

DIVYANG-FRIENDLY MEASURES NEED TO BE INTEGRATED AT PLANNING STAGE FOR ENSURING INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN SMART CITIES IN INDIA: HARDEEP PURI

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs

Divyang-Friendly Measures need to be Integrated at Planning Stage for Ensuring Inclusive Growth in Smart Cities in India: Hardeep Puri

feedback Emanating from such Stakeholders' Interactions to be sent to Smart Cities for Incorporating in their Plans to make these Projects all Inclusive

Posted On: 11 SEP 2018 4:51PM by PIB Delhi

Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs (I/C), has stressed on the need for integrating **divyang-friendly measures in various projects being implemented in the Smart Cities in India. This, he said, is required at the initial project planning stage to ensure that cities become divyang-friendly, accessible and inclusive.** He was speaking at an interactive session on “**Divyang Friendly Measures and Policy Recommendations for Smart Cities in India**” here today. He said that in conjunction with the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Smart Cities Mission seeks to ensure that the most vulnerable sections of our society enjoy ‘Ease of Living’ in Indian cities. The workshop, organised by the National Institute of Urban Affairs, had participation from divyang persons from different walks of life and eminent citizens and experts, including several international sports personalities.

Addressing the participants, Shri Puri said that the **feedback emanating from such stakeholders' interactions will be sent to the CEOs and project managers of the Smart Cities to be incorporated in their plans.** He said that these measures will improve the “ease of living” for those who lacked accessibility to all facilities. Lamenting that India particularly lacks data on disability, Shri Hardeep Puri said that “we will be looking at 25% of the population that will need universal accessibility in order to live independently and with dignity.” He asserted that the Disability Act of 1995 also mandated accessibility for persons with disabilities. He pointed out that the “Clause 40-48 of the VIIIth Chapter of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 also mandates making all buildings, services and products accessible giving definite timelines for implementation and retrofitting.”

The Minister was categorical in saying that “the standards exist, legislation is in place, thus we now have no reason to ignore this very urgent issue of accessibility any longer.” He outlined that according to the United Nations, a mere 1% additional cost is incurred for incorporating universal design and accessibility in the design and planning stage itself. Stating that India is at an interesting cusp, Shri Puri said that “we have the Accessible India Campaign, AMRUT, HRIDAY, Swachh Bharat, Digital India and the Smart Cities Mission – and accessibility cuts across them all.”

He further said that “clarity must be maintained on the standards applicable,” and added that “NCPEDP worked closely with BIS to update the National Building Code 2016 to ensure that accessibility cuts across all chapters and section.” Shri Puri said that accessibility also makes for a business case, adding that tourism-based cities are likely to face an opportunity loss of an estimated 15-20% of the global market share if they exclude tourists with disabilities. “Leaving people with disabilities out of economic opportunities leads to a loss of 3-7% of GDP annually,” he added.

Shri Hardeep Puri also said that accessibility needs to be looked at beyond the built infrastructure alone. He said, “with a growing digital interface, technology must be made accessible too – municipal apps, bus shelters, kiosks, red light junctions, ATMs, all need to be made accessible for people with disabilities. Signage captioning is important for the deaf and hearing-impaired. Products that we use must be accessible- e.g. low floor buses, lifts and elevators that announce the floor reached for people with visual disabilities, etc.”

The Smart Cities Mission adopts a unique approach to urbanization, adding that at its core, the Mission promotes the access to infrastructure for all citizens and this becomes a platform to provide social justice. The Minister pointed out that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 goals and 169 targets, has given the nations of the world a very ambitious framework with the underlying theme of ‘Leave No One Behind’. “This framework is inspired by the Indian ethos of *Sarvodaya through Antyodaya*,” he said, stating further that people with disabilities are among the most marginalised – not because of their disability but because of an environment that is hostile insensitive and inaccessible.

The Minister elaborated on the “Article 36 of the New Urban Agenda’ which said, “*We commit ourselves to promoting appropriate measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment of cities, in particular to public spaces, public transport, housing, education and health facilities, public information and communication (including information and communications technologies and systems) and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas.*”

RJ/KGS

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