



Committee: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Towards disability-inclusive and accessible urban development

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INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is one of the most common phenomena of the 21st century. It is a growing force that is influencing and transforming development in many parts of the world – in both developed and developing countries. Experts claim, that urbanization could be the driving force for the re-design of cities all around the globe, making them sustainable, safe and inclusive for all. It is estimated, that today about 55% of the global population lives in urban areas and by 2050 the number will further grow, reaching a total of 6,25 billion people. Out of them, 15% are persons with disabilities.

Unfortunately, persons with disabilities, being one of the most marginalized social groups, are often deprived of their basic human rights. For the global population of people with disabilities living in urban areas, most cities and towns present significant barriers to participation and availability, varying from inaccessible built and virtual infrastructures to lack of user-available facilities or limited access to basic public services.

As Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations once said, “Persons with disabilities have a significant positive impact on society, and their contributions can be even greater if we remove barriers to their participation. With more than one billion of persons with disabilities in our world today, this is more important than ever.” The concept of including the voices of the global disability community in the public affairs should be a commonly accepted goal, since the deprivation and exclusion faced by persons with disabilities, prevents them from enjoying urban services and their basic human rights and affects the development of our communities as a whole.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Disability

Disability is an impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or some combination of these. It substantially affects a person's life activities and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime. In general, it is an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult for someone to do the things that other people do.¹



Figure 1 Symbols of Disability

Urbanization

Urbanization is called the process by which more and more people leave the countryside to live in cities. It refers to the population shift from rural to urban areas and the ways in which each society adapts to this change. Urbanization is one of the most important global trends of the 21st century. It has the potential to contribute to the “re-design” of our world supporting the creation of sustainable and inclusive cities for all. It is estimated that by 2050 more than 55% of humanity will be living in urban areas.²

Urban Development

The urban development is a technical and political process concerning the development and design of land use in an urban environment, including air and water infrastructure and the infrastructure passing into and out of urban areas, such as transportation, communications, and distribution networks.³

¹ <http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/understanding-disability1/understanding-disability/what-is-disability/>

² https://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/The_Inclusion_Imperative__Towards_Disability-Inclusive_Development_and_Accessible_Urban_Development.pdf

³ <https://mcgill.ca/urbanplanning/planning>

Social Inclusion

In case of disability, this term is used for the belief that all people should freely, openly and without underestimating the abilities of disabled people, accommodate any person with a disability without restrictions or limitations.⁴

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Accessibility refers to the precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in all aspects of life. By accessible and inclusive urban development we mean that, an urban area should be built or formed in such a way, that it enables all members of society, including persons with disabilities, to equally participate in their community.

Social aspect

Nowadays, persons with a form of disability are one of the most vulnerable minorities. They are still treated differently and they still face discrimination in all aspects of life, including their access in urban development, since there are many prejudices and stereotypes against them. For the approximately one billion persons with disabilities around the globe, towns and cities often present a plethora of physical, environmental, technical and social barriers, which hogtie this social group, as those barriers do not facilitate their rights, making them unable to have an access on physical and virtual infrastructures, facilities and public services.

It is a matter of utmost importance for all of us to acknowledge the importance of enabling persons with disabilities to enjoy all public services and to support accessible global governance processes for the disability community worldwide. Unfortunately, cities of today have repeatedly failed to adapt to the unique needs of disabled people and the vast amount of obstacles that they face acts as a deterrent for their involvement in social affairs.

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability-inclusion.html>

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It is necessary to realize that improved infrastructure, support services and disability inclusive urban development will provide more benefits not only to this specific part of the population, but also to the society as a whole. Therefore, making this effort shouldn't be considered by governments or general the public as unimportant or optional but as a mandatory step for national and international



growth and for sustainable development. Accessibility, as a collective good that benefits all, should therefore be considered a main prerequisite for cities to achieve inclusive and sustainable urban development.

Figure 2 ©World Enabled Accessible cities bring benefits to the whole of society, including citizens with disabilities.

Economic aspect

We have reached a stage, where governments have to realize that investing in the improvement of accessibility in urban services would benefit their economy, since excluding persons with disabilities from having access to them, could have as a result the loss of about 7% of the national GDP. Experts insist on the fact, that improving facilities, services and the urban environment in general would mean an addition of only 2% to the governmental expenses, according to the International Labour Office.

Not integrating disabled people, while impeding their access to the community, can be counter-productive for the majority of the countries worldwide. Taking into consideration the human capital, which could have been produced by those people, and the alternative cost created as a result of inaccessibility, governments should start changing their point of view concerning the issue.

The exclusion of persons with disabilities, due to inaccessible urban environment could also be a significant strike for cities that depend on tourism. It is estimated, that excluding persons with disabilities from being target group, can result in the loss of the alarming percent of about 15-20% of the global tourism



capital according to UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

DIAUD

The Global Network on Disability Inclusive and Accessible Urban Development (DIAUD) is a multi-stakeholder network that works to ensure that the New Urban Agenda and the UN Habitat III process incorporate the perspectives of persons with disabilities. The DIAUD network aims to build and enhance networking among persons with disabilities and disability rights advocates, policymakers and government officials, urban development professionals, academia, foundations, the private sector and development cooperation partners.

DPI

Disabled Peoples International (DPI) is a network of national organizations or assemblies of disabled people, established in 1981 with the aim to promote human rights of disabled people through full participation, equalization of opportunity and development.

EDF

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million people with disabilities in Europe. Furthermore, it is the only organization that is ruled by persons with disabilities and their families.

China

In response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Report, the Government set up a Task Force to examine not only the government and its Housing Authority premises identified by EOC, but also around 3,900 premises and facilities under the management of the Government departments and Housing Authority that have a frequent public interface. The people responsible for the premises responded promptly and followed upon the recommendations of removing the physical barriers and providing access to these premises for people with disabilities.

United States of America

Americans with Disability Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability, while at the same time protecting Americans with disabilities against discrimination. This governmental organization also controls the adjustment of disabled people to their workplaces as well as adjustments to public accommodations and ensures that disabled people are being treated equally into the concept of urban development.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS
1968	The Architectural Barriers Act stated that all federally owned buildings should be designed in a way to be accessible to disabled people.
3 December 1982	World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons was created through resolution 37/52, whose goal is the prevention of disabilities, the establishment of rehabilitation and protection of the rights of people with disabilities.
1994	The equalization of opportunities of persons with disabilities was set as a goal in the International Conference on Population and Development.
30 March 2007	The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed.
11 June 2015	DESA/DSPD Forum on Accessible and Inclusive Urban Development.
28 to 30 October 2015	UNDESA/DSPD Forum on Disability and Development: Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development, in UN Convention Center in Nairobi, Kenya.
14 June 2016	Forum on Ways forward Towards a Disability Inclusive and Accessible New Urban Agenda

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16 October 2016	UN DSPD/DESA – Ecuador High Level Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador.
12 to 14 June 2018	11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD will take place at the United Nations Headquarters, New York.

RELEVANT UN TREATIES, RESOLUTIONS AND EVENTS

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a rights treaty of the United Nations intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Parties to the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law. The Convention has served as the major catalyst in the global movement from viewing persons with disabilities as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing them as full and equal members of society, with human rights.

The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975)

The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons is a UN document, aiming to protect the rights of disabled persons and to ensure that they are being treated as equal members of our societies.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Throughout the past decades, the international community has tried to tackle the issue, without meeting great success. Nowadays, persons with disabilities are still one of the most vulnerable minorities of our population. In many aspects of



life they are often made victims of discrimination and they are not being treated as equal members of our societies.

The first attempt to tackle the issue can be found back in 1975, when the Declaration on the Rights on Disabled Persons was introduced in the UN General Assembly. The aim of this declaration is to clearly state and define all rights of persons with disabilities but we should not forget that it cannot be considered as a legally binding document since it is a resolution of the Assembly.

Figure 3 Key experiences and lessons learned from the ongoing discourse around accessible urban development in light of Habitat III and the “New Urban Agenda”

The European Accessibility Act, proposed 2012, was another program that

was proposed with the aim of coming to a final solution on the issue. This Act would establish standards within member countries for accessible products, services, and public buildings. The adaption of accessibility standards within the EU would enable the social integration of persons with disabilities in the communities and their mobility across member states, while making the urban environment more friendly for them and allowing those people to enjoy the public services and their fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, this program didn't meet with the expectations of the international disabled community, since little changed.

The adoption of a new Urban Agenda in Habitat III, was an attempt that seemed to have a lot of potential when it comes to solving the issue of access to housing and urban settings of disabled persons. This new agenda would emphasize on how the rights of disabled people would be ensured and protected in the world of globalization and urban development, so that disabled persons would be treated as equal members of societies and wouldn't just be left behind.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Taking into consideration, that there are over 1 billion persons with disability all over the globe which don't have full access to public services and cannot participate in their communities, solving this issue is a matter of utmost importance.

Providing complete streets serving multiple functions could be a first step towards the solution of the issue. Local authorities should try to bear in mind all citizens, including disabled persons when it comes to forming the roads of a city. Having big sidewalks that ensure the safety and the mobility of this marginalized minority should be a major goal on the agenda of all governments.

Providing a plethora of housing types is also very important. By this, we mean a wide range of residencies of different sizes, configurations, tenures, and price points located in buildings of different sizes. This alternative housing can more easily serve the needs of disabled persons, since these buildings would be formed in such a way that they take into account the particularities of these people.



Figure 4 Ramp house. An accessible mean of housing for the disabled people.

Apply a universal design strategy is also a possible solution. Buildings could be equipped with an attestation, which will ensure that they are friendly for disabled persons, in order to avoid inconvenience. Investing in an accessible external landscape, including routes and ramps would be a significant improvement of the current situation. Simple orientation and emergency evacuation services for all, would also improve the lives of persons with

disabilities in urban environment.

Last but not least, raising public awareness is, as in most cases, a measure that should be implemented. If people know more about the difficulties that disabled

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persons face in their everyday life and get to know the obstacles that these people have to overcome, then they will themselves be more active and engaged in the issue and would try to treat the international disabled community with respect.

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