[**Access and mobility rights**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1755895/access-and-mobility-rights)

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“I CANNOT walk. The university administration has allocated a hostel room to me on the top floor and there are no lifts in our hostel. I sit on the stairs and drag myself up or down the stairs when I have to go back to my room or have to go to class or the cafeteria. So, I try to come down in the morning and not go up till after dinner. This is so difficult to do. Sometimes I just miss classes or meals on days when I do not have the strength to face multiple flights of stairs.”

This is a student at a local university. He cannot walk. There are rooms on the ground floor in his hostel too. Though he has applied multiple times for those rooms, he has not been allocated one on the ground floor. Instead, more politically connected or economically stronger students get those rooms.

What is clearly needed is public investment in the basic rights of movement for people with disabilities. Why does the university not have lifts or ramps? It is their duty to provide these; it is not an issue of extending courtesy or charity.

The student should be allocated a room on the ground floor, of course. This should be part of university regulations. And it is the right of the individual to have access to and the obligation of the institution to provide reasonable accommodation. But it does not happen in too many instances and too many places in Pakistan.

There is little public investment in the rights of movement for people with disabilities.

“The elevator that students can use does not stop on all floors; it goes to the top floor only. My classes are on the floors in between. I asked the management if I could use the elevator reserved for the faculty. The initial answer was a no. Eventually, they did relent.” Even where facilities are present and there are possibilities, getting reasonable accommodation is a struggle. It demands tenacity and perseverance from the concerned person, who, because of a lifetime of experience, might be reluctant to persist.

This lack of investment in public goods to ensure the rights of movement of persons with physical disabilities, a responsibility of both society and the state, shows a glaring disregard for individual rights and human dignity. A child we interviewed, who studies at a special institute that has been created for the education of children with physical disabilities, told us that though the institute has buses, it does not have ramps on buses, nor does the institute hire people who can help children get on the bus or get off it.

“We have to drag ourselves up the steps to get on the bus and we have to jump down the steps and onto our wheelchair when we have to get off the bus. A number of my friends have injured themselves while getting off.”

Even where ramps have been made, and only a few places have them, most of the time they are too steep or difficult to navigate for a person on a wheelchair. It makes it clear that in many places ramps are made to comply with regulations rather than the spirit of facilitating persons with disabilities.

The lack of public goods provision leads to a subtler issue as well — one that has a more profound impact on the quality of life of persons with disabilities. When ramps are not present, when it is difficult to navigate floors on a wheelchair, when doors have not been widened to accommodate wheelchairs or when bathrooms have not been fitted accordingly, persons with disabilities have to depend on others to help them do things they could have done on their own had proper investment been made. This has an impact on everyday life but it has a greater impact on dignity and self-esteem.

A young person we interviewed dropped out of college because he needed his brother or father to drop him to college in the morning and pick him up every afternoon. With both brother and father working, it was just not possible so he dropped out. He now wants to apply as a private candidate, but without academic support and peer interaction that he had when he went to college, it is much harder. His social life has been severely impacted as well.

Another young person mentioned that his parents do not have the resources to carry out the needed changes even in the room and bathroom he uses, or to buy equipment that could facilitate his mobility and make him independent and his life more comfortable. He has to ‘depend’ on his brother to go to the bathroom. This makes him feel terrible. If the brother returns late from work, accidents happen. He gets embarrassed. His brother, though a very loving person, sometimes gets tired or frustrated. The brother feels he cannot have a life of his own as he has to be home at certain times to help the brother with disabilities and do other chores as well. “It feels as if I am always imposing on others, and whether they do anything, willingly or lovingly or not, I feel I am burden on them.”

The larger society does not help either. Most of the time, relatives and acquaintances increase the social pressure. One student mentioned that even when she does well academically, she feels others can only see her disability, and more often than not, feel that even her good performance is due to the ‘pity’ teachers might have felt for her.

The provision of public goods related to access and movement are a right. They impact the lives of all citizens but for people with physical disabilities it is a make-or-break matter ie the difference between being able to go to school, college or place of work or being confined at home, the difference between having a social life and not having one. But we are failing miserably, as a society and a state, in providing these rights to our fellow citizens.

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