-Building Workshops: Purpose and Reach

In this context, UNDP India, in partnership with the Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC), conducted a series of capacity-building workshops across four cities—Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and Coimbatore—in early 2025. Over 125 participants, primarily from private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) organizations, attended the workshops to build awareness and institutional readiness for disability inclusion through legal insights, inclusive hiring, accessibility, and case studies⁶.

Fig 1: Profile of Participating Organisations



Workforce Representation and Key Barriers to Inclusion⁷

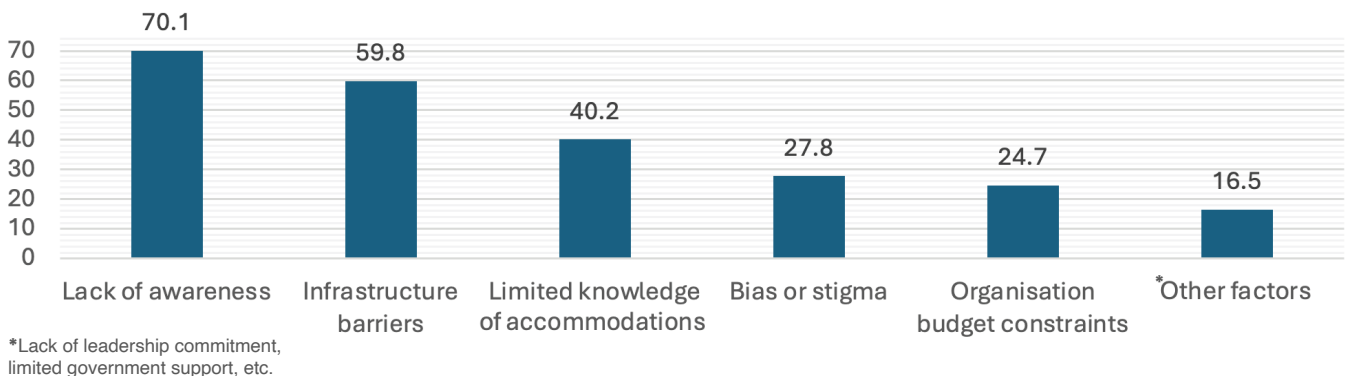
A quick pre and post-workshop survey revealed that 71% of participating organizations had less than 5% of their workforce composed of persons with disabilities, with around 19% reporting no representation (Table 1).

Table 1: Share of Workforce Comprising Persons with Disabilities

Workforce Composition	% of Participants
0%	19
1-5%	52
More than 5%	15
Unsure	14
Total	100%

- ▶ **Limited or Non-Compliant Inclusion Policies:** While 62% of respondents reported that their organizations had a disability inclusion policy, workshop discussions revealed that most were either generic, embedded within broader diversity frameworks, or limited to general equal opportunity statements. These policies were often neither detailed nor fully aligned with the RPwD Act and had not been registered with the Disability Commissioner, as mandated.
- ▶ **Limited awareness and Infrastructure barriers:** Lack of awareness about disability inclusion—including legal mandates, disability etiquettes, and corporate inclusive practices—was cited by 70.1% of participants as the most significant barrier. This was followed by infrastructure challenges (59.8%), highlighting the continued physical and digital inaccessibility of many workplaces (Fig 2).

Fig 2: Key Barriers to Disability Inclusion in the Workplace (% of Participants)



- ▶ **Mindset Barriers and Stereotypes about Capabilities of Persons with Disabilities:** Prior to the workshop, only 43% of respondents felt confident hiring a person with a disability. A key challenge identified was the persistent belief among employers that persons with disabilities are only suited for limited or low-skilled roles. Many participants acknowledged lacking exposure to the diverse skills and competencies PwDs bring to the workplace. Following sensitization sessions and exposure to inclusive employment case studies, this figure rose to 85%, demonstrating that mindset-related barriers can be effectively addressed through awareness-building and practical examples.

Participants' Suggestions on Enabling SME Inclusion Efforts

During the workshops, participants also discussed how various ecosystem actors can support SMEs in advancing disability inclusion. Key areas identified include:

▶ Capacity Building and Awareness generation for SMEs:

- Regular awareness and refresher workshops across all industrial cities and clusters, supported by a dedicated digital platform/AI Chatbot for ongoing peer learning and resource sharing.

- Need for handholding and technical support from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and NGOs to improve policies, infrastructure, and hiring practices by SMEs.
- An organization-to-organization mentorship model could pair inclusive organizations (Details in Annex) with SMEs aiming to strengthen their practices.
- City-level Resource Centres of Excellence (e.g., CARE-DAT by IIT Delhi and AIIMS to design assistive technology solutions that support stroke patient rehabilitation) could provide expert guidance, accessibility audits, and assistive tech support⁸.

► **Need for data-driven insights:**

- Participants recommended commissioning targeted research to inform more effective support for SMEs on disability inclusion (Table 3). Such evidence, they noted, would inform policy, strengthen incentives, and drive more effective disability inclusion across the SME ecosystem⁹.

Table 2: Proposed Research Questions to Strengthen SME Support on Disability Inclusion

Thematic Area	Key Research Questions
Effectiveness of Incentive Schemes	What existing government financial incentives (e.g., seed funds, payroll subsidies) are accessible to SMEs employing PwDs, and how effective are they in practice?
National Policy Models	What can India learn from Tamil Nadu’s MSME Department, for instance, provides seed funding for startups led by transpersons and persons with disabilities, as well as payroll subsidies for SMEs employing over 25% of their workforce from these groups ¹⁰ for promoting employment of PwDs in small enterprises?
RPwD Act Compliance (10-Year Review)	How has the RPwD Act 2016 impacted employment outcomes in the public and private sectors, and what gaps remain in its enforcement and implementation?
Education-to-Employment Barriers	How do systemic exclusions in mainstream education impact the employment prospects of women with disabilities, particularly in underserved states?

► **Diversify Vocational Skilling Models to Enhance Inclusion and Employment Outcomes for PwDs:**

- Vocational skilling is born from the realisation that mainstream schooling often limitedly addresses the needs of PwDs. To effectively address the diverse needs, abilities, and contexts of PwDs, it was suggested that vocational skilling initiatives adopt and support multiple delivery models. No single approach can cater to the wide spectrum of disabilities, geographies, and socioeconomic realities. A mix of models—ranging from mainstream certification programs to community-based, peer-led, and sheltered training—can enable more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable pathways to employment for PwDs¹¹ (Details in annex).

► **Adopting cost-effective solutions to promote greater uptake by SMEs:**

- Collaborating with OPDs and NGOs can help SMEs access trained talent pools and reduce recruitment costs. For example, Mirakle Couriers hires hearing-impaired individuals through partnerships with NGOs. Additionally, leveraging digital tools such as virtual interviews and remote work options can lower operational expenses while enabling persons with specific disabilities (e.g., those with mobility impairments, or certain sensory disabilities) to participate in the workforce.

End Notes

1. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Annual Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), July 2022–June 2023. Available at: https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_583_Final_0.pdf
2. MoSPI. Annual Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), July 2022–June 2023. Available at: <https://mospi.gov.in/publication/annual-report-periodic-labour-force-survey-plfs-july-2022-june-2023>
3. Rural India Online. Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India – A Statistical Profile 2021. Available at: <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/persons-with-disabilities-divyangjan-in-india---a-statistical-profile-2021>
4. Randstad. ED&I Report – Embracing All Abilities. Available at: <https://info.randstad.in/hubfs/Thought%20leadership%20reports/Randstad%20-%20ED&I%20report%20-%20Embracing%20All%20Abilities.pdf>
5. Randstad. ED&I Report – Embracing All Abilities. Available at: <https://info.randstad.in/hubfs/Thought%20leadership%20reports/Randstad%20-%20ED&I%20report%20-%20Embracing%20All%20Abilities.pdf>
6. Key partners played a critical role in conducting these workshops by anchoring local outreach, mobilizing participants, and contextualizing discussions. Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) such as GDRC (Ahmedabad), Swarga Foundation (Coimbatore), MSSl (Chennai), and NPDO (Hyderabad) brought in lived experiences and community perspectives. Industry associations including CII-IBDN, CITI, and GCCl helped highlight private sector engagement and inclusion practices, while public institutions such as the National Career Service Centre (Ahmedabad), TNSKILL Corporation, and the Disability Commissioner's Office (Hyderabad) shared key policy frameworks and ongoing initiatives on skilling and employment.
7. Disclaimer: The data presented here was gathered as part of a training exercise and is intended for illustrative or educational purposes only. It may not reflect actual or current circumstances and should not be quoted or cited as an authoritative source.
8. IIT Delhi. Centre for Advanced Research and Excellence in Disability and Assistive Technology (CARE-DAT). Available at: <https://home.iitd.ac.in/care-dat.php>
9. The Leaflet. In Mizoram, Effective Implementation of the RPwD Act Remains a Pipe Dream. Available at: <https://theleaflet.in/leaflet-reports/in-mizoram-effective-implementation-of-the-rpwd-act-remains-a-pipe-dream>
10. The Hindu. Tamil Nadu Announces Special Seed Fund for Start-ups Run by Transpersons and Persons with Disabilities. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/tamil-nadu-announces-special-seed-fund-for-start-ups-run-by-transpersons-and-persons-with-disabilities/article68344392.ece>
11. Sarthak Educational Trust. Final Report on Vocational Skilling Initiatives. Available at: https://www.sarthakindia.org/reports_web/Sarthak_VocationalSkilling_Final_23072022.pdf



► 1. Corporate Practices in Disability Inclusion

Core Focus Area	Inclusion Strategy	Example Companies
Accessible Infrastructure & Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting accessibility audits across locations, going beyond ramps. - Incorporating assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, ergonomic tools) 	HUL, SAP Labs India, Google, McKinsey
Tailored Training & Sensitization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disability etiquette workshops and sensitization training for managers - Regular internal training on inclusion 	HUL, MetLife, Accenture, SAP Labs India
Inclusive Hiring & Role Fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying role-ability fit (e.g., Mirakle Couriers hires persons with hearing disabilities for delivery roles; they excel at map-reading and navigation due to strong visual orientation) - Building neurodiversity- and disability-friendly recruitment pipelines 	Mirakle Couriers, Google, HUL
Career Pathways & Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internship-to-hiring pipelines for PwDs (e.g., SAKSHAM program at HUL). - Inclusion across functions (e.g., employing people with Down syndrome in client-facing roles at Lemon Tree) 	HUL, Lemon Tree Hotels
Community & Ecosystem Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnering with NGOs and disability-focused employment platforms - Building internal communities like ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) dedicated to various disabilities - Creating global or national awards and recognitions to reinforce inclusive identity 	MetLife, Accenture, Google
Assistive Ecosystems & Resource Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up accessibility centers within the company - Centralized assistive resource hubs to support all departments 	McKinsey, Google

► 2. Corporate Design for Inclusivity: A Holistic Approach to Workplace Equality

The Centre of Excellence for Employment by Sarthak Educational Trust, an NGO working towards mainstreaming persons with disability, particularly visual impairments, offers a range of services aimed at fostering an inclusive workplace. These services are designed to help businesses integrate and support PwDs effectively:

- (a) **Accessibility:** Ensuring that workplace environments and job roles are accessible to all employees, leveraging advanced supportive technologies.
- (b) **Diverse Talent Acquisition:** Assisting businesses in recruiting PwDs through inclusive job postings, accessible recruitment drives, and collaborative partnerships.

- (c) **Skill Development:** Providing tailored training programs to enhance the professional skills of PwDs, facilitating their career advancement and personal growth.
- (d) **Empathy and Awareness Training:** Educating the workforce about disability inclusion, breaking down stereotypes, and promoting a culture of empathy and mutual respect.
- (e) **Policy Development:** Helping organizations develop and implement inclusive policies that align with best practices and legal requirements.
- (f) **Communication Support:** Offering sign language training and other communication aids to ensure effective interaction between all employees.

► 3. Illustrative examples of Vocational Skilling Models for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)

Model	Recommended Approach	Illustrative Example
Peer Training Model	Leverage peer-to-peer models where trainers and trainees share lived experiences, fostering trust and retention.	AMBA (Bengaluru) – IT-based training for adults with intellectual disabilities
Group Training Model	Train PwDs in groups to offer collective services or products, reducing costs and building team-based enterprises.	Atmavishwas (Goa NGO) – used to train PwDs in baking
Sheltered Model	PwDs are members of a certain shelter, receive training there, and their work is marketed and paid for by the shelter, particularly for those with high support needs. This model is often expensive and cannot cover the wider population of PwDs.	Tamil Nadu-based organisation, Sristi Foundation – teaches organic farming to young men with intellectual disability

