

1st REPORT

Global Survey on Accessibility & Engagement with Persons with Disabilities

Local & Regional Governments taking action to solve the
Accessibility Crisis

The Global Survey on Accessibility & Engagement with Persons with Disabilities was developed by the **United Cities and Local Governments** and the **World Blind Union**, with the with direct consultation and inputs from Local and Regional Government members of the UCLG Global Community of Practice on Inclusive and Accessible Cities and Territories



CITIES FOR ALL
GLOBAL CAMPAIGN ON INCLUSIVE
AND ACCESSIBLE CITIES

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1. Introduction

Cities and territories are facing significant demographic pressures, as more than half of the global population currently resides in urban areas. Among them, **16% are persons with disabilities residing predominantly (over two-thirds) in low- and middle-income countries. By 2050, 70 % of the world's population will live in urban communities including over one billion persons with disabilities.** Furthermore, over 46% of older persons, aged 60 years and above, experience disabilities. To build future proof resilient and inclusive cities, urban areas must have inclusive and accessible infrastructure and services to guarantee that all persons can live safe, independent, and dignified lives and participate in all aspects of society.

In parallel to the growing demographics of persons who depend on accessible infrastructure to access the rights, rapid urbanization is expected to result in the addition of approximately 1.2 million square kilometers (km²) of newly developed urban areas worldwide by the year 2030. In other words, there will be a significant increase in the total area of built-up urban land over the next decade; implying that **there is still an opportunity to plan and design these areas in a way that promotes accessibility**, inclusivity, and sustainability

The barriers caused by **inaccessible infrastructure continue to threaten many other rights.** Persons with disabilities, particularly women and those living in homelessness or residing in institutions, face significant barriers to access housing preventing them from enjoying their right to an adequate standard of living, their right to an independent life and to be included in the community. Inaccessibility of transport and public spaces pose significant barriers in their everyday lives, situation of emergencies and reconstruction.

Unfortunately, accessibility and universal design are often ignored in Build Back Better strategies and climate adaptation policies resulting in the building of new inaccessible infrastructure leading to further discrimination and deeper inequalities. In addition to these demographics and barriers in physical infrastructure, the recent digitalisation of cities also shows a growing digital divide for persons with disabilities as urbanization continues to grow and becomes less and less accessible.

There is an **urgent need to accelerate the implementation of complete accessibility measures across all physical, digital and social environments; in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (CRPD) Article 9.** By incorporating universal design principles, products, environments, and systems can be made more inclusive and accessible without extra cost, making them "future proof" and able to meet the needs of a diverse range of people over time

Addressing accessibility requires a comprehensive approach to infrastructure management, municipal codes, standards, land use, transportation planning, housing and community development, mobility, social services, and monitoring of human rights. Local and regional governments (LRGs) play a crucial role in achieving this. As the primary actors responsible for urban development and management, they are best positioned to understand the rights, specific needs and priorities of their communities and develop policies and programs to directly address them.

Recognizing the importance of evidence based interventions and responding to the critical need accelerate the local implementation of the CRPD, this to pioneer survey has been

developed as a direct response to the policy brief "[Localization to Solve the Accessibility Crisis: Recommendations to States Parties for Immediate Action to solve the accessibility crisis](#)" and to better understand how LRGs are addressing accessibility and the engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) along with main challenges affecting the implementation of disability inclusive policies and programs.

2. Background & Context

The Global Survey on Accessibility and Engagement of Persons with Disabilities is tool for LRGs to map out and inform inclusive local practices by understanding how they are addressing accessibility and collaborating with OPDs. **The first round of data collection included 30 respondents representing 25 different LRGs, representing each of the UCLG Sections including Africa, Europe, the Middle East and West Asia, Asia and South America.** The data analyzed for the survey took into account regional diversity of the municipalities along with the population size, with over 40% of respondents representing intermediary size cities. Respondents also represented different municipal roles including Mayor, Advisors to the Mayor, Heads of Municipal Cabinet, Vice-president of Municipal Court of Audits, Accessibility Specialists, Directors of Planning and Policy Advisors amongst others.

For the survey accessibility is understood from its international definition as highlighted in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities are defined as organizations where a majority of persons with disabilities form the management, staff, members, volunteers and user groups.

3. Findings

3.1 Capacities & Policies

In general, over **70 percent of respondents mentioned that their municipality had policies to promote accessibility** that included a focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities in socio-economic life through social assistance, equal opportunities for decent and productive work, education, culture, tourism, transportation, equitable public space infrastructure, access to information, awareness raising of rights of persons with disabilities in the community. For the municipalities that cited not having existing policies the main barriers were due to limited financing, capacity and structural issues within the municipality, limited interest of municipality to focus on this area, and little to no consideration of persons with disabilities as public actors or decision makers.

Although over 70 percent of the respondents cited having policies on accessibility this number dropped to 66 percent when asked whether there was a specific department in the municipality in charge of disability inclusion and accessibility. This could be interpreted as the **disconnect between existing policies on accessibility and disability inclusion and the capacity of the municipality to monitor and implement these policies.** For those municipalities that did not have a specific department on disability inclusion and accessibility, some barriers to the creation included limited financial resources and competency for this work delegated to other departments such as the Office of Human Talent, Sociocultural office and the Canton's Council

for Protection of Human Rights. An interesting point mentioned from one of the respondents is that **due to the structure of how the municipality handles marginalized groups, it limits the creation of a specific department** dedicated to disability inclusion but that this was thought of as a way to incorporate disability in a more transversal way in the actions that the municipality develops.

Respondents who cited having a specific department to promote disability inclusion and accessibility highlighted different measures on their departments' collaboration with other municipal departments and local stakeholders. Some of these measures included collaborating with local private sector and firefighters to improve accessibility of tourism facilities and crisis management, and ensuring that gender initiatives take into account persons with disabilities, older persons and children. Respondents also highlighted there **departments actions could be strengthened by having more political support of their work with some decision making power in deciding how municipal budget is utilized**, ensuring that accessibility and disability are included in the municipality's strategic plan and more capacity building and training to further develop and implement disability inclusive local policies and programs.

3.2 Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Public Policies & Programs

In terms of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision making capacity, **46 percent of the respondents cited that persons with disabilities were directly linked to decision making roles** that included Mayors, Municipal Council Members, Municipal Court of Audits, Municipal Council on Disability, and Municipal Assembly of Persons with Disabilities. These roles represent tangible examples of how municipalities can progressively realize the CRPD's motto on "nothing about us with us" in municipal planning and development. Although a positive trend, in general the **respondents rated the inclusion of persons with disabilities in policy and decision making on the lower mid range**, which is also in line with data on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision making. This could be interpreted as a case for ensuring more inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision making roles in local government, which would also influence and increase the rate of their inclusion in policy and decision making.

In regards to the inclusion in municipal programs and projects, the perception was slightly more positive with respondents perceiving the inclusion persons with disabilities in the mid-high range. This could also directly relate to the 86 percent of respondents that highlighted that Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) were present in their city or region. Of these **respondents 60% stated that they regularly (monthly or quarterly) directly met with with persons with disabilities or OPDs through public consultations, ad hoc meetings on specific issues, advisory committees or boards, joint projects, online surveys or feedback portals, during accessibility audits, consultative councils, and citizen assemblies**. These mechanisms provide regular engagement with residents with disabilities, updating them and ensuring their active participation in the programs and projects that the municipality is spearheading. It is important to ensure that this type of engagement can also be promoted within the municipality as part of its decision making mechanisms.

3.3 Areas of Collaboration with Persons with Disabilities

As part of the consultation for development of the survey a variety of thematic areas of priority were identified and included Climate Action, Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response, Tourism, Culture, Sports & Leisure, Migrant & Refugee Inclusion, Social Services, Health Service

Delivery, Transport & Mobility, Housing, Employment, Urban Planning and Design, and Information and Communication Technologies.

Of these thematic areas, **respondents identified tourism, culture, sports & leisure, social services, and urban planning & design as the top thematic areas where persons with disabilities and OPDs are directly involved** in relation to the municipalities initiatives. This does not mean that other topics are not as important but shine a light on some barriers including lack of engagement with OPDs on certain topics and limited competencies in some regions where municipalities are not give the competencies to decide on certain issue, for example as one respondent highlighted is the case in the areas of health and education. In terms of areas which the respondents felt **need more direct involvement and consultation of persons with disabilities and OPDs the majority of respondents highlighted Social Services, Education, Health Service Delivery, Transport & Mobility and Employment**. Although it is reasonable to say all areas need more engagement, these responses help identify some critical areas in which municipalities need to strengthen their engagement and consultation with OPDs. It would also be important and interesting to compare these responses to local OPDs, to review overlaps and possible differences in opinion on priority areas.

In terms of the mainstream approach to accessibility in public planning, 63 percent of respondents mentioned that they engage other community groups in the consultation for municipal work on accessibility. These group included community youth, women, migrant, older persons, and entrepreneurial groups as well as family members of persons with disabilities

3.4 Challenges & Support Needed

In terms of local realities, there still remain challenges to strengthen the engagement between local and regional governments and OPDs. Oftentimes, these barriers are more systemic, affecting the whole ecosystem of public life and equitable public service provision.

Some of the **main challenges highlighted by respondents include awareness & knowledge gaps on accessibility and universal design by municipal departments** and in the community, the limited engagement of OPDS in urban development across all levels, limited funding and financing mechanism to support the implementation and follow up of inclusive urban development projects, the lack of up to date development frameworks, policies and standards on accessibility for informed urban planning, and the lack of disaggregated data on disability to help inform policy and identify barriers.

In regards to the above barriers, the respondents identified the different resources and support needed to improve accessibility and enhance their engagement with persons with disabilities. From the response the following top 4 priorities were identified (in order of importance), including:

1. Financial Resources and more funding to invest, start and sustain actions on accessibility
2. Training and Capacity Building programs for municipal officials and employees on disability rights, accessibility and inclusion.
3. Awareness Campaigns that promote disability inclusion and address stigma and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.
4. Technical Support to implement accessibility standards and audits.

The above priorities offer a guide into what type of partnerships need to be explored to enhance

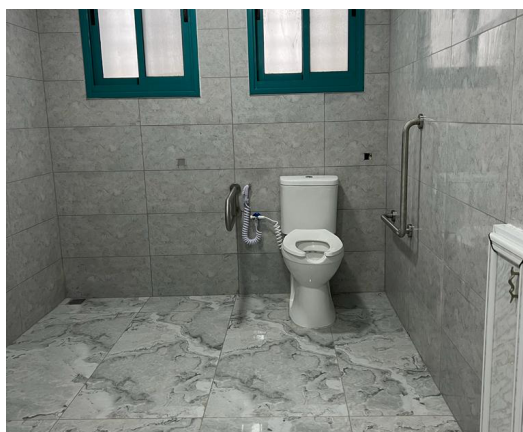
local actions and the capacity of LRGs to effectively mainstream accessibility in public policies and programs in a sustainable way. They also highlight the need to further advocate and systemically address the concept of “Nothing About Us Without Us” at the local level and promote the CRPD’s paradigm shift to address negative and limiting perceptions of persons with disabilities.

4. Local Actions to achieve the CRPD

4.1 The Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA)

APLA brings together local governments from around Palestine to enhance their capacities through strategic advocacy and lobbying, while also promoting the exchange of information and best practices.

In regards to disability inclusion, APLA has a strategic plan known as “Improving Local Governments Units’ performance to delivery equitable and inclusive services”. This strategic plan has a key point on advocating for accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities; supported by an Inclusion Task Force, a specific inclusion position to drive inclusive practices within the organization and technical support for capacity-building trainings.



In terms of implementation, the “Empower, Mainstream, Include, Promotion of the rights of PwDs in Palestine (EMI)” project has led to clear results on disability mainstreaming at the local level. Results of the program include the **development of a Self-Disability Audit Tool to strengthen municipal planning and monitoring of disability inclusion**, allocation of funds to local governments to make existing buildings accessible, and supporting greater awareness on disability inclusion and the integration of disability responsive actions into municipal strategic plans. Along with these results, APLA also introduced an Inclusive Municipality Prize for local governments on innovative action plans on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Unfortunately, **due to the current geo-political situation project implementation has not been able to continue as planned** but APLA continues to engage with the local authorities to advance as possible

4.2 Mersin Municipality, Turkey

In line with its goal of creating an accessible city, Mersin Metropolitan Municipality is committed to enhancing the quality of life for persons with disabilities through accessibility in a range of initiatives from transportation to education, health services and social life.

Mersin's commitment to accessibility is also data driven. As a province with close to fifty thousand inhabitants who identify as persons with disabilities, Mersin has shaped its disability policies around the rights based approach, moving away from aid and involving persons with disabilities directly in the development and implementation of these policies. In parallel, Mersin has also developed social facilities aimed at supporting the active participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic and cultural life. In addition to policy interventions, and through meaningful stakeholder consultation, **accessibility has been integrated in the strategic plan that guides the municipality's actions over the five year governance period.**

As a result of Mersin's participatory and human rights based approach to disability inclusion, implementation measures for disability inclusion have had tangible outcomes; **particularly in disability responsive physical infrastructure, accessible public transit systems, accessible tourism and cultural, digital accessibility, and support services.**



In terms of physical accessibility, main interventions have been focused on ensuring public buildings, transport stops and pedestrian paths are accessible with **ramps, elevator systems, adjustments to side walks and tactile wayfinding on walkways for a more equitable and navigable urban environment.** For transport systems, the municipality has increasingly integrated the use of low floor buses for municipal transport and

also equipping public transit stops with easy to understand signals, digital displays and audio announcement systems to ensure all passengers have up to date and timely information on the municipality's transit network. Mersin has also partnered with the Embassy of Japan on a Transfer Vehicle project to facilitate more inclusive mobility for older persons and persons with disabilities. Additionally, As an important tourist destination in Turkey for both domestic and international visitors, Mersin has ongoing efforts to improve the accessibility of historical and cultural sites, museums and beaches.

In the area of digitalization and smart city applications, the municipality has seen an increasing importance to **prioritize digital accessibility to enhance equity in digital information systems and applications throughout the city.** In this regard, applications providing information on transportation routes and schedules include audio and visual support features specifically designed for blind and low vision users along with other municipal web based services and mobile applications. These efforts are prioritized to ensure that all residents can benefit from Mersin's digital services and smart city advancements

In the area of support and social inclusion services, **the Accessible living Center, Autism Family Counseling Center and Temporary Support Homes** are important resources supporting the municipality's continued commitment to an intersectional approach to accessibility. These resources offer comprehensive services and resources that are aimed in promoting independent living and quality of life for persons with disabilities and their families; providing inclusive youth development and educational services, cleaning assistance, meal delivery, adaptive transportation and recreational services.



To date, Mersin has measured its impact with over thirty thousand individuals benefiting from these inclusive infrastructure services. Although the municipality has had many advancements in the area of accessibility, challenges are still present toward continued actions in this regard. **Current challenges to furthering more accessible and inclusive programs in Mersin include high population density, geographical constraints and costs for implementation initiatives.** Some of these challenges can be reduced through stronger partnerships with the international community.



4.3 Lisbon, Portugal

The city of Lisbon has put a key priority to pedestrian accessibility, particularly in regards to the **intersectional lens of gender equity to promote safety and accessibility for women in girls in public spaces and transport.** Fear of violence and sexual harassment continue to affect women's public participation globally and lead to limited engagement in public life, such as avoiding taking public transport at night. In this regard the Lisbon City Council made it priority to look into mobility patterns of diverse groups of women when in transit, to promote better safety and accessibility for women and girls.

After two years of research on the "Safety and Perception of Safety of Women in Public Spaces and Access to Public Transport", Lisbon's division for Pedestrian Accessibility identified a local lower income neighborhood on the edge of the city known as Bairro Padre Cruz to pilot infrastructure changes at the local level with the goal of improving public safety for diverse groups of women and girls in the Bairro Padre Cruz neighborhood.

Aiming to understand the community better, various meetings were held with local organizations to ensure effective involvement of the community. These organizations included **care and residential facilities for older persons, resident associations and local youth associations** amongst others. These discussions led to various consultations through surveys, focus groups and interviews with diverse groups of women and girls between the ages of 13 to 65 and older. Some learnings from these consultations were that many women in Bairro Padre Cruz are shift workers that require them to commute in the early hours of the morning or late at night, and due to limited service options in the neighborhood many of the neighborhood's residents must travel to nearby neighborhoods to do their daily errands and weekly grocery shopping.

After **presenting the data collected to participants and discussion of the results with the participants two priority areas were selected and included** a bus terminal at the nearby church and another local road and intersection. In the two locations the areas of intervention included moving bus terminal to a central street to increase visibility and promote safety, removing pavement obstacles and parking, introducing traffic calming measures, and introducing accessibility features such as levelled pedestrian crossings and seating areas.

The project remains ongoing but is already a **major step forward in Lisbon’s inclusive urban strategy, which takes a meaningful look at the intersectionalities of women and girls and putting their safety in public spaces and access to public transport on the city’s agenda**. Also the cooperation with local associations and municipal bus company is bringing an intersectional gender responsive approach to the forefront of transport operations and public space re-design and establishing trust in the community and participants.

Continued **challenges exist in the form of community’s openness to talk about what makes women and girls afraid and uncomfortable in public space and transport** and covering these aspects is still new ground for many cities. Tackling sexual harassment in public space and transport has not filtered through to many local space design practices, transport policies and staff training. It has taken consistent and positive collaboration in advocating for this topic to receive the deserved attention and budget allocation.

4.4 Lincoln, Argentina

The city of Lincoln, a city of 47,000 residents in Argentina, has been leading a process **aimed at improving the local awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) following the creation of the Department on Disability in 2016**. Through the creation of this department the city has developed various public policies to promote the autonomy and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in public life and work with dedicated financial resources from the municipal budget to develop and carry out local interventions to promote great disability inclusion. The Department on Disability is made up of 17 skilled professionals in the area of disability including doctors, lawyers, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers and accessible education teachers.

The interventions promoted from the city on the localization of the UNCRPD have a particular focus on the inclusion and independent living of young persons with disabilities in the city. Starting through a program known as **“Get Hooked on your Rights”** the city brought together young persons with disabilities with other sectors, such local business and schools, to discuss the opportunities for more equitable access and inclusion of persons with disabilities in these spaces.



The **program has been a good base in which the city aims at challenging negative stereotypes of the community on disability** while also raising young persons with disabilities' awareness on their rights and the importance of defending and promoting them in the community.

One of the programs that was developed following the Hooked on you Rights program is Lincoln's Independent Living program and the creation of the community center "FRIDA" in 2020. The center was named FRIDA after the well known Mexican painter with a disability, as a way to highlight the need for society to recognize each person's potential rather than thinking disability as a burden to the person and society. **The Frida Center aims to support persons with disabilities to develop their maximum autonomy.** FRIDA is open from Monday to Friday and open for persons with disabilities to participate in activities daily for up to four hours in programs on recreation therapy and pre-employment. The activities within this area offer work skill training and other recreational activities such as painting and carpentry.

The **Independent Living program at the FRIDA center** is focused on young persons with intellectual disabilities. The program is broken down into different steps focused on areas such as acquiring daily living skills, interacting with the community, and living with other persons. Some examples of skills learned through this program include how to organize and host dinners with friends and evening outings. In the **future the program aims to support persons with disabilities autonomous and long term coexistence with other groups in the community.** At the moment, this program is the only one of its kind in Argentina in regards to the complete support and implementation from the public sector.



One **main challenges to the different programs' success is the society's perception on persons with disabilities**, which affects and makes autonomous and independent living difficult. A challenge for the future will be to achieve coexistence of the groups of persons participating in the Frida center with different .

5. Key recommendations and way forward

1. Foster a culture of accessibility, including through reasonable accommodations, and improve conditions to ensure persons with disabilities can take on decision making roles and be directly involved in urban planning strategies and programs.
2. In regions where OPDs exist support more mechanisms for their participation and regular consultation with the Municipality and in regions where no OPDs exist local and regional governments in partnership with national governments should work together to help establish local OPDs that can work with the local government
3. Ensure OPDs participation is supported without risk of influence
4. Need for Decentralized and Multilevel Governance models to deal with capacity and financing issues, while supporting meaningful partnerships that better allocate existing resources needed to address accessibility gaps
5. Technical support & trainingProgressive technical support & training for municipal staff, across all departments, on localization of the UNCRPD

This **first phase of data collection and synthesis represents a beginning of a collective way forward to respond to the growing inequities and discrimination caused from the lack of accessibility in our built, digital and social environment.** It is important to highlight that this transformation can not be achieved solely by LRGs but requires a meaningful multi stakeholder approach that prioritizes human rights and dignity at the center of sustainable development. It is clear that the success of efforts to make cities inclusive and accessible depends on the active participation and engagement of local communities, and localization of the UNCRPD is a key mechanism to achieve this.