

Materials on Development Finance

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Accessible mobility – important not just for people with disabilities

Mobility is a fundamental need

Movement is vital to human existence, like breathing or sleeping. Simply put: those who are able to move from A to B have more opportunities. Mobility is therefore part and parcel of a high quality of life. It is also essential for social inclusion and self-determined participation in economic and political life.

Access to key areas of life such as work, housing, leisure, sports, media and establishing social contacts depends largely on whether mobility facilities are accessible. Can this service also be used by a blind person? Are there lifts and ramps for wheelchair users? When it comes to public transport in particular, there are still considerable barriers almost everywhere in the world that restrict people with disabilities in their freedom of movement. That is why this issue is also playing a growing role in German development cooperation. Its work is integrated into the human rights objectives of the German Federal Government and the corresponding international agreements.

Political background

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Germany, it came into force in 2009 and has since been fleshed out further by various laws. At the heart of the Convention is the objective of explicitly stipulating equality for people with disabilities and thereby providing them with access to guaranteed rights.

The subject of mobility is highlighted in two articles: Article 9 stipulates that the physical environment must be accessible, including means of transport as well as information and communication systems. The aim of the obligations outlined in

Article 20 is to guarantee the “personal mobility” of people with disabilities, enabling them to have the greatest amount of independence possible and take control of their lives. The article obligates the Contracting States to take effective measures in this regard.

About the term “accessibility”

Accessibility means that buildings, means of transport, leisure facilities and workplaces, among other things, are designed in such a way that all people are able to access them without help. In addition to the accessibility of buildings, the term also refers to the availability of plain-language forms or the presence of sign language interpreters in lectures, for example.



Relatively simple things, such as providing a ramp instead of stairs or a ramp as well as stairs, make a huge difference.

A variety of needs

There are different kinds of disabilities, each with different requirements when it comes to accessible mobility. That is why it is important to take these differences into account when designing mobility measures, and to address the various needs that exist among people with disabilities. In concrete terms, when it comes to the practical implementation of mobility-promoting facilities, the needs of people with disabilities can be categorised into four main groups: needs relating to movement, understanding/orientating

oneself, seeing and hearing. Accordingly, these needs must be taken into account in project planning.

• Motor impairments:

People with disabilities in motor function are restricted in their movement in various ways and are often dependent on walking aids, walkers or wheelchairs. In road traffic, this group of people faces special challenges, particularly when accessing public transport and using footpaths, controls and vehicle infrastructure such as seats and steps. The foot-wheel principle also applies here. This means that if a space can be accessed on foot, it must also be possible to access it on wheels (e.g. with wheelchairs or walkers). Ramps or lifts, entrances without steps or thresholds, as well as parking spaces reserved for wheelchair users, are crucial here. In other words, all mobility-promoting infrastructure must be built and set up according to the foot-wheel principle.

• Cognitive impairments:

People with cognitive impairments may have problems with orientating themselves in road traffic, finding the right means of transport or reading the timetable, for example. Clear, simple symbols, intuitive user interfaces as well as multilingual and easy-to-understand instructions help to minimise possible hurdles. The so-called KISS rule – Keep it short and simple – is an important concept here, whereby pictograms, visual language and orientation systems play a key role.

• Visual impairments:

Acoustic or tactile orientation aids are important for people with visual impairments. The so-called “two-senses principle” is central here. This stipulates that information must always be available via at least two senses – visual, acoustic

or tactile. For example, traffic lights should have both visual and acoustic signals so that visually impaired people are able to better orientate themselves. In addition, tactile guidance systems, such as ground surface indicators, significantly help when creating a low-barrier environment. Such systems enable even blind people to move around independently and safely.



Ground surface indicators also make it possible for visually impaired people to find their way on public transport.

• **Hearing impairments:**

When safety-related or traffic-related information is provided in an exclusively auditory format, people with hearing impairments, including those who are hard of hearing, are restricted in their mobility. For this reason, visual or tactile information is also required to promote the mobility of people with this kind of disability. This can be in the form of visual warning signals, visual displays or vibration feedback in traffic systems and vehicles, for example. The two-senses principle also applies here.

Everyone benefits from accessible transport – at some point in their lives

Few people are disabled from birth

Measures to reduce barriers to mobility benefit not only people with disabilities, but also, for example, parents with prams or elderly people who are no longer quite so sure on their feet. In this respect, an inclusive transport policy benefits everyone at some point. This is especially true when one considers the fact that although only a minority of people are born with a disability, many people nevertheless end up experiencing reduced mobility at some point over the course of their lives, either through fate or illness. Moreover, many disabilities are invisible; nevertheless, these people are dependent on help and orientation in transport systems.

Inclusion in development cooperation

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), around 1.3 billion people worldwide live with disabilities. A particularly high proportion live in countries in the Global South, which have medium and low average incomes. Their participation in society is often limited due to substandard political environments, discriminatory attitudes, insufficient financial resources and a lack of opportunities for co-determination. At the same time, they are at high risk of becoming trapped in poverty. Conversely, poverty also increases the risk of ending up with a disability, for example due to malnutrition, restricted access to medical care, dangerous working conditions or armed conflicts, which are far more common in developing countries than in industrialised nations. In the spirit of the SDGs "Leave no one behind", German development cooperation is therefore tackling this issue as it relates to mobility projects, alongside many other aspects.

KfW bolsters urban transport in Georgia

In Batumi, in addition to three transfer terminals and a multi-storey car park for park and ride facilities, a smart traffic management system is also being created with KfW funding. All of this is intended to contribute to creating a sustainable and inclusive mobility system, as the new transport routes and modes ensure that disabled and socially disadvantaged people also have access to mobility services. The three transfer terminals with buses have been planned and built with accessibility in mind.

Inclusion action plan

In 2013, the German Federal Government adopted an "Action Plan for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities". Its goal is to systematically anchor inclusion in German development policy and also to establish inclusive structures and practices within the organisation itself.

In development cooperation, the German Federal Government is pursuing two strategies to this end:

- One is the concept of "**disability mainstreaming**". This envisages making inclusion an integral part of existing structures, programmes and measures. As a result, it becomes a cross-cutting issue that must be

systematically addressed in all social and political departments.

- The German Federal Government is also pursuing an "**empowerment**" approach. This is intended to enable people with disabilities to lead a self-determined life and actively participate in society. The aim is to increase their individual autonomy and remove barriers to their full participation. This requires, among other things, involving self-representation organisations and promoting targeted training and networking to improve their co-determination opportunities.

Both approaches also require political "advocacy work" in order to create inclusive framework conditions at all levels.

Inclusion in practice

In order to get closer to achieving the inclusion goals in development cooperation, possible obstacles and hurdles for people with disabilities must be considered from the outset. This also applies to the important mobility sector. Since the beginning of 2024, a marker in development cooperation has been in place, which can be used to record contributions to inclusion in DC projects.

It is clear that various aspects must be systematically taken into account, especially when it comes to mobility. In addition to accessible infrastructure, these also include forms of communication adapted to the various needs of people with disabilities as well as awareness-raising measures for project participants. In close cooperation with partner organisations in the global south, KfW has already been able to integrate inclusive elements into some mobility projects, and will do this more and more in the future.

KfW bolsters new mobility systems in India

KfW is assisting India with a variety of sustainable mobility solutions. Depending on the city and context, this involves, for example, underground railways, city trams, express buses, charging infrastructure, information systems or infrastructure for better interconnection of different modes of transport. However, operational and quality management as well as user-

friendliness are also taken into account. In Tamil Nadu, for example, part of the bus fleet has been converted to low-floor buses, which are more accessible for disabled people, as well as elderly people and children. In Bangalore, the accessibility of underground and suburban stations is now being improved with the help of experts and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Inclusion is vital for development and for achieving the SDGs. Mobility is a key factor here because it not only increases personal quality of life, but also creates the conditions that enable people to participate in economic and social life in the first place. There is therefore both a human rights and an economic rationale for greater accessibility on trains, buses, underground trains and roads – in any kind of transport system, in fact.

That is why it is highly advantageous to always incorporate inclusion aspects (not only) in development cooperation, especially in new mobility projects. It is much easier and also significantly cheaper to install a ramp when the infrastructure is first being built than to add it later. The inclusion marker introduced for German DC in 2024 will provide further orientation over time, and show even more precisely where inclusion is already an intrinsic part of infrastructure and where it should be taken into greater account.

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