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## Physical Disability Accommodations in Hong Kong

Walking in someone else's shoes has long been taught as a lesson in empathy. How might a kindergarten classmate feel if you took their toy without asking? How might a co-worker feel if you did not invite them out to lunch with the rest of the group? It always helps to consider how you might feel if you were put in someone else's circumstances, if you had to walk in someone else's shoes. However, what happens when being put in someone else's shoes means that you cannot walk? For a reporter from the *South China Morning post*, this was exactly the experience she had.

As performance art to depict the accessibility of public spaces, [photographer Kevin Cheng](#) set up a scavenger hunt in Wan Chai for wheelchair residents. The goal was to travel across the neighborhood and visit a list of random locations. Needless to say, the journey was difficult, and sometimes impossible for people with physical disabilities. At times, there weren't even ramps for the participants to cross the street on their own. At one point, a participant was stuck in the street, waiting for someone to help her. Kevin quotes, "Yes, there may be a barrier free facility. But then you set the entrance somewhere inconspicuous, and blocked by many fire doors... Something is done for wheelchair uses, but is the problem solved?" A reporter for the *South China Morning post*, who was able-bodied, was asked to make the journey in a wheelchair as well. In the video, she struggles in the wheelchair. She could not comprehend getting around in daily life without any substantial and thoughtful accommodations for her. For this population, however, accessibility is much more complex than physical accommodations. The lack of physical mobility and accommodations greatly affects social mobility in Hong Kong.

In a recent poll, only 9.9% of those questioned believed that there were adequate opportunities to move up the [social ladder in Hong Kong](#). This does not factor in those with physical disabilities. For many people, the common paths towards increased social mobility are education and employment. However, employment discrimination for those with physical disabilities is another barrier for those with physical disabilities in Hong Kong.

In fact, there have been many cases of employment discrimination for those with physical disabilities in Hong Kong. In 2013, Hong Kong revealed that they had a population of 196,400 disabled people that were also of working age; only [35% had jobs](#). This indicates that there is clearly some discriminatory force at play within the socio-economic landscape of Hong Kong. Several cases in recent years have come to light of discrimination towards employees with physical disabilities across Hong Kong. In one example, [Hongkong Post staff](#) have stated that their complaints were pushed aside and misunderstandings were blamed on their own disabilities. One employee with a cleft palate was told they had a "broken mouth".

While there are institutions created for those with physical disabilities in Hong Kong to find employment, they still have deep-seeded flaws. In October, Carrie Lam brought forth a plan to demolish the [Shine Skills Centre](#), a training school for those with physical disabilities. In another instance, [The Factory for the Blind](#), an company which employs Hong Kong residents with physical disabilities, received complaints from its employees that they experienced bullying

from supervisors when expressing concerns that a relocation of the office would make it too difficult to commute to work. These complaints have made it to the appropriate governmental offices in Hong Kong; however, the minimal responses from the government have not been enough to solve the problem.

In January, the [Equal Opportunities Commission \(EOC\)](#) of Hong Kong received complaints about a serious lack of accommodations for people with physical disabilities. It is not only the issue of institutions not having barrier free-access, it is also the issue of spaces not listing online whether or not they even have barrier free access. The needs of people with physical disabilities are not met, but they are also ignored. According to [section 26](#) of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, this lack of accommodation is illegal. However, spaces across Hong Kong, have made no move to make changes.

Access to education is another problem. In particular, Hong Kong University not only publically provides accommodations such as ramps, they also provide support and guidance in their [Academic Advising Center](#). However, the conversation about accommodations does not end here. What if you are uneducated? Are you not entitled to accommodation? Only [1.6%](#) of Hong Kong University's student population recorded that they have some sort of physical disability. This is already a low percentage, but it is also unknown how many of these 1.6% of students are residents of Hong Kong or just students who are in Hong Kong studying at the University.

Thus, social mobility is increasing difficult, if not nearly impossible for people with physical disabilities in Hong Kong. While lack of social mobility is a problem acknowledged by the legislative council of Hong Kong, physical disability is still not recognized. [In a research brief from 2015](#), published by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, physical disability is not mentioned. Instead, the research brief lumps all Hong Kong residents together; saying that everyone has difficulty in increasing social mobility. By ignoring the additional barriers that people with physical disabilities must face on the path to increased social mobility, the legislative council is not only reinforcing inequity in Hong Kong, but effectively erasing them from policy. By not including them in this brief and not recommending physical accommodations, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong is acting as if this population does not exist.

For people with physical disabilities in Hong Kong, getting by without physical barriers is a part of daily life. As Kevin Cheng, the photographer mentioned above, pointed out, people with disabilities still have to get from point A to point B like the rest of the population, but without accommodations such as ramps and available entrances, the journey is exponentially more difficult. As these accommodations should be provided by the state, this is an absolute failure on the part of the Hong Kong government. The hierarchical landscape of these barriers to educational, professional, and public spaces reinforces the fact that having a physical disability is a barrier to increased social mobility. These layers of discrimination seep into all facets of life for those who are physically disabled, and the fact that they are not addressed shows both a deep structural inequality and a lack of empathy not only the part of the Hong Kong government, but also on the part of Hong Kong residents. This summer, Hong Kong residents have shown the lengths they will go to protest and stand up for their rights, but there have been no moves to

stand up for the rights of the “hidden” physically disabled population of Hong Kong. Hong Kong, both the citizens and the Legislative Council, would benefit from attempting to walk in someone else’s shoes.