

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, April 24

Evidence digest focus issue: Disability Inclusive Urban Development & Infrastructure

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Guest blog: Mikaela Patrick, Global Disability Innovation Hub



In this interview, we delve into the critical importance of disability inclusion in infrastructure and urban design with Mikaela Patrick, Head of Inclusive Infrastructure and Climate at the **Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub)**. Mikaela sheds light on the significance of inclusive design, drawing from GDI Hub's flagship programme, **AT2030** and its Inclusive Infrastructure research, which conducts collaborative research with cities worldwide to understand and promote accessibility and inclusion.

1. Why does disability inclusion matter in the context of infrastructure and urban design?

The simplest answer is that it's a human right for everyone to experience the world around them. It's set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) that everyone has the right to accessibility; article nine speaks particularly to infrastructure, cities and services. We're also talking about 16% of our global population; that's a significant number of people that we need to be designing with when we're shaping our cities and historically we have not done so. At GDI Hub we believe that inclusive design really can benefit everyone, but most of all it leads to better environments for people with disabilities and older people - fair and equal environments that everybody can enjoy throughout their life course. **Around 75% of the infrastructure that we're going to have by the year 2050 doesn't exist yet.** If we embed inclusive design strategies and mandate accessibility standards, now, we could really build a more inclusive future.

2. What are some key principles or approaches that should be considered when designing infrastructure projects with a focus on disability inclusion?

Inclusive and accessible: Inclusion of people with disabilities needs to be at the core of the ambition to design inclusive infrastructure. That means by designing **with** people with disabilities that will be impacted by or are beneficiaries of that infrastructure. Going further, our built environment will be made more inclusive by creating opportunities for the

employment of people with disabilities in the urban sector and local government. Inclusive leadership is also necessary to drive cultural change.

Strategy and innovation: At GDI Hub, we utilise an **inclusive design strategy**, developed following the redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park during the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Starting with an inclusive culture and participation, the approach on the Park mandated inclusive design and accessibility standards, exceeding UK building regulations, and championed disability innovation. An Access Panel comprising local people with disabilities participated in design reviews, ensuring their voices were heard in decision-making. This helped to navigate competing priorities including accessibility, health, safety, sustainability, and cost. The Panel's involvement ensured accountability, and led to more inclusive outcomes. We've spent three years testing this strategy through **research** and are now looking to pilot inclusive infrastructure interventions with cities in low-and-middle-income countries within the next phase of the UK Aid-funded AT2030 programme.

Affordability: While more research is needed to build a robust business case around cost, it's clear that integrating accessibility from the beginning can lead to lower costs, smoother implementation, and increased sustainability. Retrofitting accessibility later often involves adding overlays to existing projects, increasing cost and carbon footprints. Therefore, we advocate that inclusive design and sustainability should be intertwined to be more resourceful for both people and the planet.

Awareness and knowledge: Beyond a dedicated accessibility or inclusive design lead on a project, all individuals involved in urban sector projects within local governments and delivery should have a basic understanding of the benefits and importance of inclusive design and accessibility. Repeatedly, we encounter issues like incorrectly installed tactile paving. Contractors may not have awareness of its purpose or function. These issues highlight the importance of consistent understanding among both the design and maintenance teams involved in infrastructure projects.

Consistency: Maintenance, management and operation of the built environment is also essential. For example, the maintenance of lifts to maintain accessibility. We often observe misuse or disrepair of accessibility features, such as converting accessible toilets into storage or blocking pathways. These behaviours significantly impact the building's accessibility. Therefore, considering human behaviour and usage patterns is essential to maintaining accessibility over time.

3. How can infrastructure projects effectively collaborate with people with disabilities to ensure that their perspectives and needs are incorporated?

Employment pathways and engagement activities must be accessible, which unfortunately is often not the case. For instance, town hall meetings about new projects may be held in inaccessible venues, or essential communication aids like sign language interpreters may be lacking. Technical jargon and complex information can act as barriers so it's essential to present ideas in a clear and accessible manner. For example, in our Inclusive Infrastructure research programme, we conducted co-design workshops where our local partners, Kota

Kita, worked with participants created tactile maps of the city of Surakarta (Solo), Indonesia. This interactive approach allowed visually impaired individuals to engage with the map in a meaningful way and participate on an equal basis.

Accountability is key. Often, local communities are invited to consultations but see little follow-up, leading to distrust and disengagement. It's crucial to remember that engagement should be ongoing, not a one-off event and where possible considering community-led approaches to interventions can 'build' ownership and cohesion. The most inclusive infrastructure projects maintain participation processes throughout, ensuring continuous feedback loops and adjustment as the project progresses.

4. What's next for inclusive infrastructure?

The simple truth is that inclusive design is good design. It's imperative that accessibility and inclusive design are integrated in all infrastructure. Doing so not only leads to better outcomes but also fosters thriving and vibrant communities, while supporting the achievement of SDG targets. In the face of pressing global challenges such as climate change, which are already impacting the accessibility of our infrastructure, we cannot afford to continue working in siloes. The benefits extend beyond people with disabilities to include other marginalised groups and society as a whole. While standards and regulations can provide guidance, designing with people with disabilities and their representative organisations ensures that solutions meet their needs and aspirations, ultimately shaping a fairer world.

The AT2030 Inclusive Infrastructure sub-programme is shortly releasing a Global Action Report on Delivering Inclusive Design in Cities, accompanied by a comparison report on the status of inclusive infrastructure in cities. Find them here from early summer:

www.at2030.org/inclusive-infrastructure. A new phase of the programme starting in Summer 2024 will pilot inclusive infrastructure interventions with cities and climate projects.

The latest evidence and guidance on Disability Inclusive Urban Development & Infrastructure

Urban Planning & Design

A paper from August 2023 looks at the importance of **Urban Green Spaces in enhancing health and well-being for people with disabilities**. The paper underscores the importance of green spaces in urban areas and explores how people with disabilities benefit from them through various means. It argues that the planning and development of urban green spaces should prioritise the inclusion of people with disabilities. By doing so, cities can harness their potential to enhance public resources and move towards genuine sustainability on environmental, social, and economic fronts.

A paper published in March 2024 presents research on the **importance of accessibility and disability-inclusive urban planning**. This research is based on an analysis of people with physical impairments in Kathmandu, Nepal. It finds that people with disabilities face a widespread lack of accessibility to build environments, from roads and housing to public buildings and spaces and basic urban services such as sanitation and water, health, education, transportation, and emergency response and resilience programs. Specific problems found in Kathmandu include inaccessibility of pavements, bus stops and pedestrian crossings. More broadly, the paper examines how persons with disabilities in the city often struggle with the complexities of the built environment and the need to address this through disability-inclusive urban planning.

In October 2023, the Global Disability Innovation Hub published a report on **'Co-creating Inclusive Public Spaces: Learning from Four Global Case Studies in inclusive Cities.'** This report presents findings from a global research study on inclusive infrastructure and city design, focusing specifically on inclusive public spaces. The featured city case studies are Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Varanasi, India; Surakarta, Indonesia; and Nairobi, Kenya. Based on document reviews, interviews, photo diaries and co-design workshops, the participatory study discusses findings related to types of public spaces valued by participants in each of the four cities; barriers and challenges experienced by persons with disabilities in the public realm; and aspirations for more inclusive public spaces and opportunities for inclusive design.

The World Economic Forum published a blog on **'Why designing an accessible and inclusive city goes beyond affordability'** in February 2024. It outlines an approach taken by the city of Fukuoka, Japan, to create a 'dementia-friendly' city, as the population ages. It also underscores why thinking of access should go beyond affordability in an urban context – including how upfront investment in accessibility can save on more costly care interventions.

A **blog from Urbanet** in September 2023 reports learnings from the Planning Inclusive Communities project in Australia. The blog highlights how people with disabilities often experience social and spatial exclusion and immobility due to exclusionary planning and design decisions. It outlines how the project responded in three critical areas: commitment to disability justice, changing the narrative about disability and confronting ableism, as well as adopting inclusive urban governance, planning and design practices, education, and leadership.

A blog published in November 2023 looks at why **'Accessibility is the Key to an Inclusive City.'** The author defines an accessible city as one that has been designed and developed with the aim of providing equal opportunities and a seamless experience for all its residents. To this end, the author highlights that in an urban context this means going beyond wheelchair ramps to think about a more holistic approach to urban planning that includes physical barriers of public spaces, transport and buildings, to sensory inclusivity and access to information. The author also highlights the universal benefits of accessibility in cities – extending beyond people with disabilities to benefit the broader population.

In July 2023, a working paper was published on **'Inclusive Urbanism: Accounting for the Vulnerabilities of Persons with Invisible Disabilities.'** This paper focuses on enhancing

the accessibility and livability of cities for individuals with psychosocial, intellectual, and development disabilities. The paper provides context to invisible disabilities and how they are often overlooked in urban spaces and explores accessibility and inclusion needs in cities.

A blog by Centre for Disability and Inclusion Africa [explores how Nigerian Cities could be more disability-friendly](#). The blog highlights specific features of Nigerian cities which inadvertently exclude persons with disabilities – like the tendency for Nigerian banks to have revolving doors. It also highlights pressing issues such as a lack of accessible transport options, and poorly designed pavements which hinder mobility and present obstacles to those with mobility impairments. It presents a number of approaches to addressing these issues in Nigeria, including making inclusive design approaches more prevalent and stakeholder collaboration for inclusive policies and building codes.

In December 2023, the Global Disability Innovation Hub published [a blog on the use of accessible and easy-to-read graphics and videos](#) to communicate the key findings of a project on inclusive urban design to diverse audiences. This approach was used as part of the Inclusive Infrastructure team's approaches to communicate about inclusive design in different ways, including visuals, to support a desire from the sector to understand what good 'looks like.'

A blog published in June 2023 examines ['Designing Cities for Accessibility.'](#) This blog examines the different kinds of impact resulting in exclusionary public spaces and city planning, including the social and economic impacts on people with disabilities. It also examines some of the challenges in implementing accessibility standards in the built environment when it comes to historical buildings. The blog then looks at what urban inclusion looks like in practice, and describes the need for collaboration between designers, city officials, and community members. An overview is given of a number of international disability inclusion standards and the numerous benefits of planning for diversity and inclusion in an urban context, including in terms of climate resilience and education outcomes.

In April 2023, a study was published looking at ['Usability of Road Infrastructure for Persons with Mobility Impairment.'](#) This study reviewed six randomly selected cities in Nigeria. Primary data was collected through geometric measurement, observation, and the use of structured questionnaire. The study found insignificant numbers, and (in some cases), complete non-existence of pedestrian infrastructure and universal design facilities on major roads in the investigated cities. Most of the roads examined have facilities in less than 20% of the required locations. Generally, roads in Nigerian cities are characterised by structural barriers which impede safety and accessibility for people with mobility impairment thereby making them experience unreliable and less-affordable journeys, reflecting the low usability of road infrastructure across the cities. The study highlights the necessity of involving individuals with mobility impairments in the planning and design of transport infrastructure, stressing the importance of ongoing advocacy by civil society, disability organisations, and policymakers globally to ensure inclusive, universally designed, and accessible transport systems by 2030.

Infrastructure programmes

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk published a cheat sheet on **Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion in Infrastructure programming** in August 2023. Infrastructure is vital for societal development and economic progress, but benefits are often not distributed equally. This cheat sheet provides information for policy makers and programme staff on how to mainstream gender equality, disability, and social inclusion into infrastructure initiatives to effectively drive economic growth, enhance accessibility, and foster sustainable outcomes that benefit everyone.

In August 2023, the Global Disability Innovation Hub published **a case study on inclusive infrastructure in Medellín, Colombia**. This case study was the sixth under the UK Aid funded AT2030 Inclusive Infrastructure sub-programme. The case study describes the current challenges and opportunities for embedding inclusive design in Medellín, providing priority recommendations and forward-thinking next steps. There is an overview provided of physical, socio-economic and attitudinal barriers experienced by people with disabilities in the city. A series of recommendations are provided aimed at policy and decision makers, industry, and local communities. Recommendations span inclusive city strategies, training on disability inclusion across city-level stakeholders, inclusive climate resilience and response, the development of building codes and standards, and more.

A **blog by the World Bank** in December 2023 outlines the Bank's work done on inclusive infrastructure in partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The blog outlines JICA's commitments to social inclusion and infrastructure and mentions various projects where the agency has implemented these principles, including the Dhaka Mass Transport system in Bangladesh. It also outlines joint initiatives between Japan and the World Bank, including Quality Infrastructure Investment (QII) partnership, and how this has led to more inclusive infrastructure development considering the needs of people with disabilities.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

In March 2024, UNOPS, in collaboration with UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), WaterAid and Arup, published **new guidelines for developing inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure**. The guidelines address the knowledge gap on ways to practically implement inclusive approaches to WASH infrastructure development, particularly in developing countries and fragile contexts. It draws on project case studies from Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal and more to illustrate the diverse challenges faced by different groups, and provide recommended actions and resources to strengthen the capacity of governments, infrastructure practitioners and other stakeholders to address these. The guidelines include an introduction to inclusive WASH, guidelines for developing inclusive WASH infrastructure, and lastly a set of 'reader's tools' aimed at different audiences.

A UN article from March 2023 looks at how **inclusive water systems for persons with disabilities are integral for achieving SDGs**. This article outlines how SDG 6 on providing

clean water and sanitation is an important avenue to empower persons with disabilities – given its requirement to ensure no one is left behind. The article outlines several case studies of WASH related initiatives to address disability inclusion – including from Nigeria, Mozambique, and Kenya. It outlines three key changes needed for disability inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene; accessible amenities and infrastructure including storage facilities; harmonised inclusive policies developed by governments, development agencies, and community based organisations and the need to include persons with disabilities in water resource management and the development of innovations; and lastly the provision of sufficient financial and physical resources dedicated to disability inclusion in water sector services and programmes.

Climate resilience

C40 Cities published a resource pack for cities on **delivering disability inclusive climate action** in November 2023. The resource pack is designed to help cities understand the need for disability mainstreaming in climate action and to outline the opportunities and first steps in getting started. Areas covered include transport and mobility, just energy transition and disaster risk management. The pack contains a factsheet on making the case for disability inclusion in climate action; a policy paper on mainstreaming disability inclusion in disaster risk management, and a policy paper on mainstreaming disability inclusion through mobility action in cities.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

General

In March, the Disability Inclusive Development Helpdesk published a query featuring a **regional gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis for Latin America**. The report highlights the positive benefits of prioritising gender equality, disability, and social inclusion on poverty reduction, trade and economic development, peace and stability, and addressing climate change and disasters. It provides an intersectional analysis of GEDSI trends in the following areas: legislation and civic space; health, education, employment and social protection; climate change, trade, and security.

In February, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) published an '**Operational Guide on the Implementation of the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032**.' The Jakarta Declaration outlines six priority areas for promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including harmonising national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making processes, advancing universal design-based accessibility, engaging the private sector in disability inclusion

efforts, promoting gender-responsive approaches, and closing disability data gaps for inclusive development and progress tracking. It is a technical resource to support the implementation of the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032. The Operational Guide lays out strategic whole-of-government actions towards disability-inclusive development, with whole-of-society engagement. While Governments are its primary users, this guide is also directed at a wide range of actors beyond the government, including but not limited to CSOs and OPDs, private sector stakeholders, academic, United Nations entities and other development partners.

In January, UNDP Cambodia published a '**Disability Inclusion Trainer's Manual**' – a guide for supporting training capacity for disability inclusion. The guide provides some basic background, and suggested ideas and methods to support disability awareness and inclusion training. The manual is written for people who will be carrying out training on disability inclusion for the mainstream development sector, including government. It is structured as an end-to-end guidance on the process of setting up and delivering training, including guidance on facilitation, preparation, ensuring inclusion of the training itself for persons with disabilities, as well as providing training content and resources.

In March, BOND published a paper on '**An intersectional approach to disability inclusion**' - a resource for members of the Bond Disability and Development Group, donors, and wider NGO sector. The paper explores what it means to take an intersectional approach to disability inclusion. It unpacks how disability intersects with other identities to produce unique experiences of oppression across different thematic areas. It also includes practical case study examples from across the Bond Disability and Development Group, highlighting tools and programmes that take an intersectional approach to disability inclusion.

In February, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) published a report entitled '**JICA Survey and Analysis on Promotion of Disability Mainstreaming and Inclusion in JICA's Operations**.' This paper outlines findings from a survey to provide JICA with information and recommendations to improve the system and practice and develop relevant guidelines for further advancing disability-inclusive development in JICA's operations. It outlines the survey methodology; international trends in mainstreaming Disability Inclusion in international cooperation; case studies on disability inclusion in JICA projects; and a set of recommendations for advancing disability inclusive development in JICA's operations.

Climate justice

The World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) published a **press release on advancing disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction and early warning systems in the Pacific region**. This article outlines findings from a study conducted by GFDRR focusing on the Pacific region and highlights the complex challenges and opportunities in integrating disability considerations into Disaster Risk Management (DRM). It examines various aspects of conditions experienced in a disaster, including the role of climate change, existing legal frameworks, and the essential role of national disability organisations. The report offers recommendations that cover various aspects of DRM,

including policy frameworks, capacity building, community engagement, and data collection. The press release also contains findings from a workshop aimed at applying the recommendations from the report in the Marshall Islands.

In February, Climate Investment Funds (CIF) published a paper on **Disability Inclusion in Climate Finance**. The background paper serves to inform the CIF's strategy regarding disability inclusion in climate finance, offering practical guidance applicable to investment projects across various sectors. Specifically, it rationalises disability inclusion within climate finance, proposes operational approaches for integration into projects, identifies sector-specific considerations, and outlines organisational commitments to inclusive practices. Highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate change on people with disabilities, the paper emphasises the necessity of their involvement in decision-making processes and suggests strategies for engagement, such as consulting with organisations of people with disabilities. It delves into sector-specific nuances, including considerations for energy transition, smart cities, and nature-based solutions, advocating for universal design principles, affordable green energy, and targeted job programs.

Education

In February, the Geneva Hub on Education in Emergencies published a briefing note on **Education in Emergencies and Disability Inclusion**. The briefing note outlines why education in emergencies is critical, and barriers faced by children with disabilities in these contexts. It provides some key messages on 'What We Know' about children with disabilities during crisis, and what urgent actions are needed in response. The briefing note also provides a set of facts and figures related to young people with disabilities and the barriers they face to education. Lastly, a set of further resources and reading are provided. In February, a blog was published by Sightsavers entitled '**The Key to Inclusive Education is Engaging Organisations of People with Disabilities.**' It draws on experiences of the Inclusive Futures programme and consortium in working with organisations of people with disabilities. It recaps key areas in this regard including community outreach; peer-to-peer support for parents; accessibility guidance; strengthening local systems; and the need to ensure engagement is truly meaningful.

In March, UNICEF released a resource on disability inclusive evaluation - '**Disability-Inclusive Evaluations in UNICEF: Guideline for Achieving UNDIS Standards.**' The report outlines UNICEF's guidelines for disability-inclusive evaluations, stressing the importance of ensuring children with disabilities are not overlooked. It emphasises the preparatory phase, advocating for explicit inclusion in terms of reference and active involvement of people with disabilities in evaluation teams. The data collection phase highlights the necessity of adapting methods to accommodate various disabilities, while analysis and reporting emphasise reflecting disability inclusion in recommendations.

Health

In January, the World Health Organization (WHO) published an **'FAQ on Health equity for persons with disabilities: a guide for action.'** It provides a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions about the **Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities** (which was published in 2022). It provides a brief overview of the guide itself, who it was designed for, and how it should be used.

Humanitarian response

In March, the Protection Cluster with UNHCR published a **'Good Practices Paper on Technical Support and Capacity Development of Humanitarian Actors linked to Protection Clusters.'** This paper focuses in particular on disability inclusion. It is part of a wider effort to build capacity of protection clusters and their partners, based on a survey of protection clusters identifying critical gaps. The paper outlines the gaps identified with regards to the inclusion of people with disabilities accessing humanitarian services; what was done to address these gaps; and results of the exercise. The paper recaps four key lessons that emerged which are relevant more broadly, including the need to involve organisations of people with disabilities in the planning and implementation of humanitarian interventions; providing targeted training for humanitarian workers on rights-based and data driven approaches to disability inclusion; and the facilitation of discussions and strategies between different humanitarian organisations to form more unified approaches to disability rights.

In March, the World Food Programme (WFP) published guidance on **'Inclusive Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness and Response.'** The study explores WFP's programming in Indonesia and the Philippines, including WFP's advisory, technical assistance and service provision roles to government and partners. The purpose of this guide is to contextualise disability inclusion in WFP's emergency preparedness and response programming. The guide builds on core reference materials, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2019. A general overview of disability inclusion principles and approaches are outlined, followed by detailed guidance on what disability inclusion looks like in practice with regards to emergency preparedness actions, and emergency response actions.

In March, the Shelter Cluster published a brief set of **'Tips and recommendations on accessible construction and disability inclusive shelter programming in Ukraine.'** This two page document provides an introduction to inclusive shelter programming, key principles, common mistakes, cost of accessible construction, and a set of further resources and guidelines. It is focused on the process of physical design of shelter spaces from an accessibility perspective.

In February, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland (ASB) with Christian Blind Mission (CBM), International Disability Alliance (IDA), and Malteser International published a series

of **findings and lessons learned on collecting disability disaggregated data in disaster risk reduction**. This analysis explores the challenges and opportunities that arise when collecting disability-disaggregated data in disaster-prone contexts and how such data can be used to improve disaster risk reduction programmes. Key findings of the analysis included data being heavily influenced by diversity and intersectionality in types of impairments; gender and age dynamics; challenges in disaster risk mitigation planning and participation; and the presence of environmental and attitudinal barriers.

In February, independent analysts Acaps published a thematic report on **the impact of the conflict on people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip**. This report outlines the disproportionate impact on people with disabilities as a result of Israeli airstrikes, ground offensives, and its blockade of Gaza. It includes an overview of latest developments, disability prevalence in the Gaza strip before 7th October 2023, and an outline of identified impacts on people with disabilities, including: reduced ability to evacuate to safety; difficulty obtaining food; insufficient WASH facilities and hygiene-related essentials; lack of healthcare; heightened protection risks; and disrupted education for children with disabilities.

Women and girls with disabilities

In March, UN Women published a guidance note entitled '**measuring violence against women with disability: Data availability, methodological issues, and recommendations for good practice**.' The guidance note focuses on the measurement of violence against women with disability, and is one in a series of methodological briefing notes for strengthening the measurement and data collection of violence against particular groups of women or specific aspects of violence against women. It provides recommendations for the strengthening of measurement of violence against women with disabilities, and has been informed by a scoping review, expert meetings, and consultations with global, regional, and national experts. Recommendations are provided across a range of areas, including on conducting surveys; ethical conduct of research; data collection; and inclusion of women with disabilities in the research process.

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on **our website**. Contact us via: enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk