

# Disability and Exclusion: Social, Education and Employment Perspectives

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## **Abstract:**

When the whole world is striving towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in all walks of life, they are still among the vulnerable group who are at risk of social exclusion. The meaningful participation in societal activities is hindered by marginalisation at an individual level leading to unemployment and thus poverty. Disability, social exclusion and poverty are inextricably associated that despite poverty alleviation programmes, disability reforms, advocacy and disability acts, these marginalised group of disabled individuals still remain as victims. The dynamic relationship between these three is studied in this article to to examine some of the issues of the human rights approach towards disability rehabilitation. Due to the systemic, structural and attitudinal barriers, developing countries like India are still struggling to create an inclusive society. This article suggests measures to overcome the challenges faced by persons with disabilities so as to initiate steps towards successful inclusion.

**Keywords:** *Disability; Poverty; Exclusion; Social Exclusion; and Marginalization.*

## **Introduction**

“Disabled people are not only the most deprived human beings in the developing world, they also are the most neglected”

**- Amartya Sen**

World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) estimates approximately 15 percent of the world's population has a disability. This translates into over a million people, at least 200 million being children with disabilities (CwDs), 80 per cent of them living in developing countries. Disability has often been closely associated with poverty (Yeo & Moore, 2003; Hoogeveen, 2005; Elwan, 1999). This association and relationship have been recognized in various studies since the 1990s. Empirical evidence supporting the existence of this relationship has increased in the last decade; however, there is still a lack of comprehensive knowledge and theoretical understanding of how these two conditions interact with each other and what causal mechanisms play an important role in the formation of this relationship.

According to Equiv.in, a recruitment platform that cited government data for

the numbers, in India, only 34 lakhs of about 1.34 crore people with disabilities who are in the employable age have a job, which indicates an unemployment rate of more than 70 per cent (The Economic Times, 2019). Most of those among the PwDs who have jobs, receive little or no monetary remuneration. It has been documented in extensive literature that additional costs to ensure inclusive access to infrastructure is lower than 1 per cent in the stage of designing and planning (Bieler, 2012) but unfortunately most of the workplaces including public buildings or institutes are still inaccessible to PwDs in the Country. Although many countries (USA, UK, German, Japan etc.) have initiated mainstreaming the persons with disabilities into the larger contours of their society, life remains to be an uphill struggle for them in India (Menon & Ferose, 2014). This situation of the PwD will only change when there is fundamental change and connection between underlying factors such as poverty, lack of access to education and employment within the broader society.

### **Disability and Poverty**

Poverty is a key issue faced by individuals with disabilities where disability and poverty have a bidirectional relationship; meaning that disability is a cause and a consequence of poverty (Elwan, 1999; Yeo and Moore, 2003; Braithwaite and Mont, 2008). It is a cause in the sense that it hinders the educational and skills development and can lead to less job opportunities and less income, resulting in economic deprivation. Disability is also a consequence as poverty limits the access to health care and preventive services resulting in poor health conditions. Furthermore, the lack of proper nutrition, limited access to health care provisions and facilities, lack of knowledge about health and hygiene, meagre access to clean water and basic daily living accessories and violence are common factors that contribute to PwDs becoming chronically ill.

In addition, persons with illness and impairments experience extra costs and barriers in accessing their essential health care facilities and rehabilitation services. Additionally, they are excluded from education, social life and employment and coerced to shoulder direct, indirect and opportunity costs, which negatively affect their income and consumption (Groce et al., 2011; Yeo and Moore, 2003; WHO, 2011; Yeo, 2003; Palmer, 2013). Persons with disabilities are most likely to be poor and that poverty remains as the contributing factor behind disabilities of several kinds. Data are showing that people with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are 'poorer than their nondisabled peers in terms of access to education, access to healthcare, employment, income, social support and civic involvement' (Groce et al., 2011).

The national poverty ratio estimated by the Planning Commission using Tendulkar methodology from the National Sample Survey's data on household

consumer expenditure indicated a poverty incidence of 25.7 per cent in rural areas, 13.7 per cent in urban areas and 21.9 per cent for the entire country in 2011-12 (Gol 2013). Subsequently, the Expert Group estimated that 30.9 per cent of the rural population, 26.4 per cent of the urban population and 29.5 per cent of the total population remain below the poverty line in 2011-12 (Gol, 2014).

Although studies reveal that while the poverty rate has been significantly reduced due to governmental support, factors such as natural disasters, heavy dependence on agriculture and high birth rates have contributed to the continued poverty in rural India that affects around 300 million people. In India, as per the Census 2011, about 69 per cent of the overall PwDs, 1.86 crore (18.6 million) population of India lives in rural areas. Most of the studies (provide references here) found that the rural areas witness much poverty and illiteracy rate which rarely welcomes PwDs and when it comes to women with disabilities, the state is worse than their male counterparts in every sphere of their lives.

There remains a huge gap on the poverty analysis for the PwDs group of population in India. Several researchers are of the opinion that the lack of explicit inclusion of PwDs in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and development strategies, including policies, programmes and affirmative actions to reduce poverty, is one important and central limitation in the fulfilment of objectives related to eradicate extreme poverty among all (Thomas, 2005; UN, 2011). Thomas (2005) also stressed the need to include persons with disabilities if the goals are to be achieved as disability is not specifically stated in the MDG. Poverty is engendered not only from an economic perspective but impacts personal, social, educational, political exclusion and powerlessness.

As such, poverty is highly correlated with social exclusion, marginalisation, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation, and other economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of deprivation. It results from limited or no access to basic infrastructure and services, and is further compounded by people's lack of access to land, credit, technology and institutions and to other productive assets and resources needed to ensure sustainable livelihoods (Poverty Assessment Study Report (1995) cited by Dube and Charowa, 2005:9).

Studies also indicate that not all disabled people are poor and nor are all poor people disabled, however if there are such similarities between the characteristics of poverty and of disability (not impairment), then perhaps the relationship could be better depicted as interlocking circles as mentioned below:



## Disability and Social Exclusion

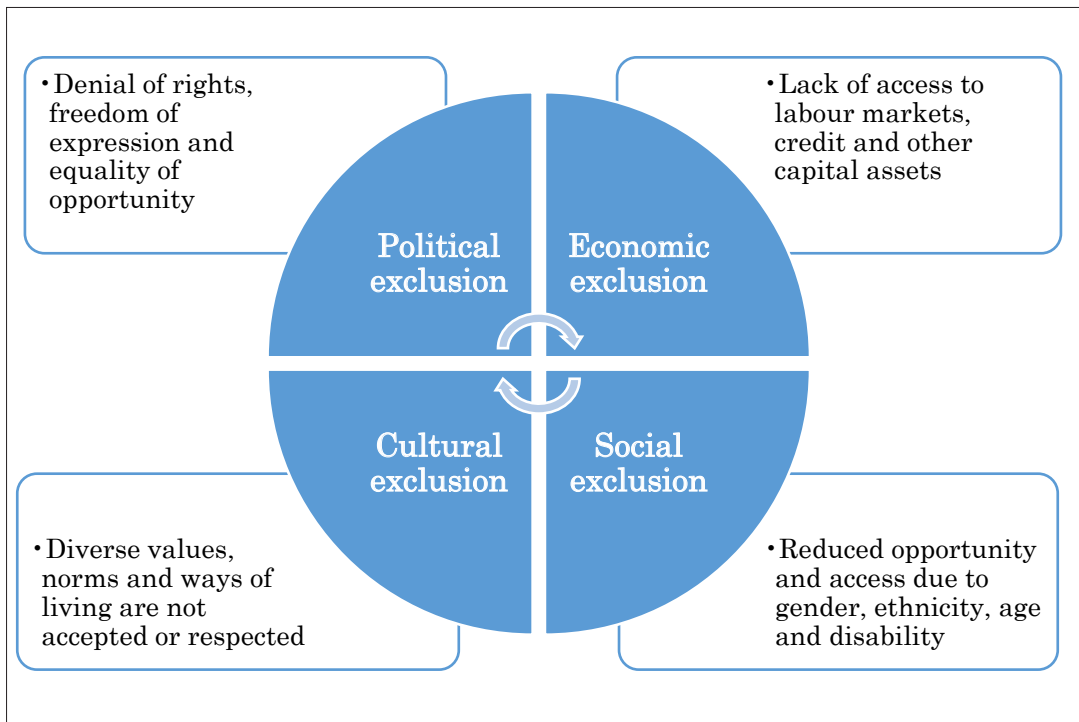
Social exclusion is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon which is attributed to many factors including inadequate income, barriers to labour market, transport, and social environment, as well to limited access to a wide range of public and private services. Generally social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state (Report on the World Social Situation, 2016). There are also multiple forms of exclusion including political, economic, social and cultural (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997; Stewart and Langer, 2007). Although there is no universally agreed definition or benchmark for social exclusion, lack of participation in society is fundamental to most definitions by scholars, government bodies, non-governmental organizations and others.

According to Popay et al., (2008, p. 2) “exclusion consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships interacting across four main dimensions-economic, political, social and cultural-and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global levels. It results in a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterized by unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights which leads to health inequalities...” Likewise, Levitas and other fellow scholars (2007, p. 9)) are of the view that “social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to most people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole”. To bring more conceptual clarity it can be articulated that “social exclusion is what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills,

low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health and family breakdown” (United Kingdom Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004, p. 2).

An individual who is born with a disability or who becomes disabled often faces social marginalisation and has significantly less chance of accessing health care, education, or employment leading to poverty, which in turn results in restricted access to safe housing and food, health care and so forth (Trani et al., 2010; Groce et al., 2011). This poverty and entrenched social exclusion affect not only the individual, but also the family. The links between disability, and poverty and health are of note, not only because they are assumed to be strong, but also because the estimated size of the global disability population – over one billion people or 15 per cent of the world’s population (WHO/World Bank:2011).

### Key Forms of Social Exclusion



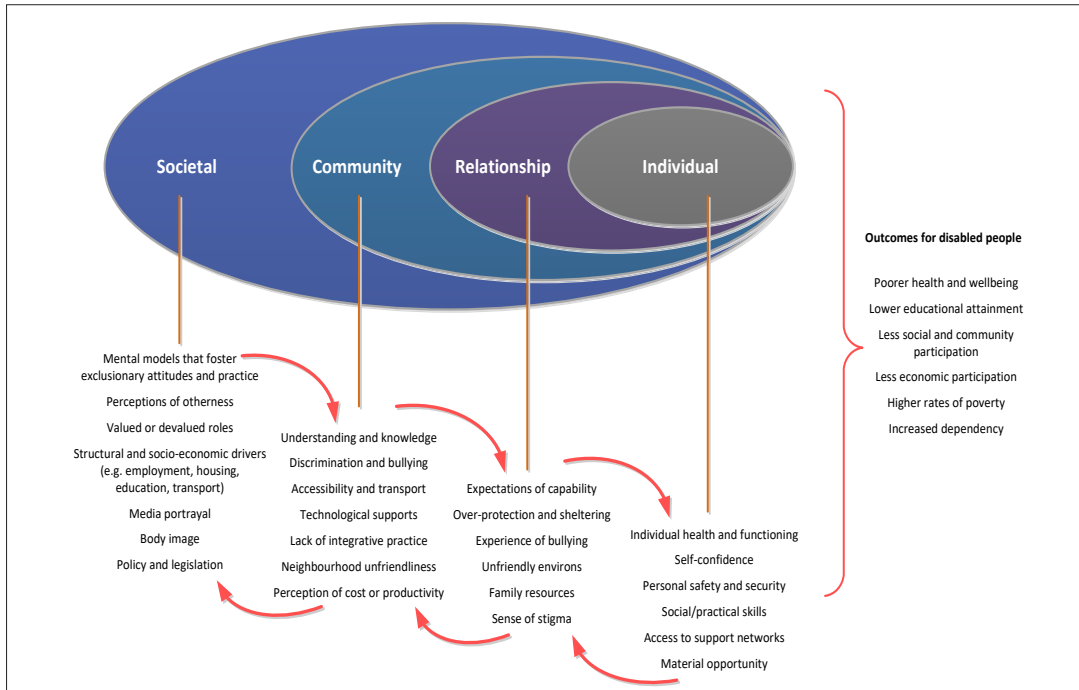
## **Appleton-Dyer and Field (2014)**

There is an established link between social exclusion and discrimination (needs a reference here). Discrimination and violation of human rights lead to social exclusion and poverty. For example, PwDs may be excluded from employment due to deliberate exclusion by employers, negative attitude of colleagues and employers and inaccessible environment (social exclusion). This exclusion is reinforced by the lack of policy or implementation of policies to promote equal opportunities in the workplace for PwDs (political exclusion) (Appleton-Dyer and Field, 2014).

Historically people have been excluded from society based on characteristics as ethnicity, gender, identity, disability or other intrinsic features (Das, 2009). For example, seeing people only in terms of their impairments and the notion of the 'typical worker' can result in discriminatory behaviour (Harma et al., 2013; Foster and Wass, 2013). These mental models have enabled not only exclusion, but also discrimination, alienation and persecution in different ways (Balibar, 2005; Simpson, 2011). Perceptions of valued or devalued roles also lead to exclusion. Those who play valued roles will be treated well, but those who play devalued roles will be perceived negatively and they are often labelled in some way which is not acceptable socially and morally (Wolfensburger, 2000). For example, people with mental /health problems are often excluded because of stigma and discrimination, and low expectations of what they can achieve (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004b).

Personal and social relationships of PwDs often lead to exclusion. Some PwDs need support from family and community, particularly when there are some structural and socio-economic barriers to inclusion. This support mechanism can be hindered by lack of resources as well as families' concerns over discrimination and stigma (Anaby et al., 2013; Kramer et al., 2011; Milner et al., 2004). At an individual level, the factors of social exclusion are an individual's health, self-confidence, well-being, education, skills, access to support networks and services, efficacy, and material opportunities. These factors mutually strengthen social exclusionary mechanism, and negatively impact the social life of PwDs (WHO, 2011).

## Key Factors of Exclusion at a Societal, Community, Relational and Individual Level



### Appleton-Dyer and Field (2014)

Every citizen has a right to a liveable income, education and training, employment, housing, healthcare, a social and cultural life. Depriving a person from those rights leads to isolation, and poverty. The results of the study by Nolan and Gannon (2005), suggest that severely hampering disability is indeed associated with a significantly lower level of social participation. Social exclusion and unequal development assuming an intimate relation between the social form of relations and the corresponding character of economic development is not only significant from the point of view of the constitutionally recognized excluded categories and classes of people, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes but also has in its scope the causes of other disadvantaged segments of population not belonging to these castes but certainly suffering from some form of exclusion on account of their disabilities (Thakur, 2013). This exclusion assumes extreme form in a society characterized by processes such as Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG), which though expected to ensure equity, parity and fair competition but in reality, have caused inequity, disparity and unfair competition which have brought the marginal, disabled and almost all the excluded categories and segments of

the population at crossroads due to the conditions that have emerged contrary to the expectations. As a result, the chances of social exclusion for the socially marginalized, disadvantaged and PwDs are likely to intensify with the impact of market forces under the process. Literature (Gilmore and Cuskelly, 2014) suggested that the ramifications of loneliness and social exclusion could potentially contribute to the known mental and physical health inequalities that further exacerbate social exclusion.

## **Disability and Educational Exclusion**

Students with disabilities are found to be frequently trapped in a cycle of exclusion from education, society and mainstream development programmes (Ahmad, 2015). Children with disabilities have been excluded from the general education system and placed in special schools historically. In some cases, they are separated from their families and placed in long-term residential institutions where they are educated in isolation from the community, if they are educated at all. A child with a disability is almost 17 times more likely to be institutionalised than other children (UNICEF, 2013).

The initial enrolment rate of children with disabilities in mainstream schools is very low. Even if the children with disabilities are enrolled in schools, they are more likely to drop out and leave schools early without transitioning to secondary school and beyond (GCE and HI, 2014). Children with disabilities are also at increased risk of school violence and bullying, discrimination, preventing the safety and right to education (UNESCO, 2017). According to a study of Plan International (2013) children with disabilities are 10 times less likely to go to school than children without disabilities and when they do attend school, it is likely to be in a segregated setting. The Global Partnership for Education (2018) estimates that 90 per cent of children with disabilities in low and lower-middle income countries do not go to school. Data also revealed that only 5 per cent of all children with disabilities worldwide have completed primary school (Peters, 2003). The educational exclusion including low enrolment, poor retention and education completion rate of children with disabilities is attributed to several factors such as gender and socio-economic status (Filmer, 2008), lack of knowledge on how to include children in education planning and implementation (Robson and Evans, 2005), rural-urban divide (UNICEF, 1999), discrimination, prejudice and linguistics barriers (ibid), rigid evaluation, assessment process and admission policies (National Council on Disability, 2000), lack of flexibility in curriculum and stream or subject selection according to the individual needs of learners (Shevlin et al., 2002; Groce, 2004), lack of understanding of teachers about pedagogical needs of children with disabilities (Webster, 2015)), inferior quality of education (Rutherford, 2016) and lack of accessibility, both in terms of physical



(infrastructure, learning materials, buildings, location of schools, transports and alike) and psycho-social (attitude, belief, superstitions, perceived understanding, stigma, caste, religion, ethnicity and alike) environments of schools.

According to the Indian Census 2011, 45 per cent of India's PwDs population is illiterate compared to 26 per cent of total population. Lack of education is one of the main factors leading to social exclusion and poverty. According to the "State of the Education Report for India: Children with Disabilities" (UNESCO, 2019), more than one in every four Indian children with disabilities (in the 5-19 age group) is not enrolled in an educational institution. It is noted that a minimal percentage of PwDs attend higher education in the country. In addition to that the number of individuals with disabilities who undergo needs based vocational education as well as training is small and for many such training is not accessible and affordable, due to accessibility and poverty related issues. Nevertheless, there are government and private organisations and centres which provide a limited set of skills development programmes for some specific groups of PwDs. Most often the programmes offered by these centres are not aligned with growing societal needs and labour market demands. This needs a reference.

Research indicates that despite the positive attitudes towards inclusion, teachers often lack knowledge and skills regarding inclusionary practices and pedagogical approaches. Studies also reveal that the established conventional cultural beliefs towards the Dalit children results in discrimination and exclusion of children in inclusive classroom at rural areas (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Vulnerable children, especially children with disabilities often have issues to start schools and more prone to get dropped out of school earlier than their peers without disabilities even before accessing high school education. Such difficulties in school participation and earlier drop out are found particularly in low-income countries (Filmer, 2008).

The status of the children with disabilities is found to be very poor in terms of educational attainment during their school years (DCSF, 2010), and this has long-term consequences for opportunities and outcomes into adulthood (Pamela & Maag 2003; Melanie, 2010). Part of the reasons may lie with the nature of the disability and its severity; for example, learning difficulties, or other impairments, may imply learning needs. However, there has been concern that education and educational support of children with disabilities does not enable them to fulfil their potential (Blatchford et al., 2011; Aron & Loprest, 2012).

## **Disability and Unemployment**

Unemployment is closely interconnected to poverty and social exclusion of PwDs. Lack of employment is considered as the prime cause of poverty among persons

with disabilities (Parodi & Sciulli, 2011). It has also been found that that PwDs experience substantial wage and participation rate differences when compared to non-disabled persons (Kidd, Sloane & Ferko, 2000; Bartel & Taubman, 1979; Gannon, 2005). On average, the participation rate of people with severe disabilities in the workforce is less than half that of able-bodied workers. A lower percentage of PwDs are able to find employment in India, even though the government has set up 28 employment exchanges to source employment avenues for the PwDs. Moreover, the 3 per cent reservation of jobs in the government sector is only for Class III (Auditor, Accountant etc) and IV (Peon, Office Assistant etc,) jobs. The issues of discrimination and exclusion of PwDs in employment have been explored and confirmed in many recent studies and cases.

Research by De Leire (2001) and Jones et al., (2006) has shown that persons with disabilities are more likely to receive low incomes as compared to persons without disabilities. The results of the final study report of Disability and Social Exclusion in the European Union (GNCDP, 2002) reveal that only 30.5 per cent of the disabled labour force population is employed. The remainder are either unemployed (20.8 per cent) or inactive (42 per cent). It was also found from the study that 57 per cent of persons with disabilities were under the category of low paid jobs. Additionally, it is found from the 'People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes' (World Bank, 2007) report that there has been a 5 percent drop in the employment rate of people with disabilities in the decade leading up to 2002. The fall in the employment rate of working age PwDs has been from 42 percent in 1991 to 37 percent in 2002. This evidence, perhaps, can be taken as the supportive to the argument that there are still unaddressed issues that are causing the exclusion and accumulation in the area of employment of people with disabilities in India.

The main reasons for their unemployment or inactivity of PwDs have been documented in many research studies (references?). These could be summarized and mentioned as- the prejudice of employers, the lack of education and training, and the severity of their disability, followed by the lack of adaptation of the workplace and supportive policies, lack of understanding of the employers about the specific needs and requirements of the PwDs, and the lack of psychological support, guidance and follow up programmes. Additionally, Miranda (2003) has highlighted that the main reason for the higher incidence of labour market nonparticipation among PwDs is that not only for the fact that the PwDs experience more difficulties in finding a job according to their abilities but also serious physical barriers continue to exist in the access to buildings and to the public transportation system.

## Recommendations

- It is important to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in the national development processes. Persons with disabilities should be provided with sufficient opportunities to develop employability skills. Effective intervention strategies should enhance the livelihood options of individuals with disabilities in India.
- Poverty alleviation is crucial in preventing disability directly and indirectly, especially in developing countries with low resources like India. When initiatives are developed and implemented to make persons with disabilities economically independent, this will lead to socio-economic inclusion.
- Economic reforms allowing more opportunities for PwDs in the employment market would lead to the increased ability to raise their financial standards.
- Necessary poverty alleviation programmes, vocational guidance, job reservations should be provided to persons with disabilities without any discrimination.
- The recent 'Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act' 2016 insists the Skill Development and Employment in its Chapter IV. Among the persons with disabilities, those with visual impairment living in remote rural areas are not accessible either to education or vocational training which makes them more vulnerable to poverty.
- Measures are to be developed to allow effective access to education for people at risk of exclusion, and implement policies which seek to prevent life crises, leading to situations of social exclusion, such as exclusion from schools. From a social exclusion perspective, it is fundamental that education systems are designed in such a way as to consider the specific needs of disabled people.
- Develop policies to increase job retention and re-integration of PwDs with special focus on women with disabilities in the work place.
- Monitor and supervise the progress and issues related to implementation of policies and programmes meant for employment and social inclusion of the PwDs.
- Maximise the employability potential and create enabling and accessible work environments for PwDs to empower them to strengthen their economic security. This would enable them to contribute to the national development.
- In lieu of some of the loopholes in employment for PwDs, there should be initiatives for engaging existing vocational services, guidance and training, placement in employment and related services for workers.

- Systematic and transparent procedures should be developed related to their employment, salary standards, provident fund, extra medical allowance as well as supporting incentive measures and affirmative actions.
- Of significance is the need to change the mindset and attitude of the employers and people without disabilities towards the inclusion of people with disabilities into the mainstream society.

## Conclusion

Shifting from disability policy to inclusive policy is an essential step in actualizing the human rights of persons with disabilities. Holistic approach of disability should be geared towards poverty reduction activities, thus reducing the inequality and paving the way to the greater economic growth of developing nations. Genuine inclusion in education occurs when the opportunities are offered to all children, including vulnerable children, to access and remain in the education system, helping them to make choices to ensure their lives are rewarding, meaningful and productive, and trigger social change (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Walker, 2012). The factors that influence the work limitations of persons with disabilities should be identified and necessary steps should be initiated by the policy makers to ensure their social inclusion through labour market participation. Appropriate monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of support services would enhance the job retention of such individuals. Social security, access to education and employment and sufficient financial support systems are to be available. Thus, by creating changes at a systemic level to address the educational, social, and economic exclusion and by developing inclusive strategies through right-based approach, persons with disabilities can live in an inclusive society.

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