



POLICE STATION ACCESSIBILITY AND THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: FROM PHYSICAL ACCESS TO ACCESSIBLE JUSTICE IN INDIA

Law

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ABSTRACT

Background: Police stations are often the first institutional point of contact with the criminal justice system for victims, complainants, witnesses and accused persons. For persons with disabilities, inaccessible infrastructure, communication barriers and absence of procedural accommodation may transform a formally available justice system into one that cannot be independently or effectively accessed. **Objective:** This study examines police-station accessibility as a component of access to justice for persons with disabilities in India, using documentary evidence generated through Right to Information (RTI) proceedings and subsequent administrative intervention in Rajasthan, interpreted against the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and India's sector-specific accessibility standards for police infrastructure. **Methods:** A documentary legal-policy case-study design was employed. Primary material included an official RTI response issued by the Office of the Additional Superintendent of Police, Udaipur City, Rajasthan, dated 24 June 2026, and documented subsequent representations and administrative communications concerning disability-friendly police stations in Rajasthan. These materials were analysed alongside statutory provisions, notified accessibility standards, judicial decisions and international literature concerning disability and law-enforcement interaction. **Results:** The Udaipur police authority responded that the accessibility-related information requested through RTI was not maintained in the office in any form and therefore substantive information could not be provided. The importance of this response lies not in proving physical non-accessibility of any particular police station, but in demonstrating a measurement and accountability gap: the relevant office could not produce a structured accessibility dataset responsive to the request. Subsequent representations elevated the issue to Rajasthan's senior police and Home Department structures and generated administrative communications concerning disability-friendly policing. **Conclusion:** Police accessibility should be understood as a continuous justice-access pathway, not as a building feature. Compliance requires three interdependent dimensions: physical accessibility, procedural and communication accessibility, and measurable institutional governance. Police administrations should establish station-wise accessibility registers, periodic independent audits, disability-sensitive operating procedures, trained accessibility personnel, accessible complaint mechanisms and publicly reportable corrective-action plans.

KEYWORDS

Disability; Police Stations; Accessibility; Access To Justice; Persons With Disabilities; Rpwd Act; Police Reform; Reasonable Accommodation; Rti; Rajasthan; Criminal Justice; Universal Design

INTRODUCTION

Access to a police station can determine whether an individual is able to report violence, seek immediate protection, register information regarding an offence, participate in an investigation, give evidence, obtain assistance or challenge unlawful conduct. For persons with disabilities, therefore, accessibility of police services is not merely an infrastructure issue. It is an essential component of access to justice.

A person using a wheelchair may confront stairs or an unusable ramp. A person with visual disability may encounter inaccessible signage or documents. A deaf person may require sign-language interpretation or another effective communication mechanism. A person with intellectual or psychosocial disability may require information in an understandable format, additional time, communication support or procedural accommodation. A person with multiple disabilities may encounter several of these barriers simultaneously.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises accessibility under Article 9 and effective access to justice, including appropriate procedural accommodations at investigative and preliminary stages, under Article 13. Article 13 also calls for appropriate training of police and prison personnel. Article 16 requires protection from exploitation, violence and abuse and disability-sensitive mechanisms capable of identifying, investigating and prosecuting such abuse. [1–3]

India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act) incorporates these principles into domestic law. Its statutory framework addresses equality, non-discrimination, protection from abuse and exploitation, access to justice, reasonable accommodation and accessibility. Police accessibility is therefore not peripheral to policing; it is part of lawful and effective policing itself.

Research Problem

Accessibility assessments frequently focus on whether a building contains a ramp. Such an approach is inadequate for police stations.

- a person may be unable to reach the station from the road or parking area;
- an entrance may be technically ramped but not independently usable;

- a reception or complaint desk may be inaccessible to wheelchair users;
- access to toilets or upper floors may be absent;
- tactile guidance or accessible signage may be unavailable;
- persons with hearing disabilities may be unable to communicate effectively with officers;
- information may not be available in accessible formats;
- staff may not understand disability-sensitive procedures;
- interpreters or special educators may not be rapidly available; and
- complaint mechanisms may remain inaccessible electronically or remotely.

The central research question is: How should police-station accessibility be conceptualised, measured and governed so that persons with disabilities can effectively exercise their right of access to justice?

A secondary question arises from the Rajasthan documentary evidence: What does it signify when a police authority cannot provide structured accessibility information because such information is not maintained in its records?

Methods

Study Design

This study uses a documentary legal-policy case-study design. It is not presented as a physical accessibility audit of all police stations in Udaipur or Rajasthan, and it does not estimate the prevalence of inaccessible police stations. This distinction is necessary to preserve methodological validity.

Primary Documentary Evidence

The principal primary document examined was an official communication from the Office of the Additional Superintendent of Police, City, District Udaipur, Rajasthan, dated 24 June 2026, issued in response to an application under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The communication stated in substance that the information sought through the applicant's questions was not maintained in any form by the office and therefore no substantive information could be supplied.

The study also considered documented subsequent representations and

communications demonstrating escalation of police-station accessibility concerns to senior Rajasthan Police and Home Department authorities. Supporting records document administrative intervention concerning the objective of making police stations more disability-friendly.

Secondary Sources

- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016;
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017 and notified accessibility standards;
- Ministry of Home Affairs accessibility standards for police stations and associated infrastructure;
- Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023;
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Supreme Court jurisprudence on disability and accessibility; and
- peer-reviewed literature concerning police interaction with persons with disabilities.

Analytical Framework

The evidence was analysed through three domains: (A) physical accessibility - approach, parking, entrance, internal circulation, reception, toilets, vertical movement, signage and safety; (B) procedural and communication accessibility - ability to report an offence, communicate with officers, receive information, participate in investigation and obtain procedural accommodation; and (C) governance accessibility - availability of institutional data, responsible officers, accessibility audits, staff training, grievance procedures, monitoring and time-bound remediation.

RESULTS

The RTI Response Revealed a Data-Governance Gap

The most important finding of the Udaipur RTI response is not that a particular police station was proven inaccessible. No such inference should be made from this document alone. The important finding is that the responding police office stated that the requested accessibility-related information was not maintained in any form.

This exposes a different type of accessibility deficit: institutional invisibility of accessibility within administrative records. If an administration does not maintain structured information about accessibility, fundamental management questions become difficult to answer: how many police stations are fully accessible; which require retrofitting; which have compliant ramps, accessible toilets, reserved parking, tactile pathways and accessible signage; which have undergone audits; which officers have received training; what budgets have been sanctioned; and what remedial deadlines exist?

Absence of compiled information does not itself prove absence of facilities. However, it restricts the administration's capacity to measure, compare, prioritise, monitor and publicly demonstrate compliance.

Administrative Escalation Followed Disability-Rights Advocacy

The documentary record shows that police accessibility subsequently became the subject of representations before higher Rajasthan authorities and official communications involving the police/Home Department structure. The significance is institutional: an individual accessibility question moved from information request to identification of administrative-data limitations, then to representation and higher-level administrative attention.

Specific Police-Accessibility Standard Already Exists

India does not face an absence of technical guidance. The Ministry of Home Affairs developed sector-specific Accessibility Standards and Guidelines for MHA Specific Built Infrastructures and Associated Services for Police Stations, Prisons and Disaster Mitigation Centres. These standards conceptualise an accessible police station as considerably more than a building with a ramp.

- accessible routes and pathways;
- accessible parking;
- accessible building entrance;
- reception areas;
- corridors;
- elevators/lifts where required;
- staircases;
- accessible toilets;
- drinking-water facilities;

- signage and tactile guidance;
- internal movement; and
- disability-sensitive assistance.

The Legal Architecture of Accessible Policing Equality and Reasonable Accommodation

Section 3 of the RPwD Act establishes equality and non-discrimination. Reasonable accommodation refers to necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden and that enable persons with disabilities to enjoy or exercise rights equally with others.[4]

In policing, reasonable accommodation may include relocating an interaction to an accessible area, permitting electronic communication, arranging an interpreter, providing communication assistance, allowing additional time, modifying ordinary procedures where necessary, providing documents in an accessible format, or recording a complaint at another location where the law so requires.

Accessibility and reasonable accommodation are related but different: accessibility is anticipatory and systemic; reasonable accommodation responds to the requirements of a particular individual. A lawful policing system requires both.

Protection from Abuse, Violence and Exploitation

Section 7 of the RPwD Act has direct relevance to police officers. Where a police officer receives a complaint or otherwise becomes aware of abuse, violence or exploitation of a person with disability, the statute requires provision of specified information concerning protection, available institutions, legal aid and complaint rights, while preserving the officer's duty to proceed according to law where information concerning a cognizable offence is received.[4] Police disability obligations therefore extend well beyond architecture.

Access to Justice

Section 12 requires the appropriate government to ensure that persons with disabilities can access courts, tribunals, authorities, commissions and bodies having judicial, quasi-judicial or investigative powers without discrimination.[4] Police investigation is therefore directly connected with disability access to justice. Article 13 of the UNCRPD reinforces this by extending accessible justice to investigative and preliminary stages and calling for training of police personnel.[2]

Accessibility of Public Buildings

Police stations fall within the broader statutory and policy framework governing public-building accessibility. Sections 40-46 of the RPwD Act establish accessibility duties relating to standards, built infrastructure and services.[4]

Procedural Accommodation Under the BNSS

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, in force from 1 July 2024, contains important disability-related procedural accommodations. Section 173 permits information relating to a cognizable offence to be communicated irrespective of territorial area and recognises electronic communication subject to statutory requirements. In specified offences where the informant is temporarily or permanently mentally or physically disabled, the information must be recorded at the person's residence or another convenient place of choice, in the presence of an interpreter or special educator as appropriate, with videography and subsequent statutory safeguards.[6] These provisions demonstrate a fundamental principle of accessible justice: sometimes the justice system must move toward the person instead of requiring the person to overcome the barriers of the justice institution.

Accessibility as a Fundamental-Rights Issue

The constitutional significance of accessibility has increasingly been recognised by the Supreme Court of India. In *Rajive Raturi v Union of India*, decided on 8 November 2024, the Supreme Court emphasised that accessibility cannot remain dependent merely upon recommendatory standards and required a mandatory accessibility framework consistent with the RPwD Act.[7]

The implications for policing are substantial. Police stations are not ordinary service establishments. They are locations where the State exercises some of its most coercive and protective powers. An inaccessible police station can restrict protection, liberty, evidence, complaint, investigation and access to justice.

Accessibility Must Extend Beyond Locomotor Disability**Persons With Visual Disabilities**

- tactile guiding pathways;
- Braille and high-contrast signage;
- accessible electronic documents;
- verbal orientation;
- screen-reader-compatible digital complaint systems; and
- assistance that preserves autonomy.

Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons

- Indian Sign Language interpretation;
- text-based communication;
- visual information systems;
- captioned audiovisual material;
- hearing-assistance systems where applicable; and
- rapid interpreter-access protocols.

Persons With Intellectual Disabilities

International research identifies recurring concerns involving inadequate specialised training, difficulty identifying intellectual disability, communication challenges and insufficient procedural support during law-enforcement encounters.[8,9] These findings reinforce the need for accessible information, trained personnel and appropriate support.

Persons With Psychosocial Disabilities

Police personnel require training that avoids stereotyping disability as dangerousness, incapacity or unreliability. Communication, de-escalation, dignity and supported decision-making may become central to a rights-compliant interaction.

Persons With Multiple Disabilities

Accessibility cannot operate through single-disability silos. A wheelchair user who is also deaf may simultaneously require physical access and sign-language communication. The system should respond to the person rather than requiring the person to fit an administrative category.

The Three-Layer Model of Accessible Policing**Layer 1: Accessible Police Infrastructure**

- accessible approach and parking;
- entrance, ramp, doors and thresholds;
- reception/complaint counter;
- corridors and vertical circulation;
- accessible toilet and drinking water;
- tactile pathways and Braille/high-contrast/pictorial signage;
- seating and emergency evacuation; and
- accessibility of all public-facing service areas.

Layer 2: Accessible Police Procedure

- accessible complaint registration and electronic reporting where lawful;
- communication assistance, interpreters and special educators;
- procedural accommodation and accessible documents;
- disability-sensitive interviewing and victim support;
- reasonable accommodation for witnesses and accused persons; and
- protection mechanisms appropriate to disability, gender and age.

Layer 3: Accessibility Governance

- station-wise accessibility database;
- date and outcome of last accessibility audit;
- deficiencies identified and remedial work approved;
- responsible officer and sanctioned expenditure;
- implementation deadline;
- staff training status;
- availability of interpreters or support services;
- accessibility complaints received; and
- status of corrective action.

The third layer is particularly important in light of the Udaipur RTI response: what is not measured is difficult to govern.

Proposed Police Station Accessibility Index

For administrative and research purposes, police accessibility could be measured through a standardised Police Station Accessibility Index (PSAI). Rather than declaring a station simply accessible or not accessible, the index could assess five domains.

Domain	Indicative Weight
Physical approach and building access	25%
Internal facilities and sanitation	20%
Communication and sensory accessibility	20%
Procedural accommodation and victim services	20%
Governance, training and accountability	15%

Each police station could receive a publicly reportable score accompanied by mandatory rectification of critical barriers. Certain deficiencies - such as inability to enter the station, absence of any accessible complaint mechanism, or inability to provide legally required communication support - should be treated as critical failures rather than being neutralised by a favourable aggregate score.

Policy Recommendations**Create a National Police Accessibility Audit**

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Bureau of Police Research and Development and State police organisations should undertake a standardised accessibility audit of police stations across India using the notified MHA framework.

Maintain Station-Level Accessibility Registers

Every police station should maintain a standardised record containing the status of all major accessibility indicators and update it following every audit and infrastructural modification.

Publish Accessibility Information

State police websites should allow a person with disability to identify whether a station has step-free entry, accessible parking, an accessible toilet, lift access, communication support, accessible complaint facilities and a disability/accessibility contact officer.

Designate Accessibility Nodal Officers

Police districts should have identifiable officers responsible for disability inclusion and accessibility monitoring. Individual stations should also identify personnel capable of coordinating reasonable accommodation.

Integrate Disability Into Police Training

Training should address disability rights, reasonable accommodation, communication, intellectual and psychosocial disability, deaf and blind complainants, women and children with disabilities, intersectionality, procedural safeguards, accessible documentation and protection against violence and exploitation.

Establish Interpreter and Communication-Support Networks

District-level panels of qualified sign-language interpreters, special educators and other communication-support professionals should be pre-identified and available through clear response protocols.

Undertake User-Based Accessibility Testing

Technical inspection alone may not reveal functional barriers. Audits should include persons with locomotor, visual, hearing, intellectual and other relevant disabilities.

Link Budgeting With Audit Findings

Every identified barrier should be connected with a chain of deficiency -> responsible authority -> budget -> deadline -> completion verification.

Introduce Accessibility Into Police Performance Governance

Accessibility should become part of police modernisation, infrastructure assessment, citizen-service evaluation and administrative review rather than remain an isolated welfare activity.

Audit the Entire Justice Journey

Future research should examine the complete pathway from reporting to police interaction, investigation, medical examination, prosecution, court and victim support. Accessibility failure at any stage can undermine the entire right to justice.

DISCUSSION

The central finding of this research is conceptual. The question is not simply whether police stations possess accessibility infrastructure. The deeper question is whether police institutions possess the administrative capacity to know whether they are accessible.

The Udaipur RTI response demonstrates the distinction. An office's inability to provide accessibility information because such data are not

maintained does not establish that every police station under its jurisdiction lacks accessible facilities. But neither is it a trivial administrative response. Accessibility obligations are difficult to implement systematically without information regarding existing facilities, deficiencies, audits, budgets and corrective timelines.

The progression from the RTI exercise to higher administrative attention in Rajasthan further demonstrates the potential of transparency mechanisms to catalyse disability-rights governance.

The appropriate objective is not to portray police institutions adversarially. Police officers themselves operate within infrastructure, staffing and resource constraints and may require institutional guidance, budgets and training. Indeed, police personnel may themselves have disabilities. The most productive approach is therefore to shift from individual blame toward measurable institutional compliance.

Accessible policing ultimately benefits police administration as well. Clear communication improves evidence; appropriate accommodations reduce misunderstanding; accessible infrastructure assists injured officers, elderly citizens and people with temporary mobility restrictions; disability-sensitive interviewing improves investigative reliability; and transparent accessibility systems increase institutional trust.

Limitations

The primary RTI document available for direct analysis from the Udaipur police archive was a single official response. It cannot establish the prevalence of physical accessibility or inaccessibility across Udaipur or Rajasthan police stations.

No direct architectural measurements of ramps, doors, toilets, counters or circulation spaces were conducted as part of this study.

The study did not interview persons with disabilities or police personnel.

Subsequent administrative communications establish institutional attention to the issue but do not by themselves establish completion of accessibility modifications across police stations.

Accordingly, the study's principal empirical finding concerns availability and governance of accessibility information rather than the physical compliance rate of police stations. Future research should combine official records with station-level physical audits and user-experience assessments.

Future Research

The next phase should undertake a cross-sectional accessibility assessment of police stations using the notified MHA standards. A robust study could include structured physical audits, photographs and measurements, interviews with station house officers, disability-rights knowledge assessment of police personnel, user-experience accessibility testing, availability of interpreters, digital accessibility testing, complaint-registration processes, comparison between urban and rural police stations, and follow-up assessment after remediation. Such research could generate a scalable evidence base linking police infrastructure, procedural accommodation and disability-rights governance.

CONCLUSION

The right to approach the police is fundamental to the practical enjoyment of numerous other rights. For a person with disability, a staircase may prevent entry, but an inaccessible justice system can create barriers far beyond a staircase.

India now possesses a substantial legal framework: the RPwD Act, the UNCRPD, criminal-procedure accommodations, sector-specific police accessibility standards and increasingly strong constitutional jurisprudence. The principal challenge is implementation.

The Udaipur documentary evidence reveals one particularly important implementation question: whether police administrations systematically maintain the information required to assess their own accessibility.

The next generation of disability-friendly policing should therefore

progress through three stages: accessible infrastructure -> accessible police procedure -> measurable accessibility governance.

A police station should not be described as accessible merely because a ramp has been constructed. It should be considered accessible when a person with disability can reach it, enter it, communicate within it, report an offence, receive protection, participate in investigation, use its facilities and exercise legal rights independently, safely and with dignity.

That is not merely accessible architecture. That is accessible justice.

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