

# ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

## BACKGROUND

Persons with disabilities have the same rights as anyone else to participate in society: to attend school, to have family and friends, to have work, and take part in social political and cultural life and events. However, in practice, persons with disabilities are often not able to enjoy these rights and participate but find themselves excluded and discriminated against. The exclusion and discrimination are caused by a variety of barriers:

**ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS:** prejudice and stereotyping because of the disability.

**ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS:** including physical infrastructural and communication/information barriers such as absence of ramps, lifts; space for wheelchair manoeuvring; inadequate light and signage and different information formats for persons with visual, hearing and intellectual disabilities.

**INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS:** failure to address attitudinal and environmental barriers and to make provisions for persons with different disabilities in legislation, policies, strategies and national or organizational plans, data, etc.

**DISABILITY INCLUSION** is the goal to ensure persons with disabilities have equal and equitable access to services as available to persons without disabilities. Accessibility then, is an important pillar of disability inclusion.

**ACCESSIBILITY** is broadly understood as the ability to access or benefit from services, products and devices and/or environments. If any of those are accessible, it means all persons, with and without disabilities can access and benefit from it without barriers. Accessibility means ensuring that persons with disabilities are able, and enabled, to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.

This Brief focuses on accessibility and ways to assess to what degree accessibility is or needs to be addressed to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities. One way to assess and monitor accessibility is an **accessibility audit**.

This Brief provides key considerations for planning and conducting an accessibility audit and suggests resources covering a wide range of aspects and tools on how to undertake an audit.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND THE CRPD

Accessibility is one of the 8 standalone general principles of the **CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)**. The convention requires that State Parties “ensure to persons with disabilities **access to** on an equal basis with others, the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas”.

 Sustainable Development Goals - Targets

- 4.a.** Build disability sensitive education facilities
- 11.2** Provide accessible transport systems
- 11.7** Provide accessible public and green spaces



52% of schools are **not** wheelchair accessible

Accessibility makes education possible



61% of government websites are **not** accessible

Accessibility empowers users

## Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities



79% face difficulties or cannot evacuate during a disaster

Accessibility saves lives

Countries with accessibility standards or guidelines



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 9 requires States to ensure equal access to facilities and services

See full report: <http://bit.ly/un-reports-disability>

 United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

[Article 9](#) and [Article 2 Definitions](#) of the CRPD recognize accessibility as a precondition for the effective participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace and a vital tool for ensuring the enjoyment of equal rights. [Article 3 General Principles](#) also stresses on the importance of ensuring accessibility as a way of preventing discrimination, particularly against women and girls with disabilities. Accessible safehouses, services and procedures ensure women and girls' with disabilities protection against violence. General comment number 2 also highlights the necessity of gender consideration in terms of health care accessibility, particularly reproductive health care for women and girls with disabilities.

### ACCESSIBILITY AND THE SDGs

Several SDGs reference disability, including SDG 4 and SDG 11 which specifically mention disability in relation to accessibility.

**ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL.**



**4.A** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

**MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE.**



**11.2** By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

**11.7** By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

**ACCESSIBILITY** relates to physical environment, transport, and communications, including information and communication technologies/systems that enables persons with disabilities to access to facilities and services for the public, as well as work places, on an equal and equitable basis with others.

An **accessibility audit** would therefore assess what barriers may exist that reduce access and participation of persons with disabilities, and what measures can be taken to eliminate these barriers in regard to

- Buildings, roads, transport systems, outdoor and indoor facilities including schools, offices, hospitals, housing and a variety of work places.

- \* Within buildings and facilities, this may include the width of corridors and doors, space in toilets to accommodate wheelchair or mobility assistive devices and additional adaptations such as handrails and raised toilet seats, as well as lighting in rooms.

- \* It would also potentially include standing desks or height-adjustable desks and other assistive devices for persons with chronic pain, and degenerative joint/muscles diseases in offices.

- Information and communication, including emergency services or online/electronic services.

- \* This may refer to availability of hearing loops, Sign Language interpreters, alternative prints (large, Braille) and easy-read versions, as well as screen-reading software, and support to interaction and communication between staff.

While we often think about accessibility in the context of physical barriers, in a broader sense, accessibility can also be assessed in terms of attitudes by service providers and duty bearers that enable or hinder the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. Even if a building is physically accessible, and information is provided in accessible formats, a person with disability may still not receive a service because a service provider (staff) or a person in authority may choose to ignore, overlook and/or reject a person with disabilities. In addition, within offices, there also needs to be advisory support for colleagues on how to communicate with colleagues with hearing impairment to foster social and professional interaction. This could include investment in staff training in sign language.

Another consideration is the definition of gender. Mostly, gender is associated with binary male/female identity.

However, especially in the context of sanitation and washing facilities, persons who are transgender or identify as non-binary may face considerable risks when having to choose between a female or male assigned toilet. For a transgender man, who still has to manage menstruation, it may be inappropriate to go to a woman's toilet and unsafe to be found out in a men's toilet. In some countries, the solution has been to provide female/male assigned washrooms and toilets as well as an additional unisex or non-binary toilet that is wheelchair accessible and that therefore anyone can use. While this is a sensitive issue, especially where legislation does not condone different gender identities outside the binary range, such considerations need to be part of an intersectional approach.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

### BOX 1

#### PRIOR TO GETTING STARTED WITH ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS AND

#### CHANGES, MAKE SURE YOU:

- Know what accessibility legislation, regulations and standards apply to you
- Seek legal advice to help you ensure compliance requirements in your workplace are met
- Reach out to and engage with OPDs and accessibility professionals to help with doing accessibility audits
- Are familiar with the building contracts and owner/lease agreements. These may affect how, when and at what cost accessibility changes can be made
- Ensure you have resources for accessibility compliance throughout the process from initial specifications to tender and procurement
- Ensure that accessibility changes do no harm to the environment or the surrounding community. Aim for the best standards of accessibility with locally available resources to support local economies and environmental sustainability
- Contract certified construction or building professionals. Ensure that OPDs and accessibility experts work with them to ensure quality.

When undertaking an accessibility audit, there are a few key issues or questions to consider:

#### **WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS?**

They may or may not be in line with the CRPD (Art 9), but knowledge or legal obligations and potential gaps are important to consider

#### **WHO WILL CONDUCT THE AUDIT?**

Considerations must be around the responsibility and transparency. Should the audit be done by an external consultant/company or by a (team of) staff? What level of expertise and knowledge around intersectional factors for accessibility is required? Ideally, it should involve technical support from OPDs/OPAs but requires also a gender lens

#### **WHAT IS THE SCOPE AND BUDGET?**

To what level of detail is the audit exploring accessibility? Is the budget sufficient to conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit with an intersectional gender/age lens? Is there a budget to implement accessibility modifications based on the audit recommendations and follow up?

## **GUIDELINES**

There are four guidelines that might help with developing an accessibility audit

### **1. ACCESSIBILITY GO – A GUIDE TO ACTION**

<https://cbm-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Accessibility-GO-A-Guide-to-Action-WBU-CBM-Global.pdf>

This is an extensive guide, developed by CBM and The World Blind Union, in 2020 and covers 7 commitments to deliver on accessibility.

It follows a whole-of-organisation approach towards accessibility and describes how to progressively achieve 7 core commitments across built environments, information and communication, procurement of goods and services, training and capacity development, programmes, meetings and events, and recruitment and human resource management.

Probably, most relevant at this stage, would be chapters (commitments) 1,2, and 7 related to workplaces and premises; information and communications; and meetings and events.

Each commitment talks about why it is important, how it relates to international legislation/frameworks, details about the area, and includes a self-assessment template on the process for this specific commitment area.

It really is an extensive guide and may have too much information and scope but it is very clearly structured so you can easily find the information you need most.

Probably, most relevant at this stage, would be chapters (commitments) 1,2, and 7 related to workplaces and premises; information and communications; and meetings and events.

Each commitment talks about why it is important, how it relates to international legislation/frameworks, details about the area, and includes a self-assessment template on the process for this specific commitment area.

It really is an extensive guide and may have too much information and scope but it is very clearly structured so you can easily find the information you need most.

### **2. THE RESOURCE BOOK ON DISABILITY INCLUSION BY LIGHT FOR THE WORLD**

[https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/lfdw\\_org/files/download\\_files/resource\\_book\\_disability\\_inclusion.pdf](https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/lfdw_org/files/download_files/resource_book_disability_inclusion.pdf)

This is also a comprehensive guide that includes information about a series of how-to issues from measuring prevalence and identifying barriers, to how to relate to and engage/communicate with persons with different disability types and how to include them when in programmes and MEAL.

Chapter 4 on how to conduct an accessibility audit contains a template with questions on the environment, inside and outside a premise, measurements on how wide corridors, doors are meant to be, angles and heights of ramps, toilets, signage and emergency systems.

It briefly touches on suitable communication methods for different disability types but does not contain a checklist specifically on how offices may be equipped to support such communication methods. It would have to be included to the template/table.

However, the guide gives a lot of practical information to adapt an audit depending on how extensively you plan to undertake it. There are also chapters on digital inclusion, e.g. websites and online content/presentation.

**3. TOOLKIT ON DISABILITY FOR AFRICA – Accessibility** by the UN Division for Social Policy Development and Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/disability/Toolkit/Accessibility.pdf>

This is more a training toolkit but has an interesting overview in the introduction to explain environmental barriers more broadly incl. in the context of WASH, judicial, health and emergency services with further resources.

In the actual training, there are several hand-outs at the end of the document containing checklists for accessibility, which may also help with your audit. It also includes further links to resources, for example the UN ESCAP operational guide to [Disability Inclusive Meetings](#)

The accessibility audit can be quite large in scale and scope; it can be something internal related to your office only, or it can be a larger undertaking that you may want to consider in some of your programmes, or as a guidance for partners.

The training pack is also a nice opportunity for capacity building and raising awareness of (new) staff on disability barriers and inclusion.

**4. THE GENDER ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT TOOLKIT (2018)** was developed by **UN WOMEN** and the **NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES** in Ukraine.

[https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2019/gender-accessibility-audit-eng\\_compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=29](https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2019/gender-accessibility-audit-eng_compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=29)

It helps practitioners and civil society identify architectural, infrastructural, information and communication barriers that prevent women and girls with disabilities from fully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The infrastructural adaptations are valid for all genders (and a checklist is prepared from p51); however, there are specific questions around health services for women and girls with disabilities which also includes questions about attitudes by staff.

## BOX 2

In a world that is ever more reliant on technology and the internet, web accessibility—people with disabilities are able to use the web—has become a vital precondition for the effective participation of people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are faced with many challenges when using the Internet and some use assistive technologies to help them access information. For instance, persons with visual impairments may use screen magnifiers or screen readers that read out loud the content of a page or translate it on a Braille display. Persons with mobility impairment may be unable to use a mouse and resort to using the keyboard or another assistive device to surf the web. Special attention needs to be dedicated to web accessibility in the web design process to ensure a site is usable by persons with different types of disabilities, using a wide range of assistive technologies.

The Accessibility Guidelines for United Nations Website page offers helpful guidance on how to make UN websites accessible for everyone. The guidelines include the various aspects of webpages, from content and design to navigation and scripts and forms.

## EXAMPLES OF ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS:

### 1. AUDIT PERFORMED AT RO LEVEL

was performed through an online questionnaire, which received responses from three units' operations and policy/programmes.

It covered 4 areas:

1. Employees with disabilities
2. Accessibility
3. Communication
4. Procurement

Based on the feedback responses, the audit made several immediate low-cost recommendations which included commitment to disability inclusion, training, imagery, vendor identification, recruitment networks and audit institutionalization. Medium-long term and more

for infrastructural reasonable accommodation and implementation of future audit action recommendations; and expansion of inclusive programming.

The report highlighted that attention to awareness of disability inclusion is important so that it can be promoted across departments and areas of work. Commitment and accountability, therefore, are well recognized. Important is also the mention of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) to help with expanding recruitment processes to increase the number of staff with disabilities, and using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions (WGQ-SS) for the identification of employees with disabilities.

## 2. AUDIT PERFORMED AT A COUNTRY OFFICE

by a technical team and user team. From the report, it can be assumed that the focus was on physical accessibility by wheelchair and white cane users.

The audit concerned the office space inside and outside and provided photos for reference and recommendations on the basis of adaptations that are possible within a few days, a few months, and after approval by the building owner for more structural changes.

### RECOMMENDATION:

What can be improved for future audits is to take a more holistic and comprehensive perspective on different disability types and their requirements. Currently, the focus is more on physical accessibility, in particular wheelchair users, but may not include persons with other physical disabilities such as chronic pain who can't sit at a stationary desk for long periods, or a person of small stature (Dwarfism) for whom work stations may need to be adjusted, or persons with cerebral palsy who may need different tools for easier performance of tasks.

Other disabilities may also need more reflection, e.g. availability of computer screen-reading software; communication between hearing and hearing impaired staff and managers; guidelines on working with/adapting to staff with psychosocial disabilities.