

# Evaluating Accessibility Issues for Persons with Disabilities in Urban Spaces: A Study of Social, Economic, and Technical Dimensions with Special Reference to Lucknow City

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## Abstract

Accessibility is an inclusive fundamental human right that enables the equity of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life to be translated into urban spaces. The research fundamentally assesses various challenges affecting accessibility in the city of Lucknow, particularly in areas concerning public infrastructure, government policies, socio-economic conditions, and technological advancement. Despite progressive policies and schemes such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and the Accessible India Campaign, Sports Complexes, public buildings, and transportation systems of the city continue to have numerous barriers. The problems are further exacerbated because Lucknow, given the compactness of the urban areas, including heritage buildings that make retrofitting difficult, is at a complete geographical disadvantage.

This study follows a secondary research approach to analyze policy documents, statistical data, and accessibility audits to determine systemic gaps and the efficacy of government interventions. The findings reveal poor policy implementation and stakeholder consultation on one hand and socio-economic marginalization of persons with disability on the other.

This includes recommendations on strengthening the implementation of policies, integrating universal design principles, assistive technologies, and multistakeholder collaborations. Socio-cultural awareness related to misogynistic cultural values needs to be addressed through inclusive ableism. The paper, therefore, underlines that nested and holistic approaches toward accessibility at the local scale are direly needed for the city of Lucknow. Addressing these challenges shall enable the city to be a role model for inclusive urban development and ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

**Keywords:** Disabilities, Accessibilities, Urban infrastructure, Ableism, theoretical model, medical model, UNCRPD, AIC.

## 1. Introduction

Accessibility within urban spaces is considered a fundamental human right by most if not all, nations worldwide since it is an opportunity to attain inclusion and equality. It will enable all people, regardless

of physical, sensory, or cognitive limitations in their ability, to move around, participate in, and use urban infrastructure. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessibility is a demand and pre-condition for fully realizing human rights by persons with disabilities (Kanchi, 2022). This has been further emphasized in making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable in SDG 11, where focus has been placed on accessible urban spaces for all.

Lucknow represents a critical case study as the capital of Uttar Pradesh due to its identity in dual strands: the historical city and a fast urbanizing metropolis. With more than 2.8 million populations as per the Census 2011, out of which about 80,893 persons have disabilities, the city reflects opportunities and challenges in addressing accessibility issues (Government of India 2011). Despite the grand progress of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, Accessible India Campaign, 2015-there are barriers to meaningful participation in crucial areas, including public buildings and transportation systems (Mahapatra et al., 2021).

This study precisely identifies the main issues affecting accessibility for persons with disabilities in Lucknow and critically reviews the adequacy of existing government policies. The research goes beyond physical barriers into socio-economic challenges, societal attitudes, and technological solutions defining accessibility. Embedded in the particular urban context of Lucknow, this study highlights some actionable insights that might help bridge the gaps between policy and practice while pushing further inclusive urban development. Addressing these challenges is just as crucial for Lucknow as it would serve as a role model for scores of other Indian cities grappling with the same issue.

## **2. Background**

Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, is a rapidly growing metropolis. The rich historical heritage has juxtaposed traditional architectural components with modern urban growth and exposed its unique challenges for access. According to Census 2011, Lucknow is home to more than 2.8 million people, of which around 80,893 persons have some or other kind of disabilities, accounting for a substantial portion of the city's demographic profile (Andre et al., 2020). The pains persons with disabilities face in an urban metropolis like Lucknow outline the incidence of historic urban design, socio-economic conditions, and gaps in the implementation of policies.

The Indian government has responded to these challenges with several landmark initiatives. The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya et al.) was launched in 2015 to make public infrastructure, transportation, and communication systems usable by persons with disability (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015). The complementing initiative in this regard is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, wherein equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities are ordained, besides introducing comprehensive accessibility guidelines (Government of India, 2016). However, how far these initiatives function locally remains inconsistent, particularly in cities like Lucknow.

Socioeconomic factors also determine access. For instance, in Lucknow, there is poor access to the realms of education, employment opportunities, and health facilities, which are often compounded by societal attitudes coupled with systemic ableism. The grossly inaccessible public transport system and poorly designed government buildings restrict free mobility and limit opportunities for active economic participation (Loring, 2020). Apart from that, persons with disabilities often have their needs ignored within urban planning strategies and policies by policymakers, thus creating several infrastructural gaps in the inclusiveness of city development plans.

Lucknow possesses a peculiar blend of geography and history, which is manifested in instances of accessibility. Narrow lanes, highly populated cities, and heritage building structures pose unique challenges in retrofitting infrastructure for the accessibility standard of modern days, Fenske (2019) stated. While the emerging metropolitan identity offers the potential for innovative city solutions, this growth necessitates region-specific strategies to be conjured out comprehensively in order to tackle these unique challenges across diverse fields.

Against this background, the present study becomes very timely in assessing the effectiveness of policies in Lucknow and addressing issues concerned with accessibility, as Pollet and Shepherd (2022) stated. This, therefore, aligns with global frameworks like UNCRPD and SDG 11 but also brings inclusive urban development tailored according to the city's socioeconomic realities and geographical makeups.

### **3. Literature Review**

The literature surrounding accessibility for persons with disabilities highlights diverse theoretical frameworks, global standards, and practical challenges. In the context of Indian urban spaces, especially Lucknow, it is essential to consider the intersection of social, economic, and technical dimensions that shape accessibility.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Frameworks**

The two models that populate most discourses in top-down discussions of disability include the medical model and the social model. The medical model places its locus on one's impairments, viewing disabilities as limitations imposed on an individual that require medical intervention (Dandoulaki et al., 2023). This perspective helps ensure that healthcare needs are being met. However, it often needs to be revised to consider the impacts of social and environmental contributions in creating barriers.

Contrasting this, the social model conceptualized by various scholars, such as Oliver 1990, suggests that disability is not located within an individual but is a product of society in general, structurally and attitudinally, leading to the exclusion of those with impairments. This model emphasizes removing physical and attitudinal barriers in a manner that secures equality and inclusion. The UNCRPD aligns with the social model, recognizing accessibility as a critical human right and calling for inclusive environments that enable equal participation. United Nations (2008).

#### **3.2 Global Standards and Policies**

Global frameworks like the UNCRPD and SDG 11 advocate for inclusion in urban spaces. SDG 11 mainly encompasses inclusion, safety, resilience, and sustainability of cities and human settlements, with accessibility as one of the foundational stones (United Nations, 2015 ). These frameworks inspire a guiding vision for countries like India, where rapid urbanization, more often than not, overlooks inclusivity.

This was furthered in India by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016, which expanded the definition of disability and laid binding standards regarding accessibility. The Accessible India Campaign serves to make public spaces and transportation systems accessible through the use of universal design principles (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015). All these remain on a small scale because of gaps in their implementations and enforcement.

#### **3.3 Accessibility in Indian Urban Contexts**

Contrary to the progress in legislation, accessibility research in Indian cities indicates numerous barriers. For example, in a recent article, Mahapatra et al. (2021) note that transport systems and public buildings remain inaccessible in most cases due to the non-implementation of accessibility guidelines. Accessibility problems are further exacerbated by narrow lanes, poorly designed public areas, and ignorance in

Lucknow. Further, societal attitude construction from ableism tends to marginalize persons with disabilities in their contribution to public life.

### **3.4 Technological Innovations in Accessibility**

The help of technological changes goes a long way in reducing gaps for more access. Allowing people with hearing and visual impairments and those who cannot walk or rely on wheels for mobility, assistive technologies like screen readers and hearing aids or other supports for mobility impairment increase such individuals' independence (Hamraie, 2017). In urban planning, universal design brings inclusivity to the forefront of thinking when planning public spaces. Intelligent city plans incorporate technology-based plans such as tactile pathways, audio navigation systems, and accessible public transportation, which is particularly applicable in cities like Lucknow (Vinodan et al., 2023).

These technological solutions, however, need to be adapted to the regional context if they will ever become useful in addressing the local challenge. For example, retrofitting heritage structures in Lucknow demands an innovative approach that would balance preservation and accessibility.

### **3.6 Existing Research Gaps**

Even though there is considerable literature on global accessibility standards and disability rights, few studies have invariably focused on Indian cities like Lucknow. Most studies fail to consider the regional discrepancies and problems at the local level, as the meta of pertaining research being done in a broader national or international framework (Wolfowitz et al., 2021). This generates a critical gap in understanding how policies can be framed to respond to the socio-culturally unique geographical context of Indian cities.

## **4. Research Objectives**

The main objective of the present study is to assess the accessibility problems of persons with disabilities in Lucknow city, examining the efficacy of existing government policies to address such challenges. The present study explicitly underlines how infrastructure, policy implementation, socio-economic environment, and technological changes interact to propose actionable solutions.

### **4.1 Assess the Accessibility of Public Infrastructure in Lucknow**

Public buildings and transport systems in Lucknow have critical touchpoints for accessibility. Research has identified that despite the facilitation of national campaigns such as the Accessible India Campaign, there remains a gap in translating accessibility standards into urban infrastructure (Kett et al., 2020). This objective, therefore, looks to analyze the state of the current physical infrastructure in Lucknow regarding confirmation to accessibility, such as ramps, elevators, pathways with tactile markings, and visual signals with hearing facilities in tune with the following references: Mahapatra et al., 2021.

### **4.2 Evaluate the Effectiveness of Government Initiatives**

Government policies, including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and various local urban development initiatives, have stipulated standards to ensure accessibility. The focus of this objective is to critically review how such initiatives are operationalized within Lucknow, determining whether such initiatives have managed to bring about diurnal change in the lives of persons with disabilities and highlighting deterrents in policy implementation (Rudra et al., 2017). Such initiatives that had brought diurnal change to persons with disabilities were identified and highlighted deterrents in policy implementation.

### **4.3 Analyze Socio-Economic Implications of Accessibility Barriers**

Accessibility is closely tagged with socio-economic inclusion. Physical barriers in the use of public places and transportation reduce access to education, job opportunities, and social activities for persons with

disabilities. According to Das (2020), this ideal studies the broader socio-economic impacts of these issues within Lucknow, focusing on the most vulnerable groups.

#### **4.4 Examine Stakeholder Roles in Accessibility Development.**

Various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, urban planners, and community groups, are critical in addressing accessibility issues (Imrie, 2001). This objective investigates stakeholder contributions and gaps in collaboration to develop a cohesive strategy for inclusivity in Lucknow.

### **5. Methodology**

This research employs a secondary research methodology, analyzing existing data and literature to identify accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities in Lucknow. Given time constraints and the availability of comprehensive secondary data, the study bypasses primary data collection methods like interviews or surveys and instead relies on a robust desk-based approach (Khalil et al., 2021).

#### **5.1 Research Design**

The methodology is structured around content and comparative analysis, examining policy documents, statistical datasets, and published research. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of accessibility issues and evaluates the effectiveness of existing policies in Lucknow's urban context (Bowen, 2009).

#### **5.2 Data Sources**

##### **1. Statistical Data:**

- Census 2011 data provides demographic insights into persons with disabilities in Lucknow (Government of India, 2011).
- National Sample Survey (NSS) 76th reports on accessibility and disability-specific challenges in urban areas (NSSO, 2018).

##### **2. Policy Documents:**

- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 sets national accessibility standards (Government of India, 2016).
- Reports from the Accessible India Campaign detailing progress and implementation gaps (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015).

##### **3. Accessibility Audits:**

- Findings from organizations like Samarthyam, which conduct accessibility audits of public infrastructure, offering region-specific data on challenges and compliance (Samarthyam, 2021).

#### **5.3 Analysis Methods**

- **Content Analysis:** Identifying recurring themes and patterns in policy implementation and accessibility gaps in Lucknow's public buildings and transportation systems (Krippendorff, 2004).
- **Comparative Analysis:** Comparing Lucknow's accessibility initiatives with international benchmarks like the UNCRPD guidelines to evaluate alignment and effectiveness (United Nations, 2008).

This methodology provides a structured approach to examining Lucknow's accessibility landscape, emphasizing policy gaps, infrastructural challenges, and the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities.

### **6. Discussion Areas**

The discussion focuses on the critical accessibility themes for persons with disabilities in Lucknow. It assesses existing infrastructure, analyzes government policies, and examines the role of socio-economic

conditions and technological advancement. In this manner, the research underlines some critical challenges and opportunities regarding the issues of inclusiveness in urban areas.

### **6.1 Assessment of Accessibility to Public Infrastructure**

Similarly, in Lucknow, infrastructure-wise, access needs to be better provided for in public buildings and transport systems. Reports from the Accessible India Campaign showed that while the Railway Ministry assures full accessibility in railway stations, compliance with accessibility standards is very partial, especially in older buildings and transport hubs (Stillman & Bharule, 2020). Public transport systems, such as buses and metro stations in Lucknow, do not have facilities like ramps, tactile indicators, and auditory announcements, which are considered essential irreducible requirements for the mobility of persons with disabilities. Apart from this, poor maintenance of the existing facilities adds to these challenges.

Recent urban development projects related to the Lucknow Metro have tried incorporating some accessibility features into their design, though these are still ad hoc. Accessibility audits by Samarthyaam show that compliance is often based upon project funding and the stakeholders' priorities with limited consideration of universal design principles.

### **6.2 Impact of Government Policy on Accessibility**

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016, at best, lays down a legal framework for ensuring access in urban areas. Limited resources, a lack of personnel training, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms hinder implementation at the municipal level (Retnandari, 2022). While ambitions were high with the setting of the Accessible India Campaign, little has been achieved in Lucknow City due to delays in infrastructure retrofitting and a lack of inter-agency coordination.

Besides, there is inequity in the policy implementation throughout the regions. For example, city planning in cities like Lucknow often focuses only on economic growth and less on inclusivity, thus excluding the incorporation of accessibility concerns into such urban planning, Munzhedzi (2020) stated. In that respect, the better way to bridge these gaps would be to increase the much-needed boosting of policy enforcement, funding, and accountability among planners and policymakers of urban areas.

### **6.3 Role of Socio-Economic Conditions**

Socially, raising awareness and challenging deep-seated cultural attitudes are crucial in making it accessible. Ableism and common misconceptions about disabilities often alienate people and reduce their involvement in public life. Community programs and public campaigns are needed to make all citizens aware of universal design and the rights of persons with disabilities, Jaeger, P. T. (2018) stated. Including persons with disabilities in urban planning ensures their needs are authentically represented. The cooperation of governmental bodies, NGOs, and local communities can create a culture of empathy and proactive engagement (Harris et al., 2022). Inclusive policies in schools and workplaces ensure that diversity is celebrated, equal opportunities are availed, and foster social integration.

### **Economic Strengthening**

Economic Strengthening From the economic point of view, accessibility and socio-economic inclusion are closely linked. Persons with a disability usually face minimal accessibility to education and employment due to various physical and systemic barriers. An investment in accessible public infrastructure, such as ramps, tactile pathways, and auditory signals, is required in the transportation system (Warchoł-Jakubowska et al., 2024). Financial incentives can also be provided through subsidies for assistive technologies and accessible design in housing to mitigate the financial burden.

This can be further strengthened by policies encouraging businesses to employ people with disabilities through tax benefits or grants. By removing the economic barriers, cities can tap into a diverse talent pool, fostering innovation and productivity.

### **Technical Advancements**

Technological innovations and bridging gaps in accessibility require transforming experiences. Universal design at all levels of urban development and new developments is necessary if there is change. This leads to people with disabilities being able to actively and confidently navigate the infrastructure. Assisted technologies promote navigation for persons with diverse needs, such as screen reading, hearing aids, and a system that provides tactile information about navigation (Messaoudi et al., 2022). Innovative urban city features, including provision for up-to-the-minute traveling schedules in public transportation through a cellular phone or computers with application software for navigation, show an immediate need for them to also cater to access unique for persons with varied needs.

There is also a need for innovative solutions to retrofit heritage and older structures in cities like Lucknow with appropriate accessibility. For example, lightweight ramps and portable lifts will allow more access to historical sites (Altin et al., 2023). Accessibility projects driven by technology require collaboration between government agencies, technology developers, and private stakeholders. Affordable and scalable solutions, customized to regional contexts, can ensure wider adoption. For instance, introducing tactile paths in dense urban areas or mobile apps with audio navigation for historical cities can improve accessibility without excessive expenditure.

To realize meaningful progress on accessibility from social, economic, and technical perspectives, efforts need to be multistakeholder. It requires strengthened policy enforcement, community involvement, and focused investment in inclusive infrastructure and technology. The addressing of systemic barriers and socio-economic marginalization of persons with disabilities forms the bedrock for establishing cities like Lucknow as exemplars in sustainable and inclusive urban growth.

## **7. Findings**

The secondary research findings highlight several serious gaps and challenges in accessibility for persons with disabilities in Lucknow. The broad areas in which the findings can be categorized are systemic barriers, gaps in the implementation of policies, socio-economic implications, and collaboration among stakeholders.

### **7.1 Accessibility - Systemic Barriers**

Access audits and reports show that public infrastructures in Lucknow fail to meet the criteria provided under both the Accessible India Campaign and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Public transport systems are no different: buses and metro services fail to provide these minimal features for accessibility, like ramps, tactile paths, and audio announcements. Public buildings are not accessible, most especially in older and historical areas, due to a lack of retrofitted features and ill-maintained infrastructure (O'Connell et al., 2022).

Added to these are the systemic barriers involving geographical constraints such as narrow lanes and heavy urban development. Retrofitting heritage structures is even more difficult because efforts at maintaining architectural integrity often run counter to the requirement for accessibility.

### **7.2 Gap in the Implementation of Policies**

Although these national policies, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, give a legally inclusive framework, their implementations in the local context of Lucknow remain in serendipity. Delays in

retrofitting public infrastructure and interdepartmental coordination hamper the progress. For instance, the feeble progress of the Accessible India Campaign in Lucknow is an offshoot of limited resources with no sufficient monitoring mechanisms.

### **7.3 Socioeconomic Implications**

Accessibility barriers have deep-seated implications for the socio-economic lives of persons with disability in Lucknow. For instance, this reduced mobility affects their access to education, employment, and health care and, through that, helps perpetuate poverty and exclusion cycles. In particular, women and persons from the lower economic classes with disability are among the most discriminated groups and face added challenges because of their intersecting vulnerabilities.

### **4. Stakeholder Collaboration Efficiency**

Improvement in accessibility requires the involvement of several stakeholders, including a governmental agency, NGOs, and urban planners. However, the study's findings indicate more functional coordination among stakeholders regarding this issue in Lucknow. A few NGOs and activist groups have gone ahead with local accessibility projects. However, they cannot bear more fruitful results due to a lack of consistent government support and community engagement.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Conclusion**

According to the researchers, accessibility would ensure inclusivity and equity for persons with disabilities in urban areas, specifically Lucknow. Though policy frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and initiatives such as the Accessible India Campaign have noted this issue, progress is extremely slow in Lucknow because of system barriers, gaps in implementation, and socioeconomic factors. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2015. The city's geographic constraints and heritage infrastructure complicate efforts toward universal accessibility.

Indeed, the findings indicate that there are implications of broad socio-economic access because of gaps in accessibility that reduce opportunities for education, paid work, and healthcare for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, inadequate collaboration among stakeholders involved in government agencies, NGOs, and urban planners themselves is a constraint to access better. It requires a consolidated, local approach: policy enforcement, technological advancement, and community involvement.

### **8.1 Recommendations**

#### **1. Strengthen Policy Enforcement**

Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the accessibility standards are adhered to in Lucknow.

Ensure an appropriate budgetary allocation for retrofitting Public Infrastructure and incorporating accessibility features into heritage buildings.

#### **2. Apply Principles of Universal Design**

Firmly integrate universal design into urban planning, emphasizing making new development accessible. Work with accessibility experts to retrofit existing infrastructure in such a way that respects heritage preservation and yet seeks to be inclusive for all.

#### **3. Leverage Technological Innovations**

Expand the use of assistive technology disparities in public spaces: tactile pathways, real-time audio announcements, and navigation apps that improve accessibility.

Introduce intelligent city solutions that precisely address Lucknow-specific urban contexts using affordable and scalable technologies.

#### 4. Encourage Stakeholder Collaboration

Enhance coordination among government agencies, NGOs, urban planners, and the local community during the design and implementation phases of accessibility initiatives.

Organize capacity-building programs among urban planners and policymakers to raise awareness and skills related to inclusive urban design.

#### 5. Increase Awareness in Society

Launch public awareness campaigns that counter attitudes in society based on ableism and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Encouraging community-based programs that participate in planning and decision-making involving persons with disabilities.

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