

Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan

Introduction

Nine years ago, the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, also known as the Accessible India Campaign, embarked on a mission to reshape India into a truly inclusive society. Launched on 3rd December 2015 by the Honourable Prime Minister, this flagship initiative was a direct response to the long-overlooked challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Rooted in the vision of "Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas," the campaign aimed to ensure universal accessibility across three vital domains: built infrastructure, transport systems, and the information and communication technology (ICT) ecosystem.



India, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), had committed to creating an accessible environment for persons with disabilities. Yet, prior to 2015, efforts lacked a cohesive strategy or enforceable timelines. The Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995, though welfare-oriented, did not adequately address accessibility issues or empower persons with disabilities to

demand their rights. Recognising this gap, the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan was launched to bring accessibility to the forefront of national development.

The campaign introduced a structured approach, focusing on making public buildings, transport networks like buses and trains, and digital platforms accessible to Divyangjans. It also sought to create awareness and set enforceable standards for accessibility compliance. Although initially planned to conclude by March 2024, the campaign's objectives have been absorbed into the Creation of Barrier-Free Environment Scheme under the broader umbrella of the Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA). This transition reinforces the idea that accessibility is a continuous endeavour, requiring sustained efforts to meet evolving challenges.

As the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan marks its ninth year, it stands as a milestone in India's journey towards fulfilling its commitment to an inclusive and equitable society, where every individual can thrive without barriers.

Campaign Achievements

The Accessible India Campaign has achieved significant milestones in creating an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities over the past nine years, with improvements spanning built infrastructure, transportation, digital platforms, education, and media accessibility. From retrofitting thousands of government buildings and transport facilities to developing sign language training and ensuring accessible TV content, the campaign has laid the groundwork for universal accessibility in India.



SUGAMYA BHARAT ABHIYAN

Key Achievements So Far

1748 government buildings retrofitted with accessibility features.

709 railway stations fully accessible, 4,068 partially accessible.

All 35 international airports now feature accessibility features such as ramps and Braille systems.

95 Central Government websites made accessible under MeitY's Content Management Framework.

3,120 out of 3,533 bus stations across 24 States /UTs equipped with accessibility features.



Here are the key achievements:

Accessible Infrastructure

- Accessibility audits of 1,671 government buildings were conducted under the target of auditing 25-50 buildings in 50 cities.
- A fund of ₹562 crore was released for retrofitting 1,314 buildings.
- Accessibility features have been incorporated into 1,748 government buildings, including 648 buildings under State/UT governments and 1,100 Central Government buildings retrofitted by the CPWD.

Transportation

- All 35 international airports and 55 out of 69 domestic airports now feature ramps, accessible toilets, helpdesks, and lifts with Braille and auditory systems.
- Aerobridges have been provided at all international/customs airports.
- 709 railway stations have been made fully accessible, while 4,068 stations are partially accessible.
- Out of 1,45,747 buses, 8,695 (5.96%) are fully accessible, and 42,348 (29.05%) are partially accessible.
- Across 24 States/UTs, 3,120 out of 3,533 bus stations have been equipped with accessibility features.

Digital Accessibility

- 95 Central Government websites have been made accessible under the Content Management Framework by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

- 676 State Government websites have been made accessible, with 476 of them live.

Education and Language Accessibility

- The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) was established in September 2015 to promote the use, teaching, and research of Indian Sign Language.
- Over 1,013 individuals have been trained in Indian Sign Language through diploma and short-term courses offered by ISLRTC.
- A total of 183 students have completed the Diploma in Indian Sign Language Interpretation (DISLI) course between 2016-17 and 2023.

Media Accessibility

- The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has published Accessibility Standards for TV Viewing for persons with hearing impairments.
- Accessibility in TV content is being implemented in phases, with 19 news channels having telecast 2,447 accessible news bulletins and 17 General Entertainment Category (GEC) channels broadcasting 3,686 accessible programmes and movies.

Other Initiatives and the Way Forward

Sector-Specific Accessibility Guidelines: Efforts are ongoing to finalise accessibility standards for the four remaining identified sectors: Road

Transport and Highways, Tourism, Information and Broadcasting, and Financial Services. Currently, 13 out of 20 Central Government Ministries/Departments have notified sector-specific guidelines, while three have adopted guidelines from other departments. Regular follow-ups are underway to expedite notifications.

Web Accessibility: A plan to make 500 additional Government of India websites accessible is in progress. The department, in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), is organising training sessions for officers from Central Government Ministries/Departments to ensure compliance with web accessibility standards.

Training of Access Auditors: The Department, in partnership with the Council of Architecture (CoA), has initiated training programs to expand the cadre of certified Access Auditors. The second phase of training for master trainers was conducted in July 2024, raising the total number of access auditors to 59.

Sugamya Bharat App: This crowdsourcing platform empowers individuals to report accessibility issues in infrastructure, transport, and information systems. With features like font adjustments, colour contrast options, and integrated screen readers in Hindi and English, the app is accessible to persons with disabilities. Available in 23 languages, it promotes public participation by enabling users to report issues that are then addressed by relevant authorities.

Curriculum Development: The Department, in collaboration with IIT Kharagpur, is working to introduce specialised courses on accessibility in B. Tech, B. Plan, and B. Arch programs. Stakeholder consultations were

held, and recommendations are being reviewed for inclusion in the model curriculum by AICTE.

Technology and Innovation: Basic Indian Sign Language (ISL) training has been provided to over 1,013 airline staff and employees of various public-facing corporate entities. These efforts aim to foster inclusivity in service industries.


Accessible Pilgrimage Sites: A dedicated initiative has been launched to make 75 pilgrimage sites accessible for persons with disabilities (PwDs). Proposals have been received from multiple states, and funds have been allocated to enhance accessibility at locations like Solophek Chardham in Sikkim.

Workshops for Universal Accessibility: A training workshop for State Public Works Department (PWD) officers was conducted from 28th to 31st August 2023, focusing on universal accessibility in built-up environments. The session saw participation from representatives of 14 states and Union Territories, underlining a collaborative approach to accessibility.

Web Accessibility Training Program: In partnership with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), a certified training course on Web Accessibility is being developed. This initiative aims to train approximately 10,000 web developers nationwide and sensitise government departments to adopt and implement Web Accessibility Guidelines. The proposal is currently under review with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DePwD).

Financial Commitment Towards Empowerment

From 2013-14 to 2023-24, the financial allocations for the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities have witnessed a significant increase, reflecting the government’s unwavering commitment to inclusivity and accessibility under initiatives like the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan. Budget Estimates (BE) have progressively risen from ₹560 crore in 2013-14 to ₹1,225.15 crore in 2023-24, with Revised Estimates (RE) and Actual Expenditures (AE) demonstrating alignment with these goals. The ₹1,143.89 crore spent in 2023-24 represents the highest expenditure in a decade, underscoring the government’s focus on achieving universal accessibility and empowerment of persons with disabilities through dedicated campaigns and schemes.

Budget Allocation Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 				
Sr. No.	Year	Budget Estimates	Revised Estimates	Actual Expenditure
1	2013-14	560.00	460.00	341.49
2	2014-15	565.00	375.00	337.96
3	2015-16	565.40	540.00	487.96
4	2016-17	783.56	783.56	772.66
5	2017-18	855.00	955.00	928.32
6	2018-19	1070.00	1070.00	1017.56
7	2019-20	1204.90	1100.00	1016.18
8	2020-21	1325.39	900.00	861.63
9	2021-22	1171.77	1044.31	1009.45
10	2022-23	1212.42	1015.98	989.35
11	2023-24	1225.15	1225.01	1143.89

(In Rupees Crore)

Conclusion

The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan has emerged as a landmark initiative, driving India's journey toward a truly inclusive and accessible society. Over the past nine years, it has successfully addressed long-standing challenges faced by persons with disabilities, setting a strong foundation for universal accessibility across infrastructure, transportation, digital platforms, and education. The campaign's integration into the broader Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA) underscores its enduring relevance and the government's commitment to inclusivity. With sustained efforts, innovative solutions, and increased financial support, the mission to empower every individual to live with dignity and independence remains steadfast, ensuring that no one is left behind in India's path toward equitable development.

References:

- <https://sugamyabharat.gov.in/>