

4. Shaping a more disabled-friendly digital ecosystem

Prelims Syllabus: Governance

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Governance - Welfare schemes for the vulnerable sections of the population



Why in News?

- As per the World Health Organization, 16% of the global population is disabled.
- However, 2.21% of the disabled population in India estimated in Census 2021 appears to be a gross underestimation.
- Technology has great potential to level the playing field for the disabled. However, it can also reinforce barriers, if not designed as per their needs.
- It was found in 2020 that India has 750 million Internet/smartphone users.
- If the 16% figure is applied, it implies that there are roughly 12 crore internet/smartphone users with disabilities.

Assessment of the situation through a study:

- For an evidence-based assessment of the situation of technology and its accessibility for the disabled section, a report was prepared.
- In the study, ten widely used apps across five sectors were studied. These apps are Zomato, Swiggy, PayTM, PhonePe, Amazon, Flipkart, Uber, Ola, WhatsApp, and Telegram.
- Moreover, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines were used to evaluate the app.
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines is a set of globally recognized parameters to determine disabled-friendly attributes of an app or website.
- It was found that 4 apps were ranked “low” in accessibility and 5 apps were ranked “medium”. The results highlight the immediate need to work on creating a disabled-friendly infrastructure both physical and digital.

- The aim of launching this report and rating index is to start discussions on digital accessibility, product design, and the development process.
- In the second phase of this report, the research group would collaborate with service providers and help them design practices and processes for improving app accessibility and educate the stakeholders about people with disabilities.
- It will further help in changing attitudes around disability, specifically within the business community, as they will move away from a charity-based approach to a rights-based and investment outlook.

Use of Artificial Intelligence:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) can further help in automating the accessibility testing process.
- It can also help in analyzing the feedback from users with disabilities at a scale to provide insights to developers and manufacturers.

