

Accessibility of Infrastructure

Accessibility is fundamental to the concept of disability rights. Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD, 2006) states that:

To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to 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 (1).

Therefore, Jordan (having ratified the UN CRPD in 2008), has an obligation to bring their policies and programmes in line with the principles of the Convention, including that of accessibility. This also applies to all UN Agencies working in Jordan.

However, currently, there remains a lack of any systematic implementation. 3 out of 4 of people with disabilities responding to a recent survey conducted by Handicap International (HI) about access to humanitarian services reported inadequate access to basic assistance such as water, shelter, food or health (2).

Stairs (left) typical of East Amman: Imagine the challenges that people with mobility impairments (whether temporary or chronic, due to injury, disease, or old age) encounter when wanting to leave their home at the top of these stairs to visit friends, buy bread or any other daily tasks.

If an environment is not accessible and people cannot move around their communities due to inaccessible infrastructure, community involvement can be severely limited. Given the precedence of Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jordan's Law for Disabled Peoples Rights (Law No. 31, 2007), and the start of a new year of projects and proposals, we take this issue of the Equal Access Monitor to look at the accessibility of infrastructure: its current state, efforts to improve it, and recommendations for what more can be done.



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Accessibility for All?

Accessibility, in some ways, is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about inclusion: it's relatively easy to imagine how a ramp makes a building more accessible than a flight of stairs. Yet, accessibility involves a lot more than ramps. It involves making sure that buildings are accessible with regards to their physical structure, the information they contain and provide, the assistive technology they make available, as well as the attitudes of their staff.

Accessible infrastructure stands to benefit a lot more people than just people who identify as people with disabilities.

Accessible buildings, transportation and information can assist people with temporary impairments due to illness or injury, caregivers (often mothers) moving around with young children who may be unable to negotiate stairs and uneven roads and sidewalks, people with visual impairments and illiterate people who may be unable to read written signs.

In a recent survey conducted in preparation for input to the World Humanitarian Summit, 39% of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) identify the lack of accessible information as one of the main barriers impeding the inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian response (2). **22% of respondents identified physical accessibility as a major barrier to service-access (2).**

Transportation is key for improving accessibility: 30 % of respondents state that service are too far from where they live and that transportation costs to reach service-points are prohibitive. The report arising from this survey states that “specific actions, such as the development of affordable or free transport or outreach services should be looked at by humanitarian actors” (2).

Yet, one of the main challenges expressed by ‘mainstream’ service providers working to implement inclusive services is the cost. As accessibility is not currently a donor requirement, it can be challenging in some cases to justify spending resources to tackle inaccessible infrastructure. At the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit planned in Istanbul this coming May, Handicap International along with other disability-rights organizations will be pushing for the formation and endorsement of international standards for disability-inclusion in humanitarian responses worldwide.

These global standards must also include disability markers for donors.

Similar to a gender marker, disability markers would provide the framework for donors to ensure that proposed projects would be inclusive of, and accessible to, people with disabilities. This would be a key step in ensuring that accessibility is systematized into humanitarian responses and that the necessary funding was made available to support accessibility measures.

Activist & Advocate: Asia Yaghi, I Am A Human Society

Asia Yaghi is a Jordanian disability activist and president of the “I am a human society” which is focused on the empowerment of people with disabilities through awareness, education, and peer-support activities. Ms. Yaghi has first-hand experience with the inaccessibility of Jordanian infrastructure, even in Amman:

“I have so many examples of taxi drivers refusing to pick me up or charging 3 – 4 times what is normally charged. I recently tried to rent an accessible bus to pick up 9 people with disabilities from the airport. On the day of the pick-up the bus company informed me that the bus was occupied and refused to make alternate arrangements! I was forced to hire 9 separate taxis.

Just the other day I arrived at a government office in order to process some paperwork for my organization. The main floor and reception area was only minimally accessible. I made it in, although I had to pull myself up out of my chair by grabbing the edge of the receptionists’ desk in order to be seen by the receptionist. The receptionist did not move around to the front in order to facilitate our communication nor did they see why the agents in the office that I was needing to access should be called down to meet me in the lobby. Yet, their office was on the second floor of the building which I could not reach with my wheelchair. When the receptionist finally did accept to call the official on the second floor then refused to come downstairs to meet with me. I cannot describe the frustration that overwhelmed me on that day.

If I, as an informed, vocal and confident person face such challenges, what would it be like for a Jordanian who is not informed of his or her rights or even more so a Syrian refugee who may fear that asserting their rights as disabled people may endanger their status in the country?”

Ms. Yaghi is intent on sharing her conviction that women with disabilities need to learn more about their rights in order to gain confidence to venture out of their homes and become active members of their communities.

Ms. Yaghi also articulated the link between inaccessible public infrastructure and transportation and other forms of systemic marginalization of people with disabilities. For example, she explains how inaccessible transportation and school buildings prevent many children with disabilities from accessing education. Schools are not ready to make adjustments for students with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities. Consequently, these children never have a chance to study or they drop out early on which often leads to financial dependence on others for the rest of their lives. Having access to education is the first step towards greater autonomy and community participation (3).

Increasing isolation and dependence of people with disabilities also increases their vulnerability to physical and sexual violence, economic exploitation and other forms of abuse (4). Therefore, according to Ms. Yaghi, improving the accessibility of the environment – including communication and information – is closely linked with protection and decreasing the vulnerability of people with disabilities, injuries, and other causes of functional limitation.



Infrastructure Accessibility

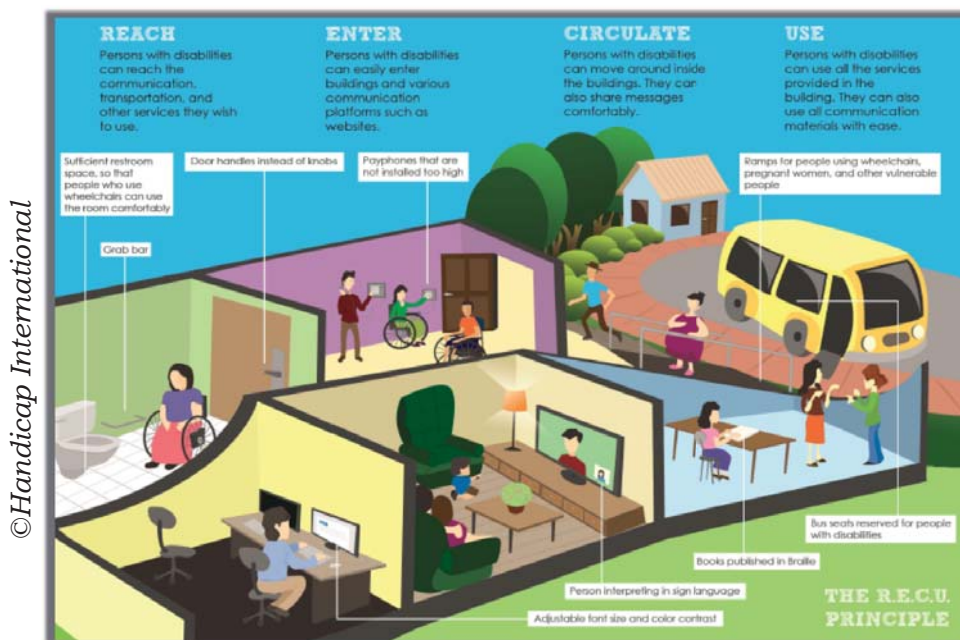
What does it take?

Without going into the specifics of WASH facilities, shelters, and so on; we describe some of the design features that help make indoor and outdoor spaces accessible regardless of their specific purpose...

Possibly the first concern someone has when leaving his or her home is roads and transportation. Currently, as soon as a person with a disability has the financial means in Jordan they try to purchase their own vehicle as public transportation is not available and most roads are treacherous. There have been some steps taken recently to ensure that new curbs and traffic islands have curb ramps. These are crucial for ensuring that wheelchair users and other people with mobility impairments, parents with children in strollers, etc. are able to safely move around cities as pedestrians. Yet, curb ramps easily become unusable as drivers are not always conscious of the use of curb ramps and park their car in front of it. Clear marking, and also an effective and applied policy, are therefore important.

“Even if all other levels are achieved, the chain of accessibility will be broken if persons with disabilities cannot take part in technical instructions and information” (5).

This “unbroken chain of movement” can be summarized by the “R.E.C.U principle”: that people with disabilities should be able to Reach, Enter, Circulate, and Use any facilities, infrastructure, or services. This principle is neatly summarized by our colleagues at HI in the Philippines with the following image (6):



To ensure the **accessibility of information**, information should be provided in multiple formats; sign language interpreters should also be available in governmental and non-governmental service-provision to ensure accessibility of Deaf people. The use of visual cues in the construction and design of colour schemes and lighting in a building can also enhance its accessibility for people with visual impairments. **Colour contrast** is one such important design principle in helping people with certain visual impairments to better orient themselves in their environment. **Flexibility** in a lighting system is also important. It is important to minimise reflection, glare, and shadows in buildings.

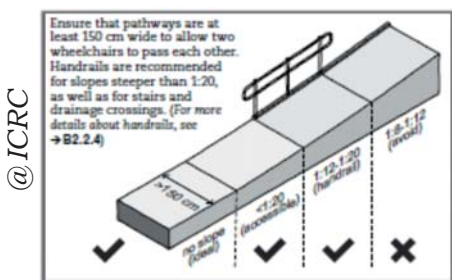
Lighting can also highlight potential hazards, provide directional guidance, and to help support or facilitate the function of specific rooms.

Signage facilitates people’s orientation and safety in a built environment. It is important that type on signs be of sufficient size and the surface of a sign should be glare and reflection-free. Raised characters and symbols on doors, elevators, and entrances to principle rooms can also assist people with visual impairments. Further specifications about type set, colours, and positioning of signs are explored in CBM’s 2008 document, *Promoting Access to the Built Environment: Guidelines* (7).

The image, right, is an excerpt from ICRC’s new resource: *All Under One Roof* (5) which provides practical guidance for disability-inclusive shelter and settlements in emergencies. Much of this information is relevant to broader infrastructure and service development in emergency settings and protracted-displacement contexts such as the current Syrian refugee context in Jordan.

Audio signals	Visual signals
E.g. bells, alarms, sirens, radio, drums, loudspeaker announcements	E.g. flags, lights flashing on/off
Ideal for persons with visual impairment. Also useful for other groups	Ideal for persons with hearing impairment. Also possible for other groups, except persons with visual impairment.
Must be accompanied with training about how to react and support with evacuation.	A combination of audio and visual signals is recommended for urgent warnings (e.g. fire alarms).
Signs and gestures	Printed materials
E.g. sign language, body language	E.g. posters, leaflets, pictures
Possible as support for other methods of communication, if these prove ineffective.	Excludes persons with visual impairment.
Assess if recipients with hearing impairment are able to communicate through any type of sign language (universal or local).	Keep messages short and simple, and use illustrations.
	If the audience is able to read Braille, consider this as a supplement.

@ICRC



@ICRC

Ramps are a recognised symbol of accessibility. Needless to say, ramps are by no means the only adjustment necessary to make a building accessible for people with mobility impairments, never mind other ‘types’ of disabilities. Yet, even the famous ramp has some hidden intricacies. A ramp is not difficult to build, yet it takes some careful calculations, measurements and planning to ensure that it in fact enhances accessibility and does not create further hazards.

At minimum, the **reception area** of any public building should be accessible. This includes enough space to manoeuvre a wheelchair or other assistive device, desks from which people can be seen even when in a seated position, and enough seating to accommodate people who cannot stand for extended periods of time.

One of the types of public buildings frequently inaccessible and frequently cited as a concern for Syrian refugees with disabilities are schools. Having ratified the UN CRPD the Jordanian government, along with its donors, have the responsibility to ensure an accessible education environment for children with disabilities. The CRPD clearly states that State Parties will ensure “that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability” (1). Donors should not shy away from the 1 – 2% extra funding that may be necessary to ensure that, at a minimum, schools are physically accessible. Accessible transport systems to enable children (from refugee and host communities) to safely travel to and from school should also be supported.

Investment in accessibility of new buildings pays off!

“The incorporation of accessibility features at the outset involves only minimal costs (approximately 1%-2% of the total building costs) compared to the of already existing buildings, which is far more costly and time consuming.” (CBM, 2008)

Examples of good practice

Handicap International's Coaching Activities



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This ramp was installed at DRC's Community Centre in Ma'an to facilitate entrance into the building for people with mobility impairments.

HI's Inclusion team has been working hard throughout 2015 to help other humanitarian actors, not currently focused on disability-specific services, to make their services more accessible. In total we conducted comprehensive accessibility assessments for 13 service providers covering a total of 29 project sites!

Many of these assessments have resulted in positive steps being taken by the service providers to make their services more inclusive and accessible.

One example of such positive work was our Inclusion Team's collaboration with DRC's Community Centres in Kerak and Ma'an. Through a collaborative coaching activity, these community centres implemented a range of measures improving their accessibility. The Centres are key points in Kerak and Ma'an where

everyone is meant to be welcome. Yet, before the physical accessibility modifications, people with mobility impairments would have faced significant challenges accessing the facilities. These Centers are also security reference points in the community, now that they're more accessible, people with a range of disabilities should find it easier to access these facilities if wanting to participate in the activities offered therein or if they need to seek safety in the event of an emergency.



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Following coaching activities, the signage marking the purpose of different rooms in the Community Centres were improved. These images from Kerak shows the way that activity rooms are now signposted in English, Arabic and a pictorial representation. At the entrance guidelines for use of the centres are also detailed so that people who may have trouble absorbing or retaining oral information can have written reminders.

For more information about HI's Inclusion-Coaching activities or to solicit coaching support,

don't hesitate to contact the Inclusion Project Manager:

Jennifer Beldad, inclusion.manager.jd@hi-emergency.org

HI's Inclusion Team has documented noticeable improvements in the accessibility of the services with which they were able to engage. In addition to the DRC community centres other highlights include a NRC's vocational training centre in Azraq being made more accessible, Terre des Homme's Child Friendly Spaces in Emirati Camp are now accessible following coaching, and the UNHCR registration facilities who's accessibility work with HI started in 2014, have now had good, accessible toilets added. The Zataari private toilet initiative is also moving forward with the capacity to ensure that households requiring an accessible toilet are able to receive one.

However, **one ongoing challenge** is that the roads connecting the accessible facilities and the homes are not accessible therefore people with mobility impairments and other disabilities still face significant challenges moving around.

Handicap International's SDR Project



Translation: Having a disability did not make me stop at a certain limit, even though Society sometimes makes us seem weak.

ties which involves first a participatory exercise to determine what sort of services they want to receive in their communities, followed by an assessment of available services to determine their accessibility in terms of staff knowledge and composition as well as information and infrastructure. This information will be mapped out and shared with other people with disabilities to point them towards existing services that can respond to their needs. The self-advocacy groups will then engage with the service providers and other stakeholders through an advocacy campaign. In Jordan, the groups link with HI's Inclusion Team to work with the service providers to help them improve the accessibility of their services and ensure that they can provide the services that people with disabilities need to receive in their communities.

The Syrian Disability Representatives (SDR) project enables Syrian people with disabilities and other refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq to form groups through which they learn about disability rights, advocacy and communication methods, and other tools that empower these refugees to work towards the realization of their rights in their countries of asylum and upon their eventual return to Syria. This project is funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Arab NGO Network for Development and, in Iraq, the NGO Nujeen for Family Democratization.

Currently SDR's groups are involved in developing an "access to services component" of their activities



Translation: Having a disability is not the end. It is the beginning.

Recommendations

- 1 Attitudes influence environment. All accessibility initiatives should be accompanied by information sharing and training of employees and community members to ensure that attitudinal barriers are overcome at the same time as physical and communication barriers.
- 2 Ensure that accessibility measures keep in mind the needs of people with hearing and/or visual impairments, intellectual impairments, mental health concerns, as well as those with physical impairments.
- 3 **Donors:** commit to the development and adoption of a universal accessibility maker based on international standards, ensuring that accessibility standards are amongst the requirements for investing your funds in an infrastructure or transportation project.
- 4 **Host governments:** recognize the potential of using donor funds to improve the accessibility of infrastructure and transportation services that could drastically improve community participation and access to services for their citizens with disabilities as well as refugees and visitors with disabilities.
- 5 **NGOs:** plan and budget for the funding, personnel, and time needed into projects to ensure that they are accessible.

Don't forget that accessibility measures stand to benefit many more people than just those seen as disabled – elderly people, people with temporary injuries, illness and fatigue, small children and their caregivers are only some of the other groups of people whose movement and use of facilities can be facilitated through ensuring that infrastructure is planned with accessibility in mind.

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