

# RIGHT TO SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE FOOTPATHS: POLITY

**NEWS:** Take steps to ensure proper footpaths, Supreme Court tells States

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Supreme Court has recognized safe and accessible footpaths as part of the Right to Life under Article 21, directing all States, UTs, and the Centre to frame inclusive pedestrian-friendly footpath guidelines to ensure public safety and urban accessibility.

### Context:

- The Supreme Court of India has recently directed all States and Union Territories to frame and implement clear guidelines for safe and accessible footpaths, reaffirming the constitutional status of pedestrian rights under Article 21.

### Constitutional Protection for Pedestrian Rights:

#### 1. Linked to Article 21 – Right to Life with Dignity:

- The Court held that safe and accessible footpaths are integral to a dignified and secure life.
- Absence of walkable pedestrian spaces jeopardizes lives by forcing people onto roads, especially in congested urban areas.

#### 2. Article 14 – Right to Equality:

- Barrier-free footpaths are essential for ensuring equal mobility rights to persons with disabilities, elderly citizens, and other vulnerable groups.

#### 3. Nature of the Right:

Constitutional Right	Legal Right
Directly derived from the Constitution (Part III – Fundamental Rights)	Granted through legislative enactments
Enforceable under Articles 32 & 226	Enforced via ordinary courts of law
Example: Right to Footpaths under Article 21	Example: Right to Vote (under RPA), RTI

### Supreme Court's Directives:

## 1. State-Level Guidelines:

- All States and UTs must develop specific guidelines to ensure pedestrian-friendly footpaths.
- Guidelines must address width, surface quality, elevation, and obstructions.

## 2. Accessibility for All:

- Footpaths must be designed to be inclusive and barrier-free.
- Must comply with provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

## 3. Removal of Encroachments:

- Court instructed civic bodies to ensure removal of unauthorized vendors, objects, and construction from footpaths.
- Encroachments violate citizens' right to free movement and hinder pedestrian safety.

## 4. Central Government Involvement:

- The Centre must submit national-level guidelines on pedestrian infrastructure within two months.
- Ensures consistency and best practices across states.

## Significance of the Supreme Court Ruling:

### 1. Footpaths as Essential Infrastructure:

- Recognised footpaths as critical civic infrastructure, not optional urban features.
- Places a legal duty on authorities to design, build, and maintain them effectively.

### 2. Urban Livability and Inclusivity:

- Promotes pedestrian-first city planning that prioritizes safety, health, and accessibility.
- Aligns with global urban design principles like "Complete Streets" and "15-minute cities".

### 3. Vulnerable Group Protection:

- Addresses the disproportionate impact of poor footpath conditions on:
  - Persons with disabilities
  - Senior citizens
  - Children and low-income pedestrians

#### 4. Public Health and Environmental Benefits:

- Encourages non-motorized transport such as walking and cycling.
- Reduces vehicular emissions, traffic congestion, and promotes a healthier lifestyle.

#### Conclusion:

- This landmark SC directive elevates pedestrian safety to a constitutional right and pushes Indian cities toward inclusive, safe, and sustainable urban mobility.
- Ensuring implementation at state and city levels will be key to transforming urban environments and protecting citizen dignity.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/take-steps-to-ensure-proper-footpaths-supreme-court-tells-states/article69575980.ece>