

Disabled Nos Still Low in Cos

An analysis of 1,062 listed cos shows only 0.6% of the workers employed were PwDs

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Bengaluru: Diversity conversations may have entered the boardrooms, but when it comes to inclusion of people with disabilities (PwDs) in the workforce, corporate India still has a long road ahead.

As per an analysis of the Business Responsibility and Sustainability reports filed by 1,062 listed companies for 2022/2022-23, more than 87% of them said their workplaces were accessible to people with disabilities. However, only 0.6% of permanent workers they employed were PwDs. Filing of the report is mandated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Data compiled for ET by primeinfobase.com showed that 38,989 of the 6.43 million permanent employees at these companies in 2022/2022-23 were PwDs. Around 45% of the companies didn't have a single PwD employee; 146 companies had just one.

While many Indian companies have been making strides on the gen-



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der diversity front, experts said there are multiple reasons why the needle has barely moved on PwD representation. These include lack of proper accessibility, attitudinal barriers and a limited pool of candidates with the right qualifications who can be deployed immediately.

"Companies don't want to invest in skilling, training, etc., they want quick fixes and therein lies a problem," said Vineet Saraiwala, founder of Atypical Advantage, an inclusive livelihood platform which claims to have helped place more than 1,000 PwDs across 100 companies in the last three years. "A lot of PwDs don't have the necessary educational background. Companies need to be more patient and take a longer-term approach: invest in training and hiring or hiring and training."

Proper infrastructure is another

issue, said Saraiwala, an IIM-Bangalore alumnus, who is blind himself. "Just creating ramps isn't enough. When we say accessibility, it should be both physical and digital. If your internal systems are not accessible, for instance, there is no screen-reader software, then you're ruling out a large chunk of PwDs who are visually challenged," he said.

Pallavi Pareek, chief executive of Ungender, which advises companies on improving their diversity quotient, said the poor PwD representation is as much about the mindset.

"Infrastructure is easy to achieve and claim when it comes to readiness. It is the mindset and culture of bringing people in which is ambiguous and extremely difficult to achieve. So, while on paper many companies will pass the audit; in the experience test, they won't," Pareek said.