Remove Barriers

Guidance for practitioners in development cooperation



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living inclusion

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Introduction

> **Accessibility allows us to tap into everyone's potential.**
>
> Debra Ruh, CEO and founder, disability inclusion strategist, author

According to the United Nations and many national legislations worldwide, **disability inclusion is a core human right** and an essential ingredient for societies to thrive. In international cooperation practice, ensuring the inclusion of and accessibility for persons with disabilities therefore cannot be optional. It is the foundation for effective, equitable, and sustainable development outcomes.

Still, many of the barriers faced by persons with disabilities remain unrecognised. And even where awareness exists, there is often limited knowledge of how to prevent or remove these barriers. This guide explores **key aspects of day-to-day practice in international cooperation** and offers practical suggestions on how barriers can be reduced. It supports a shift towards building accessibility from the outset and integrating it in our everyday work.

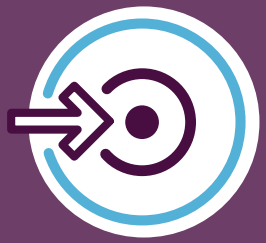
The brochure is structured in two parts. The **first part** covers basic principles: What do we mean by disability and inclusion? Why is it important for our work in international cooperation? And which standards and legal frameworks are relevant? The **second part** focuses on practice: It addresses key areas of daily work. This includes communication, the organisation of events, the development of digital tools, or procurement processes.

While the chapters follow a logical structure, you do not need to read them in sequence. Accessibility is a broad and often context-specific topic. This guide aims to provide an overall orientation, but cannot cover every aspect in detail, which is why you will find plenty of links for further reading throughout.

Also keep in mind: Accessibility is a journey, not a destination. While full accessibility is an important goal, it is not always possible to address every barrier at once. What matters is building awareness, strengthening accessibility skills, and getting started. Every step towards greater accessibility makes a difference. **Better to start small than not at all!**



Staff members of the Deaf Development Programme (DDP) in Cambodia conduct an assessment of a deaf girl at her home in rural Kampot. DDP is dedicated to assist deaf people and their families to integrate into society.



Part 1

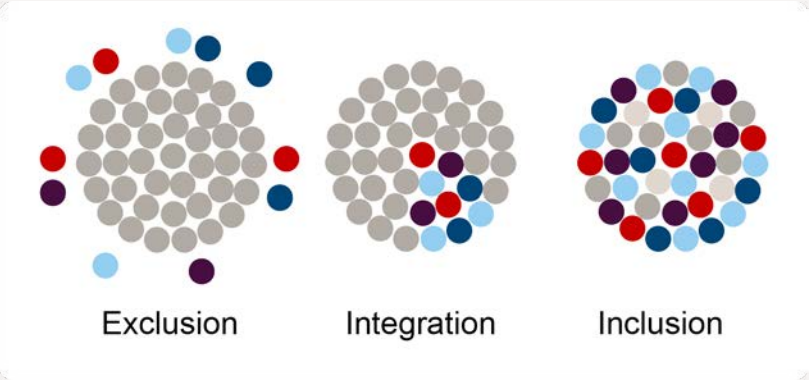
Basic Concepts around Disability Inclusion and Accessibility

Let's start by clarifying a few terms and concepts. Also, we will have a look at the key accessibility standards and legal and policy frameworks we should know and follow. We will find out that inclusion and accessibility aren't just nice-to-have and ethically called-for. Persons with disabilities have a right to equal access and participation, according to international conventions and national law in most countries.

> **Accessibility is not a problem to be solved. Accessibility is a culture to be built.**
>
> Sheri Byrne-Haber, accessibility and inclusion leader, disability advocate and author

1.1 Disability and Inclusion in the International Context

Approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide live with one or more disabilities. Most have limited access to essential areas of life such as education, justice, the labour market, mobility, digitalisation, health, or social security systems. Barriers, lack of support, and limited access to rights prevent them from participating fully and actively in society.



A life of dependency is risky. Moreover, it ties up capacity and resources of the persons with disabilities themselves and those around them. Data shows, that inclusive societies are more resilient, productive, and innovative. All projects aimed at sustainable development – regardless of their specific focus – must therefore be designed to be disability inclusive.

Definition: Disability

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, hinder their full, effective, and equal participation in society.

→ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Definition: Inclusion

Inclusion means shaping society in such a way that all persons, with their individual differences, can participate equally. It is not the individual who must adapt to existing structures and live with barriers. Rather, society must reduce barriers and create structures that enable all people to participate in social life.

→ Human Rights Strategy for German Development Policy

Legal and policy frameworks in international cooperation

- The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)** specifies how universal human rights apply to persons with disabilities. It has been ratified by 193 states, including Germany. These states are legally required to implement the convention through national legislation, policies, and measures.
- **UN CRPD – Article 32** calls on states to make their Official Development Assistance (ODA) inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, thus creating strong guidance for donors, implementing organisations, and partner governments.
- In German development cooperation, disability inclusion is established as a "binding goal and consistent obligation for all policy areas, instruments and strategies" through the **Human Rights Strategy for German Development Policy** (EN, DE, FR) and its accompanying Guide (DE). The **OECD DAC disability inclusion policy marker** is systematically applied to improve the tracking and promotion of disability-inclusive portfolios.
- Adopted in 2025, the **Amman-Berlin Declaration on Global Disability Inclusion** is calling for at least 15 percent of international development programmes being implemented at the country level to pursue inclusion of persons with disabilities as an objective.
- On regional level, examples like the **European Accessibility Act** (EAA) and the **African Disability Protocol** (ADP) play an important role.

Did you know "Nothing about us without us!"?

Persons with disabilities must be actively part of decisions affecting their lives, as members of society. This is what this motto of the disability inclusion movement is about. In projects, **Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD)** should be closely involved from planning to implementation.

→ See a short video on the crucial role of OPD.

→ Find OPDs in your country, e.g. on the OPD Map or via national networks.

1.2 Understanding Accessibility

According to the current understanding of 'disability', it is not individuals with impairments who are inherently disabled, but rather they are disabled by attitudinal and environmental barriers. These barriers prevent full, effective, and equal participation in society.

Removing such barriers, with the aim of achieving accessibility, is a fundamental prerequisite to participation.

Definition: Accessibility

Facilities, products, systems, sources of information, and communication services are considered accessible when persons with disabilities can generally locate, access and use them independently and without external assistance.

→ German Federal Disability Equality Act, Section 4

Accessibility as a path to inclusion

Inclusion and accessibility are closely connected concepts, but not the same.

- **Accessibility** focuses on identifying and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from accessing environments, information, or services.
- **Inclusion** goes a step further: it is about ensuring that persons with disabilities not only have access but also feel welcomed, valued, and able to fully participate as equals.

In this sense, **accessibility is a key prerequisite for inclusion**. Without accessible systems, meaningful participation is not possible.

In everyday work contexts, the following aspects are especially relevant:

- **Digital accessibility**, such as accessible documents, websites, online collaboration platforms and tools compatible with assistive technologies.
- **Communicative and organisational accessibility**, such as clear language, accessible layout and formats, sufficient processing time, and inclusive meeting environments and practises.
- **Physical accessibility**, such as step-free access, (tactile) guidance systems and signage, multisensory warning systems, and suitable acoustics and lighting.

In many contexts, there is no single solution that is fully accessible to everyone, or the circumstances do not allow for certain measures. Accessibility is best understood not as a fixed end state, but as an ongoing process of identifying barriers, and expanding inclusion wherever possible.

Did you know the “Curb-Cut-Effect”?

The removal of barriers for persons with disabilities often benefits many other people as well, including children, the elderly and people with temporary injuries or limited language proficiency.

This broader societal benefit is often referred to under the “Curb-Cut-Effect”: When cities began lowering pavement curbs to make streets and sidewalks accessible, they originally aimed at wheelchair users. However, curb cuts are now widely used and appreciated by many others, including parents with prams, travellers with wheeled luggage, cyclists, delivery workers, and older persons.

1.3 Digital Accessibility: Legal Framework and Standards

Many countries have national policies, laws, or regulations on accessibility. For Information and Communication Technology (ICT) most refer to the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2**, approved by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO/IEC 40500:2025). They describe how digital content can be made perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

Examples for regional or national standards:

- The **European standard for digital accessibility of ICT** (EN 301 549) expands the WCAG to cover hardware, software, and documents. Used, among other contexts, in public procurement and serves as a technical reference point for legislation.
- The **Kenya ICT Accessibility Standard** (KS 2952) provides a good example of mobilising public and private stakeholders to ensure the accessibility of ICT products and services (see GIZ Digital Inclusion Toolbox with, p. 33).

Compliance with these requirements is a legal responsibility. Violations may lead to formal complaints, legal warnings, or administrative fines resulting in financial, organisational, and reputational risks. Accessibility requirements are increasingly becoming standard practice in international cooperation, funding programmes, and procurement processes. Even where partner countries lack such legislations and regulations on accessibility, adopting the WCAG standards should be in our best interest.

German accessibility legislation and standards

The **Federal Disability Equality Act (BGG)** requires public authorities to ensure accessibility, particularly in communication, construction, transport, and information technology.

The **Accessible Information Technology Ordinance (BITV 2.0)** specifies requirements for websites and digital applications, based on the international technical standards for digital accessibility **WCAG 2.1**.

The **Accessibility Strengthening Act (BFSG)** makes accessibility mandatory for many private-sector products and digital services (e.g. websites, apps). It implements the **European Accessibility Act** into German law.

1.4 Reasonable Accommodation and Universal Design

Accessibility is about good design of processes, environments, and services that facilitate equal participation of persons with disabilities. In practice, we distinguish two complementary approaches:

- **Reasonable accommodation (also: adjustments)**
  Individual adjustments made in specific situations to enable persons with disabilities to exercise their rights and opportunities on an equal basis.
- **Universal design**
  Designing products, processes, and formats widely accessible from the outset so that diverse needs are considered, minimising the need for later adaptations or accommodations.

Both approaches are interconnected: Universal design reduces barriers systematically from the outset. The reasonable accommodation approach addresses (remaining) gaps on individual level.

You can find information on how to factor reasonable accomodation into your budget in the publication Budgeting for Inclusion from Inclusive Futures.

Assistive technologies (AT)

Assistive technologies are tools used by individuals to overcome barriers or facilitate access. They may be analogue or digital and support a wide range of needs (see Chapter 2.4).

While **universal design** ensures that systems are compatible with assistive technologies, **reasonable accommodation** means providing such technologies (e.g. for staff, event participants) where required.



What is the difference?

Comparing…	Reasonable Accommodation	Universal Design
Core idea	Individual adjustments when needed	Accessibility by design from the outset
Point in time	Reactive / situation-specific	Proactive / design-oriented
Objective	Enable equal participation in individual cases	Prevent barriers for various clusters of persons with disabilities
Typical question	“What does this individual need?”	“How can we design this, so it is accessible to all and works for many people?”
Examples:		
Online meetings	Ask all participants about their accessibility needs in advance (e.g. captions, breaks, materials beforehand).	Choose an accessible online platform (e.g. with live captions, keyboard navigation, high-contrast mode).
On-site events	Provide sign language interpreters for participants with hearing impairment as needed.	Choose an accessible venue from the start (e.g. step-free access/elevators, accessible toilets, clear visual & tactile signage for all attendees).
Documents	Provide alternative formats (e.g. for interactive publications or online quizzes with drag & drop tasks).	Create documents in an accessible format as a standard. Proper headings, alt text, and reading order as standard, e.g. always with proper headings, alternative texts, and a correct reading order.
Digital tools, E-Learning, Websites	Provide additional assistive software, offer alternative ways of interaction and navigation.	Define accessibility as a requirement in development and procurement.

1.5 Inclusive Language

Language shapes the way we think, perceive the world, and interact with one another. Therefore, we must be sensitive about the way we speak about and with others, including persons with disabilities. If you are unsure about how to refer to an individual, simply ask about their preference. Here are some general recommendations that may guide you:

- **"Persons with disabilities"** is the generally accepted terminology also used in the UN CRPD. This so-called **person-first** language emphasises the individual rather than the disability and recognises that barriers are created externally.
- Nevertheless, some individuals or groups may prefer **identity-first** language as they see the disability as an integral part of their identity, e.g. "autistic person" or "deaf person". Preferences vary and self-identification should always be considered.
- Persons with visual or hearing impairment usually feel comfortable with expressions such as "See you later!" or "Did you hear the news?". It is about finding a **balance between sensitivity and avoiding unnecessary differentiation**.
- **Address disability when needed.** Disability is part of our society and should not be treated as a taboo topic. Open and respectful conversations about accessibility and inclusion are important but always consider when and how appropriate it is to address the disability in a given context.
- **Language continues to evolve**, and discussions are ongoing. Terms that were considered progressive a few years ago may not be widely accepted today. Therefore, always be mindful of how persons with disabilities perceive certain terms and allow them to speak for themselves, as experts on their own lived experiences.

Links:

→ CBM Inclusive Participation Toolbox: Inclusive language and interaction

→ UN Office Geneva: Disability Inclusive Language Guidelines

1.6 Creating Inclusive Spaces: 10 Guiding Principles

To foster an inclusive culture in your team or project, follow these **10 guiding principles**:

1. **Create a welcoming atmosphere.** A respectful and open attitude makes everyone feel comfortable and included. Create a space for everyone to express their needs freely.
2. **Ask, don't assume.** Instead of making assumptions, just ask about everyone's accessibility needs and preferences. Respect autonomy, offer support and don't impose it.
3. **Identify barriers.** Pay attention and proactively reduce them wherever possible.
4. **Recognise diversity.** Every person brings along different social or cultural backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Therefore, avoid generalisations.
5. **There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution.** There are physical, sensory, cognitive, psychiatric, and neurological disabilities, visible and invisible ones, mild to severe, and also multiple disabilities. Be open-minded and flexible when designing solutions.
6. **Ensure everyone is heard.** Involve persons with disabilities in all relevant planning and implementation steps ("Nothing about us without us") and hire experts with lived experiences.
7. **Practical actions count.** Inclusion is not only about good intentions. Practical actions can lead to long-term changes in everyday collaboration.
8. **Focus on abilities and strengths.** Once everyone is on board, focus the collaboration on contributions rather than on potential limitations.
9. **Support empowerment and self-confidence.** Persons with disabilities may have faced situations that have undermined their self-esteem or made them feel overlooked. Be an ally who believes in their potential.
10. **Better to start small than not at all!** Remove barriers wherever you can. Even small first steps can lead to meaningful long-term changes.



For blind persons, digitalisation has made everyday life much easier in many ways. With the help of screen readers, they can access digital content and navigate through apps – provided these have been designed accordingly.



Part 2

Accessibility in Everyday Work Processes

Accessibility affects many aspects of our daily work, particularly wherever we communicate with one another, collaborate, or come together in person or online. It does not always come with high additional costs – often, creative, local socultions are perfectly feasible.

> **Accessibility isn't more work, you were just cutting corners before. The work was incomplete.**
>
> Dana McGarr, strategic leader in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

2.1 Communication and PR

Persons with disabilities are part of all our target audiences: In the general public, at conferences or trainings, in partner organisations or among our own colleagues. When communicating, it is therefore essential to comply with at least the key aspects of accessibility so that no one is excluded from information.

The three key questions of inclusive and accessible communication are:

1. Can the communication product itself be **easily accessed**? (e.g., found, downloaded)
2. Is the **content accessible and comprehensible** to persons with different disabilities? (e.g., readable, audible, understandable)
3. Are persons with disabilities **addressed and portrayed** in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner?

What does this mean for our communication work?

- Check the accessibility of the platforms or medium on which the information is provided.
- Provide information in multiple formats and through at least two sensory channels (sight, hearing, touch e.g. text + audio, visuals + captions) and, where possible, ensure compatibility with assistive technology to convey information.
- Recognise stereotypic narratives that have been (and are still) used to describe persons with disabilities. Shape these narratives to ensure inclusion!

Links:

→ UKaid / Inclusive Futures: A basic guide to accessible communications

→ UN: Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines

→ ExceedAbility: Document Accessibility Guide

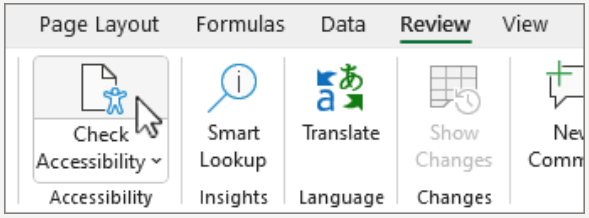
Layout & Structure

Making your documents and presentations meet accessibility standards is not particularly difficult. There are only a few things to consider and to apply consistently. Only when it comes to a more elaborate layout, you need a professional graphic designer with specific knowledge on accessibility.

Accessibility Checker

The accessibility checker is an integrated or external tool that scans a document or presentation for barriers which make it difficult or impossible for persons with disabilities to work through the content. It indicates common issues such as missing alternative texts, poor reading order, missing slide titles, low-contrast elements, or unclear link texts.

- **Microsoft / Windows:** Open the “Review” menu and select “Check Accessibility”. The results will open in a separate slide pane on the right. Click on each finding to jump to the specific item and fix it.



- **Apple / macOS:** Apple does not offer an integrated checking mechanism of this kind. You can, however, use the available features (such as the VoiceOver screen reader) to have the document read aloud to you and thereby detect any problems.

Ask yourself:

Can the content be captured for blind people by a screen reader? (→ text-to-speech)
Can a person with low vision make out the content? (→ size, contrast, etc.)

Recommendations for structuring accessible content:

- In general: Strive for consistency and a **clear structure.** Put things where readers expect them to be. Deviating from expected behaviours creates needless complexity and causes barriers.
- Screen readers rely on a **correct reading order** and a well-structured **hierarchy** of headings, text, and special elements. Special formats such as text boxes, columns, or graphics can cause unclarity if not integrated accordingly. Always use **style** for your headings (H1, H2, etc.) and **slide titles** in your presentations so that it is easy, quick and convenient to navigate through.
- Include a clickable **table of contents** at the beginning so that a blind person can navigate easily and understands quickly what the text is about.
- Do not format your text as justified. Ensure that the **line length** is not too long (e.g. in a landscape format) and the **line spacing** is large enough (min. 1,5).
- Avoid unnecessary and complex **tables**. Complex and multi-dimensional arrangements make it very difficult for a screen reader user to grasp the content. Be careful when merging tables or cells.
- Screen readers do not reliably read out **page headers and footers** in Word documents, especially when they include graphics. Furthermore, the repeated reading of identical headers/footers on every page can be very distracting. Content should therefore not be placed there, graphics should be marked as decorative.

Links:

→ Eclusief: EPAS guidelines for accessible printing

→ Microsoft: Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to persons with disabilities

→ BFW: Checklist for Accessible PowerPoint Presentations (GER)

Text Format & Typography

- **Typeface:** In general, **sans-serif fonts** are considered to be more accessible (e.g., Arial, Calibri) for digital text. However, the preferences vary, and especially when it comes to long texts or print products (e.g. newspapers), **serif fonts** can be easier to read (e.g. Times New Roman).
- Generally, it is important to use **clear letterforms** and enough **spacing** between the characters. Too much formatting, such as italics, capitalisation, underlining, and decorative fonts can significantly impair readability.
- For print products, the **font size** should be minimum 12pt, better 14pt. **Highlighting/bolding** key words helps people with reading difficulties, concentration problems or intellectual disabilities. But do not overdo it, if there is too much of it, it is more of a distraction than a help.
- Never rely solely on **colour** to convey meaning. People with colour blindness can otherwise have difficulites to understand (note also red-green colour blindness). Generally, colours must provide sufficient contrast against the background.

Arial
Calibri
Sans-serif: Digital text, e.g. websites, online publications, PDF-Documents

Times New Roman
Serif: Print products, e.g. books, leaflets

Good

Use clear fonts and enough spacing. Highlight only **important** words.

Avoid

AVOID USING TOO MUCH DECORATIVE FONTS, ***ALL CAPS, UNDERLINING AND ITALIC TEXT.***

- Insert **links** or **buttons** always with descriptive text. The URL must always be hidden behind the text. Describe what the reader can expect or what action a click triggers.

For example:

✓ UN: Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines

✗ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability-inclusive_communication_guidelines.pdf

✓ **Register for the event**

✗ **Click here**

Links:

- Google: Introducing accessibility in typography – Fonts Knowledge
- Siteiimpove: Accessible fonts – How to choose a font for web accessibility

Colour contrast

Ensuring an optimal colour contrast is important for people with low vision and colour blindness. Obviously, a high contrast increases the readability, e.g., black text on a white background or vice versa, but of course other colour combinations are possible. Rule of thumb: The contrast should increase as the text font becomes smaller.

Websites for colour contrast checks:

- Contrast calculator
- Jam.dev: WCAG Color Contrast Checker

Example:

Bad contrast

Clashing Colours

Colour contrast enhances text legibility by creating a clear distinction between the text and its background.

Clear contrast

Ensure readability

Colour contrast enhances text legibility by creating a clear distinction between the text and its background.

File Format

Not all file formats are equally accessible to screen readers. Provided the formatting recommendations (see previous chapters) are followed, the following generally applies:

Word documents (docx), **HTML products** (websites) and **structured PDF files** (= tagged PDFs) are usually convenient to use.

Image PDFs, image formats in general, and **proprietary** or **outdated** formats (e.g. doc, rtf, txt, xls, ai, pages, key) are less recommended and are more likely to create barriers.

Accessible PDFs

- Microsoft does **not** support fully accessible PDF exports on its own. **PDF/UA** ("PDF Universal Accessibility") is the international standard. However, MS Word can produce **tagged PDFs** that are generally useable with screen readers.
- The groundwork for an accessible PDF is always laid in the source document. Before exporting, ensure that the document follows accessibility standards such as using clear heading structure and reading order (see Chapter 2.1, p. 18,19) and providing alt-texts (see Chapter 2.1, p. 27).
- Follow the **step-by-step guide below** to export the document correctly.
- Ideally, perform post-processing with **Adobe Acrobat Pro** (license required) to check and improve accessibility features.

Further useful tips:

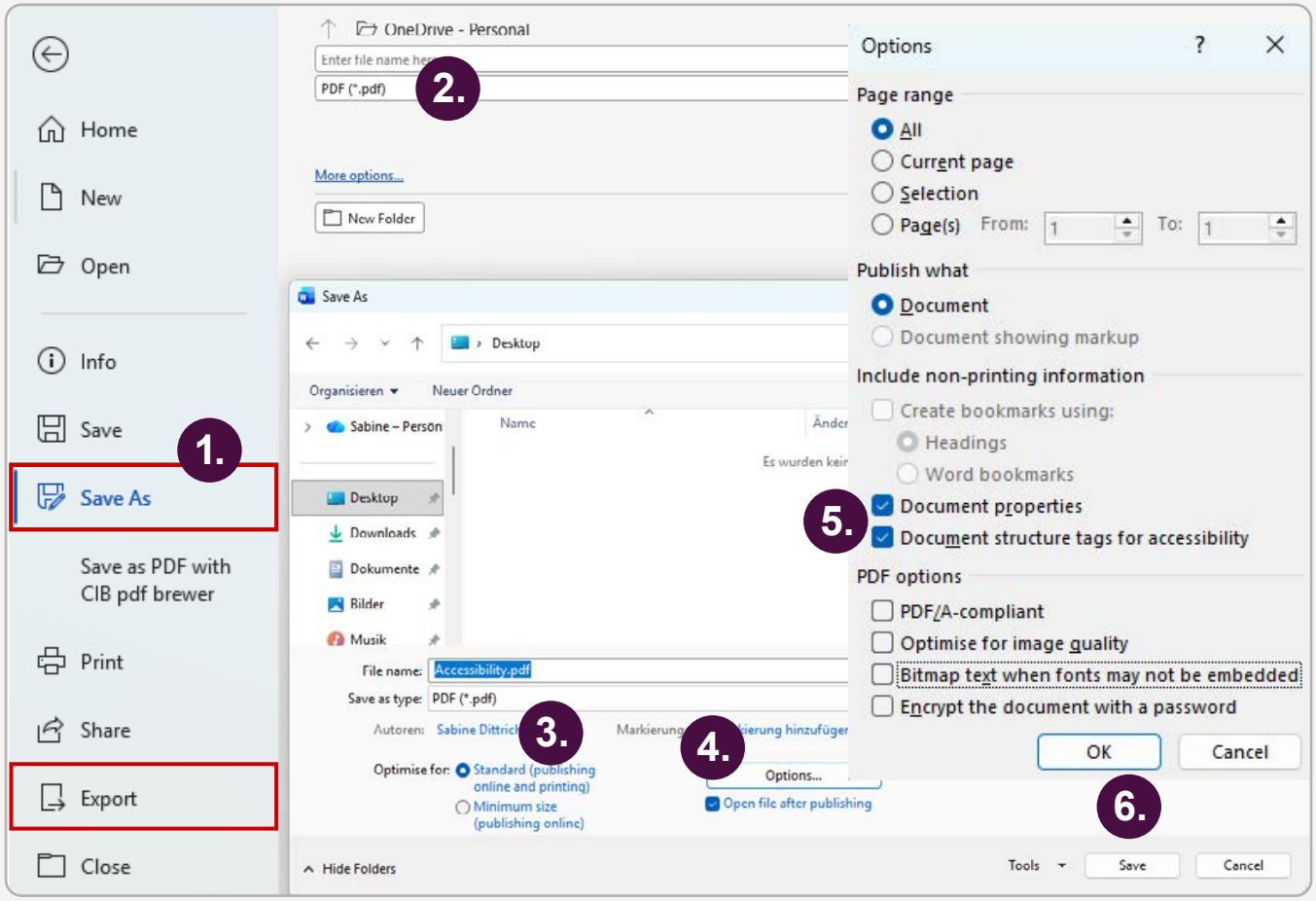
- Use **clear, concise file names** and **avoid having too many (sub-) folder levels.** Note that there is a 260-character limit – especially in SharePoint, where the full path (team name, folders, file name, and extension) is automatically counted. Overly long paths reduce accessibility, as screen readers must read the entire name, and may even prevent files from opening.
- Those who have Microsoft Copilot enabled can use the **Microsoft accessible templates**: Create a file from a template with the Microsoft 365

Links:

→ German Federal Agency for Accessibility: Checking a PDF Document

→ WebAIM: PDF Accessibility

Example of how to export an accessible PDF file from Word:



1. Go to **File** and select **Save As** or **Export**
2. Select **PDF** as the file type or choose **Create PDF**.
3. In the export dialog, select **Optimise for: Standard (Online Publishing and Printing)**.
4. Click **Options…**
5. Make sure the boxes **Document structure tags** and **Document properties** are checked, and that **Bitmap text when fonts may not be embedded** is not checked.
6. Click OK and then save the PDF.

Language accessibility

Simplified language helps many people – whether they have intellectual or learning disabilities, low literacy skills, dementia, or are non-native speakers. It is helpful to be able to distinguish between Plain Language and Easy-to-read.

Plain Language (German: Einfache Sprache) is aimed at people who have difficulty reading or concentrating or who are non-native speakers. It makes information as easy to understand as possible for everyone while still maintaining a certain professional tone. It should therefore always be considered when publishing content.

It does not follow a fixed set of rules, but here are some basic principles:

- Short sentences (“One sentence, one thought”)
- Main message first
- Use everyday words, explain difficult ones
- Use active voice only
- Be clear, direct, and specific

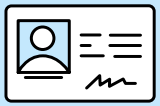
Easy-to-read (also Easy Read; German: Leichte Sprache) addresses specificly people with intellectual disabilities. It follows defined rules in terms of grammar, vocabulary, text structure and layout. Ideally, it should be accompanied by special icons or images. To do it properly, it is recommended to involve service providers who are familiar with the rules (e.g. Down Syndrome International, see below). There are also AI tools that translate texts into easy language.

Please note: Texts written in Easy-to-read should always be reviewed by people from the target group.

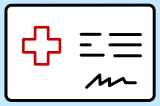


Example:

- **Original text:**
  Your ID and health insurance card are required in order to participate in the appointment.
- **Plain Language:**
  You must bring your ID and health insurance card to your appointment.
- **Easy-to-read:**



Bring your ID.



Bring your health card.



Show them at the appointment.

Links:

- Inclusion Europe: European standards for Easy-to-read
- German Federal Agency for Accessibility: Easy Read (German)
- United Stated Department of Labor: Plain Language Quick Reference Guide
- Plain Language Association International (PLAIN): What is plain language?
- Inclusion International and Down Syndrome International: Listen Include Respect Guidelines

Sign languages are natural languages with their own grammar, vocabulary, and culture. They developed independently in different countries and regions and are not simply visual versions of spoken languages. As a result, users of different sign languages may not automatically understand one another and may need to learn another sign language (just as speakers of spoken languages).

For example, deaf communities in countries where English is widely used as an official spoken language may still use entirely different sign languages (e.g. Zambian or Ghanaian Sign Language). British Sign Language (BSL) is mainly used in the United Kingdom, while American Sign Language (ASL) is used in the United States, parts of Canada, and some other regions. BSL and ASL are separate languages with different grammar, vocabulary, and handshapes. They are not simply regional dialects of the same sign language, and users of ASL and BSL generally cannot understand one another without learning the other sign language.

Sign language interpreters should always be provided for large events (conferences, etc.). They may also be necessary or advisable for online events, depending on the size or target audience. For videos, see Chapter 2.1, p. 29.

International Sign

International Sign (IS) is a simplified communication system mainly used in global formats, like international conferences, organisations, and networks. It is not a native language but a cross-border communication system drawing on widely understood signs and visual communication strategies from different sign languages. There are no reliable global statistics on the number of IS users, as it is typically used as an additional communication tool rather than a first language.

Links:

- UN: International Day of Sign Languages, 23 September
- World Federation of the Deaf: Inclusion and Equal Rights
- WASLI: International Sign

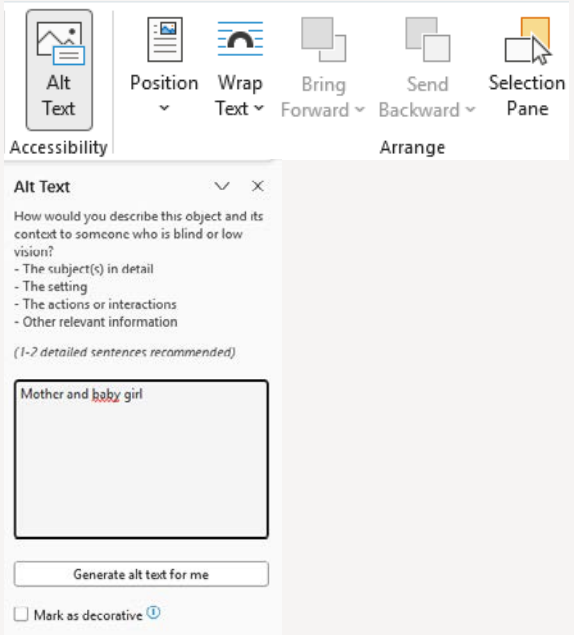
Imagery: Graphics, icons and pictures

When using images, e.g. photos or graphics, two main aspects should be considered: **ensuring barrier-free access** to their content through alternative texts, and **selecting inclusive imagery.**

Alternative texts (“alt texts”)

Alternative texts describe digital images for persons who are visually impaired and use screen reader software. The software recognises the picture automatically and reads aloud the embedded text.

- Most importantly: **Describe what is relevant.** Depending on the purpose of the picture, the text may contain only brief facts (e.g. object, location) or a more detailed visual description (e.g. clothing, mood).
- When it comes to **graphics or diagrams**, ask yourself: Is it important to describe all elements, or is it sufficient to state the overall message? Can the information also be found elsewhere in the text? In most cases, it is advisable not to be too detailed, but to convey the key information. However, in studies, for example, more details can be important.
- Images and graphic elements without any substantial significance (e.g. decorative patterns, icons, frames) should be marked as **“decorative”**, so as not to be considered by screen readers and not to distract the flow of information.
- Do not trust automatically generated alt texts. **Always double-check** and adjust!



Respectful imagery of persons with disabilities

- Ensure that persons with disabilities are portrayed as independent individuals and not as in need of help. Focus on their **abilities** and individual personalities, rather than their disabilities, barriers, or assistive devices (e.g., walking aids).
- Use **authentic** pictures. Stock photos or AI-generated pictures sometimes create unrealistic depictions, for example where assistive technologies are used incorrectly.
- Choose a **camera angle** at eye level. Avoid gloomy lighting or other stylistic devices that can reinforce stereotypes (sadness, helplessness). It is preferable to use natural light rather than artificial lighting.
- Ensure that imagery reflects diversity and includes persons with visible and invisible disabilities.

Links:

- Microsoft: Everything you need to know to write effective alt text
- Harvard University: Write helpful Alt Text to describe images
- Perkins School for the Blind: How to Write Alt Text and Image Descriptions
- PWDA: Guidelines: Images Portraying People with Disability



Video & audio

- Always provide **closed captioning**, properly synchronised to the audio of the video. Also, consider the font size and type of the captions, ensuring they are visible and easily readable.

Please note: Do not rely on autogenerated captions from platforms such as YouTube as these often contain errors. If you use automated captions, be sure to double-check and correct them.

- People who have a **sign language** as their mother tongue sometimes prefer interpreters over closed captions, as written grammar can be more challenging to understand and lacks important mimetic aspects. Depending on your audience, it may be advisable to consider this factor (see Chapter 2.1, p. 26).
- Consider having **audio descriptions** for important visual information, so that visually impaired persons can follow the content.
- Avoid using flashing lights or strobe effects in videos. If it cannot be avoided, add a warning: “Warning: This video contains…”
- Ensure there is no misrepresentation or unintended discrimination or disrespectfulness in the spoken and **visual language** used in videos. (See: “Inclusive Language” and “Respectful imagery”)

Links:

- Web Accessibility Initiative: Making Audio and Video Media Accessible
- Nottinghamshire County Council: Visual information in videos
- Video Accessibility Scan: WCAG Flash Analysis



Social Media

Of course, all the principles regarding inclusive language and the use of text, videos and images described in the other chapters also apply to social media content. Here are a few more tips that are particularly relevant on social media platforms and in chat conversations:

- Use **hashtags** in Camel Case, for example #LivingInclusion instead of #livinginclusion.
- Every **emoji** has an official name, which screen readers read aloud, e.g. “red heart” or “grinning face with big eyes”. Modifiers like skin tones are also specified (e.g. “thumbs up: medium skin tone”). However, these descriptions can vary a bit in different screen reader software or social media platforms, and they can also be disabled and thus skipped entirely. Therefore:
  - Limit their use, as this disrupts the flow of speech of the screen reader.
  - If you use them, place them at the end of sentences rather than in the middle.
  - Do **not** use them as replacements for words.
  - Their official descriptions do not always accurately convey what you actually mean, e.g., when it comes to irony, symbolic meaning, etc. The intended message very often remains unclear to screen reader users.
- Since visual content plays a large role in social media, take particular care with alt texts and other descriptions. When it comes to **GIFs**, alt text fields are often unavailable. You have to describe the GIF in your caption or post text.

Links:

→ Accessible Social: Accessible Social Media Content

→ Unicode: Full Emoji List, v17.0 (incl. standardised names)

2.2 Events and Meetings

Accessibility looks different depending on the format, size, goals, and target groups of an event. However, there are some general aspects that should be considered from the planning stage through to the execution. Whenever possible, persons with disabilities and their representative organisations should be involved in the planning process of events.

General Preparations

The following recommendations can help improve accessibility for both in-person and online events and meetings:

- **Budget planning:** Allocate an accessibility budget from the very beginning and include accessibility costs across all relevant areas, such as travels, materials, communication, and venue adjustments. The costs will vary depending on format, size, and location.
- **Moderator and speaker briefing:** Ensure all contributors are briefed in advance and sensitised to accessibility needs, such as speaking clearly, describing visual content aloud, and using inclusive language.
- **Time schedule:** Plan your schedule generously. Include regular breaks and consider extra time for transitions between rooms.
- **Accessible materials and presentations:** Make sure all materials follow general accessibility standards (see Chapter 2.1). Share relevant material in advance with the participants to enable meaningful participation.
- **Communication support:** Consider communication support such as sign language interpretations, real-time captioning, hearing loops, easy-to-read materials, or other assistive technologies (see Chapter 2.4).

Links:

- → CBM: Accessible Meetings Toolkit
- → AFDO: Event Accessibility Checklist
- → German Federal Agency for Accessibility: Checklist Accessible Events (GER)
- → Business Disability Forum: Making PowerPoint presentations accessible

Invitations

Think early about how to reach all potential participants. Ask yourself who should get involved, who might be left out, and how to invite everyone in an accessible way. Invitations play a vital role in sharing the information needed and making people feel welcomed. Some practical tips for the invitation and registration process:

- **Make sure that the invitation is accessible for everyone.** Check the email, website, or PDF for accessibility. Put the most important information first and make it stand out. Send it out well in advance so that proper arrangements can be made.
- **Be transparent.** Clearly communicate which accessibility measures are in place and where limitations may exist, so participants already know what to expect. This also includes which costs will be covered regarding accessibility measures.
- **Accessible registration forms:** Registration forms must comply with the WCAG-standards (see Chapter 1.3, p. 10, and next page)

Tip: Identifying accessibility needs

Use the registration process to identify participants' accessibility needs in advance. Apply the principles of **universal design** wherever possible but remember that **no single measure works for everyone**. Ask participants about any individual preferences or reasonable accommodation requests to enable meaningful participation.

For smaller events, provide an **open text field** or **contact email**, for example:

COPY We aim to make this event accessible to everyone. Please let us know what you need to participate, so we can arrange appropriate support.

For larger events, use a short **questionnaire** with multiple-choice options and an additional open text field for individual requests. Categories may differ whether the event is online or in person. Clearly communicate any limitations in advance. Example questionnaire:



Accessibility Requirements

We aim to plan and design the event as accessible as possible. Please use this form to let us know about any individual accessibility needs. This information is confidential and will only be used to meet your requirements.

Communication

- ☐ Sign language interpretation, language:
- ☐ Real-time captioning, language:
- ☐ Hearing aid
- ☐ Others:

Mobility

- ☐ Accessible transportation
- ☐ Accessible parking
- ☐ Step-free access / Accessible stage
- ☐ Wheelchair-accessible seating / Height-adjustable tables
- ☐ Ramps/Rails
- ☐ Accessible seating arrangement
- ☐ Others:

Accessible materials

- ☐ Receive accessible electronic copies in your preferred format (Word, tagged PDF) in advance
- ☐ Materials in Braille (grade 1 or 2)
- ☐ Materials in large font/print
- ☐ Others:

Environment & space

- ☐ Lightning
- ☐ Quiet space / low-stimulation room
- ☐ Sensory-friendly environment (e.g. reduced noise, adjusted lightning)
- ☐ Others:

Support person / assistance

- ☐ I will attend with a support person or assistant
- ☐ I will attend with a support dog
- ☐ Others:

Anything else?

Please let us know about additional requirements that may not be covered here, or if there is any further information you would like to share. Where necessary, we may contact you to further discuss how we can best support your participation!

In-person events

When organising in-person events, the choice of the venue is particularly important.
The venue should be inspected in advance, ideally by persons with disabilities.



Getting there: Ensure the venue is accessible by public transport with nearby connections and offers accessible parking spaces.



Entering the venue: The venue should meet accessibility standards and provide step-free access to the entrance and exits. If needed, install ramps or lifts.



Moving around within the venue: Wide doors and corridors with a minimum width of 1.5 m wide allow persons with wheelchairs to move around. Elevators should be provided to make everyone access different floors.



Signages and orientation: Use clear, high-contrast signage to indicate essential locations, potentially in easy-to-read language, placed at a height that is easily readable also for wheelchair users and persons of short statue.



Room arrangements: Ensure flexible and accessible seating options, including spaces for wheelchairs, and accessible low tables (not exclusively bar tables!). Make sure you have adequate and even lighting, a height-adjustable lectern, and an appropriate technical infrastructure (e.g. microphones, headsets, etc.). Make sure that sign language interpreters are clearly visible to all participants.



Accessible toilets: Ensure there is at least one fully accessible toilet on every floor. It should be close to the meeting room and comply with accessibility standards.



Emergency exits: Accessible emergency exits should include visual and/or vibrating alert systems. Consider diverse accessibility requirements within the evacuation plan.

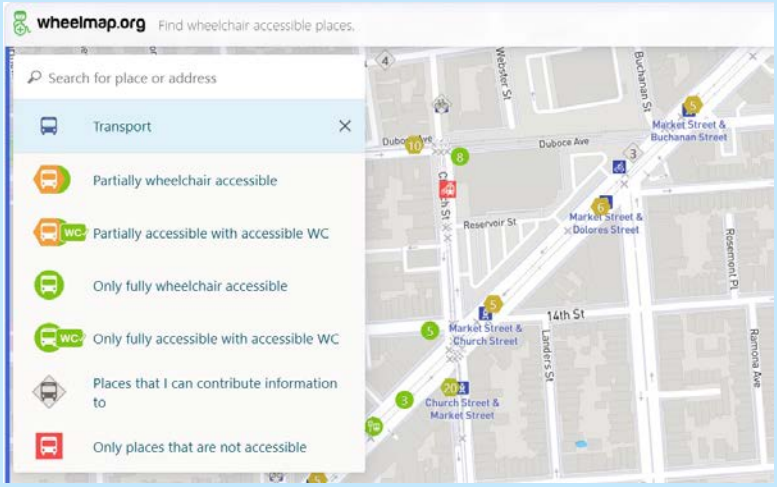


Accessible catering: Make sure the canteen is accessible and offers accessible seating options. Also ensure that service counters and payment areas are reachable for everyone.



Audio accessibility: Ensure good audio quality and minimal background noise, as this can make it more difficult for some participants to follow. If needed, provide induction loops and quiet spaces.

Digital accessibility maps like Wheelmap make it easier to find venues that are accessible for persons with mobility impairments. Moreover, digital floor plans can help participants navigate the venue and find accessible routes.



Induction Loops

Induction Loops (or: hearing loops) create accessibility for persons with hearing impairments in settings with a lot of background or interfering noise. They are an assistive listening system that takes a sound source and transfers it directly to a hearing aid without background noise, interference, or acoustic distortion (see Chapter 2.4, p.49).

Links:

- CBM: 30 important accessibility considerations for an event venue
- Aktion Mensch: Accessible Phyiscal Environment (GER)

Digital events and meetings

The mere fact that an event is held digitally or in a hybrid format can already contribute to inclusion. However, accessibility must also be consciously created in the digital space:

- **Accessible platform:** Ensure that the platform used for the event is accessible to screen readers.
  It should also offer a live captioning function that provides a real-time written transcript or audio.
  If possible, use PowerPoint Live (or similar software) as it is compatible for screen readers and allows the audience to access the slides themselves.
- **Interactive tools:** When making use of digital tools like surveys or polls, make sure they are accessible.
- **Preparation of speakers:** Offer technical briefings for the speakers in advance and demand them to use headsets to ensure good audio quality.
- **Sign Language interpreters:** Ensure that the sign language interpreters are “spotlighted” all the time to make sure, they are visible for participants who depend on them.
- **Chat function:** Avoid excessive use of the chat function if persons using a screen reader are present. It is very tyring to follow the information from the chat and the spoken word of the event at the same time.

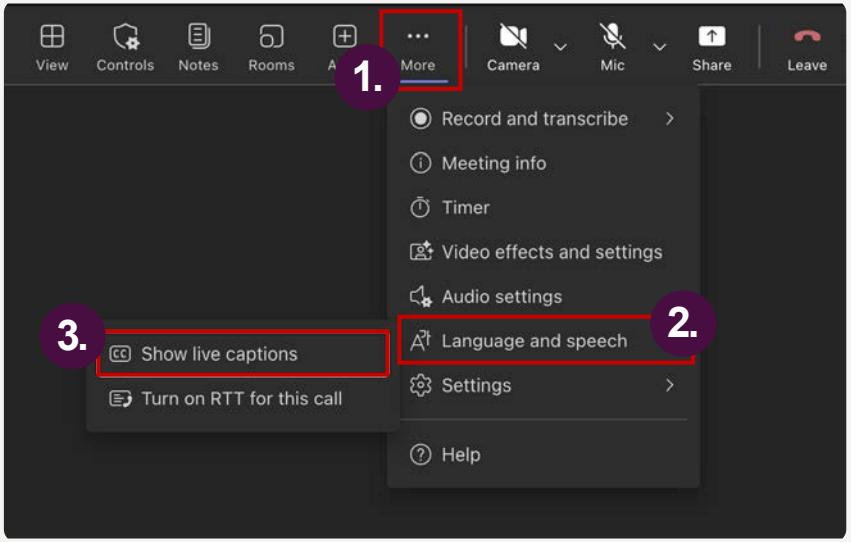
Which platform?

The Federal Agency for Accessibility has compared video conferencing programmes in terms of their accessibility. MS Teams and Zoom performed particularly well. Find here an overview of the functions of each programme: Comparison of the Accessibility of Video Conferences (GER)

English language resource: Business Disability Forum: A user’s guide to accessible video conferencing apps.

Did you know?

Live-captioning provides a real-time written transcript of audio and can make presentations accessible for persons with hearing impairments. Many video conferencing tools, like MS Teams, offer a live captioning function.



How to enable live captions in Microsoft Teams:

1. Go to “**More**” in the top navigation bar.
2. Click “**Language and speech**”.
3. And activate “**Show live captions**”.

Links:

- Netz Barrierefrei: How to make Online Events accessible
- W3C Group Note: Accessibility of Remote Meetings
- UNICEF: Key recommendations for virtual meetings (checklist)
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing: Accessibility Tips for a Better Virtual Meeting Experience

2.3 Procurement of Services and Goods

Inclusive procurement practices are based on two key objectives: 1) the procurement process itself should be accessible to everyone, including persons (service providers / consultants) with disabilities and 2) the goods and services acquired should be accessible and will not create new barriers. The aim is to ensure accessibility and non-discrimination throughout the procurement cycle, from tendering and contracting to service delivery, products, and final outputs. This can have a trans-formative impact not only on individual persons with disabilities, but also on whole companies and businesses.

Why it matters:

- The UN CRPD and many national legal frameworks recognise procurement as an important mechanism for promoting accessibility and inclusion.
- Inclusive procurement improves the quality of services and goods by designing for diverse user needs from the outset.
- It expands competition and supplier diversity, unlocking innovation and fair pricing.
- It reduces retrofit costs and implementation risks by defining accessibility and inclusion requirements early in the process.

Recommendations for an inclusive procurement process:

- Check whether (internal) procurement policies and procedures comply with applicable accessibility requirements.
- Ensure that tender documents and other procurement-related materials used internally and externally are accessible to suppliers, consultants, and experts with disabilities.
- Ensure that procurement websites, portals, and online application systems, as well as channels for submitting questions and bids are accessible.
- Where relevant, explicitly encourage the participation of experts with disabilities, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), or disability-inclusive service providers.

Recommendations for procuring accessible services & goods:

- Clearly define accessibility requirements in the **terms of reference (TOR)**. Be as specific as possible so that service providers can assess accurately costs and resource requirements.
- State the specific accessibility requirements for the relevant outputs in the **task description**, such as for websites, events, communication materials, videos, or trainings.
- Include accessibility-related knowledge and experiences in the qualification requirements for experts and in the **evaluation criteria**.
- When accessibility is a key aspect of the service, ask for an outline or **concept**, describing their approach on disability inclusion and accessibility in the specific context.
- **Allocate sufficient budget and resources** for accessibility and inclusion measures, such as accessible venues, transport, sign language interpretation, captioning, or assistive technology for experts and participants.
- **Involve OPDs** and/or **experts with disabilities** in procurement processes and service delivery whenever possible. **Communicate proactively your commitment** to working with them.
- Where relevant, clarify how **reasonable accommodation needs** of service providers with disabilities can be addressed and financed. This may include accessible transport, sign language interpretation, assistive technology, personal assistance, or accommodation.
- Where needed, the main contract should allow for subcontracting to be awarded to providers who can bring in specialised accessibility expertise.

Links:

- → UN: Guidelines Implementation – Procurement
- → Accessibility Standards Canada: Procurement of accessible services
- → UK AID / Inclusive Futures: Budgeting for inclusion
- → Bridging the Gap: Disability-inclusive Procurement
- → Disability:IN: Accessible Procurement Toolkit

Design, communication and event management services

While accessibility requirements (e.g. for websites or buildings) are regulated by law and commonly known by service providers, this is often less the case in communications, design, and event management. It is, therefore, particularly important to include accessibility requirements in tender specifications and to invite experienced service providers and consultants, where known.

Some practical tips and suggested wording

Include accessibility in the task description:

COPY “The products or events must be designed to be as accessible as possible” or “Printed materials are to be produced in in accessible standard print and, where required, in Braille, and easy-to-read formats.

- In event management, be as specific as possible as to what is needed (e.g. sign language interpretation, induction loops). These requirements have implications for budgeting, subcontracting, and time planning.
- For photographers, videographers, or graphic designers, emphasise the importance of respectful and inclusive images.

COPY We expect the visual language to reflect diversity, avoid stereotyping, and represent persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups with dignity, agency, and respect.

Ask for a short concept about their understanding of accessibility:

COPY The tenderer should set out the methods and measures it plans to implement to ensure accessibility within the scope of the service covered by the tender.

Allocate dedicated budget:

- Accessibility requirements should be reflected in the budget from the outset, e.g. costs for accessibility checks, braille printing, closed captions, or reasonable accommodation measures. The amount varies depending on the context and required measures.

Request accessibility testing or review:

- Always have draft products checked for accessibility.
- It is also useful to commission a graphic design agency to review products and documents you and your team created. This is particularly important when creating PDFs, elaborate presentations, or visual social media content.
- Ideally, persons with disabilities should always be involved in this process.

COPY Before finalisation of the product, both automated and manual accessibility testing shall be conducted and documented. Identified accessibility findings shall be addressed before final delivery.

Include service providers with experiences:

- Ask for skills:

Example **graphic design**:

COPY All experts (or: at least one expert) should have demonstrated experience in producing accessible documents and communication products, including in-depth knowledge of relevant standards and current practices.

Example **event management**:

COPY X years of experience in the design, consultancy and delivery of inclusive events / experience in collaborating with and commissioning of sign language interpreters / experience in ensuring accessibility (event methods, technology, documents) / experience in working with persons with disabilities.

- Ask for references: The bidder shall provide references for comparable assignments/contracts.

COPY 1–2 graphic products specifically optimised for accessibility

- Seek out service providers with expertise and/or demonstrated experiences in accessibility and disability inclusion. You can request recommendations via disability@giz.de.

Digital solutions and services

Digital products and services should be accessible from the outset. Accessibility ensures that websites, applications, platforms, digital learning offers, and other digital services can be used by persons with disabilities. It also improves usability for many other users and supports compliance with recognised accessibility standards and, where applicable, national legislation (see Chapter 1.2, p. 10).

Some practical tips and suggested wording

Include accessibility in the task description:

- Clearly state that all digital products and services must comply with recognised accessibility standards. Where relevant, specify the applicable standard, e.g. WCAG 2.1 (or higher), level AA.

COPY The contractor shall ensure that all deliverables comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2, Level AA.

Request accessibility expertise in expert team:

- Ask for demonstrated experience in accessible digital development and inclusive design. Where relevant, request references for comparable accessible digital products or services. Consider including accessibility competencies in the evaluation criteria.

COPY The contractor shall demonstrate experience in implementing accessible digital solutions and provide examples of comparable projects.

- For recommendations on specialized service providers contact us via disability@giz.de.

Ask for accessibility testing and verification:

- Require accessibility testing before final delivery. Combine automated and manual testing methods. Where possible, include usability testing with persons with disabilities.

COPY Before final delivery, the contractor shall conduct automated and manual accessibility testing, document findings, and address identified accessibility issues. User testing with persons with disabilities is encouraged.

Allocate dedicated resources:

- Ensure sufficient budget and time for accessibility, user testing, accessibility reviews, and reasonable accommodation where needed.

Involve persons with disabilities throughout the process:

- Require the involvement of persons with disabilities and/or OPDs in the design, testing, or review process. Allocate sufficient budget for their participation and expertise.

COPY The contractor shall involve persons with disabilities and/or organisations of persons with disabilities in the design, testing, and validation of the solution and describe how this will be done.

- To find experts with disabilities, use the ressources Global OPD Map, CBM, or OPD directory. Service providers that explicitly offer services provided by people with disabilities are, for example: myAbility, Test.Labor, ListenIncludeRespect.

Getting Started: A Basic Accessibility Clause for Digital Solutions

COPY **Minimum accessibility requirement:** The contractor shall ensure that all digital products and services comply with WCAG 2.2 Level AA. Accessibility shall be integrated throughout the project lifecycle and verified through automated and manual testing. Where feasible, persons with disabilities shall be involved in user testing and validation before final delivery.

Links:

- → Practical Framework and Toolkit for Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (p. 117–123)
- → Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Standard
- → Overview of national accessibility laws and policies by W3C.

2.4 Assistive Technologies

Assistive technologies (AT) is an umbrella term for devices and their related systems and services that support individuals with accessibility needs to participate independently in everyday life. They are used in physical environments (e.g. mobility) as well as within the digital sphere (e.g. text to speech).

AT range from no-tech and low-tech aids (e.g., wheel-chairs, walking and hearing aids, glasses) to high-tech solutions (e.g., hardware, software, artificial intelligence). In international cooperation and project settings, AT help ensure that staff, partners, consultants, and participants can:

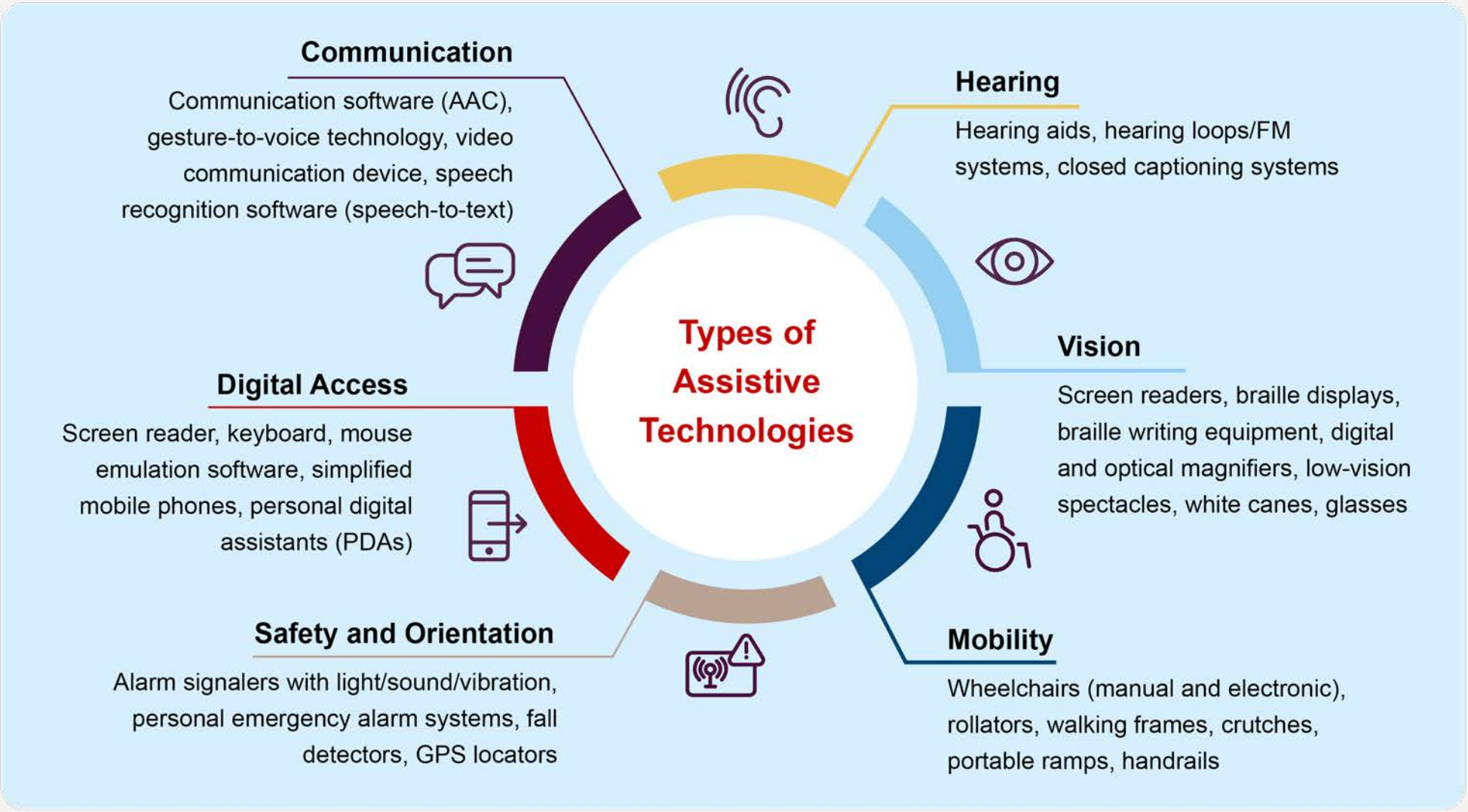
- access information
- communicate effectively
- access physical and virtual spaces safely and comfortably
- join and actively participate in meetings, events, and trainings
- work independently and productively
- participate equally in decision-making, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration processes

Please note: It must be ensured from the outset, that assistive technologies can be used properly. Wheelchairs are only useful if step-free access is available, screen readers depend on properly structured and accessible content. Inaccessible design can make even advanced AT unusable.

Links:

- WHO & UNICEF: Global Report on Assistive Technology
- ATscale: About Assistive Technology
- WebAIM: Accessibility Resources
- W3C: Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)

Overview: Types of assistive technologies



(see WHO Priority AT List)

6 Examples of Common Assistive Technologies

Mobility Aids

What is it? Mobility aids are devices that support independent movement for people with reduced mobility. They include wheelchairs, walking aids, crutches, rollators, and mobility scooters. These tools help users move safely and independently in daily life.

Who may benefit from it? E.g., persons with physical or mobility impairments, older persons with reduced strength or balance, and people recovering from injury or surgery.

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Ensure step-free access (ramps, elevators, level entrances).
- ✓ Provide wide corridors, doorways, and turning spaces for wheelchairs and scooters.
- ✓ Ensure accessible toilets and rest areas are available.
- ✓ Design smooth, even, and non-slip surfaces for walkways.
- ✓ Provide clear wayfinding, including accessible signage at appropriate heights and visible indication of step-free routes or elevators.
- ✓ Ensure elevator controls or door openers reachable from seated position.

Links:

- → CBM: Promoting Access to the Built Environment Guide
- → UNICEF: Toolkit on Accessibility for Programme-Related Buildings

Screen reader

What is it? A screen reader is a software that enables people who are blind or have low vision to access digital information. It interprets the structure of websites, documents and applications and present the content information through synthetic speech and/or a refreshable Braille display.

Common screen readers include JAWS (commercial software for Windows), NVDA (free open-source, for Windows), VoiceOver (free, for Apple devices) and TalkBack (free, for Android devices).

Who may benefit from it? Blind persons, persons with severe visual impairments, some people with reading disabilities.

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Use a logical heading structure, document hierarchy and reading order.
- ✓ Include meaningful alternative text (alt text) for images or mark as decorative.
- ✓ Use descriptive link text (e.g. Website Living Inclusion instead of https://inklusion-leben.org/en/).
- ✓ Set correct document language (see Info-Box on language support).
- ✓ Ensure tables, forms, and other content are properly structured and labelled.
- ✓ Avoid spelling and formatting errors that may affect pronunciation and navigation.

For a comprehensive overview, see Chapter 2.1 and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Links:

- → Digital NSW Australia: Understanding screen readers
- → WebAIM: Screen Reader User Survey
- → WebAIM: Designing for Screen Reader Compatibility
- → University of California: Screen Reader Demo (Video)

Refreshable Braille Displays

What is it? A refreshable Braille display converts digital text into Braille using movable pins that change dynamically as the user navigates content. The hardware device is typically connected to a computer, smartphone, or tablet via USB or Blue-tooth and receives the output of a screen reader.

Who may benefit from it? Persons who read Braille (blind and deafblind persons).

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Avoid using empty (blank) lines to create visual spacing or structure.
- ✓ Instead, use paragraph spacing instead.
- ✓ Follow all requirements for a screen reader to work properly.

Links:

→ American Foundation for the Blind: Refreshable Braille Displays

Speech Recognition

What is it? Speech recognition software converts spoken language into text and digital commands. It allows users to dictate text, navigate applications, and operate a computer using their voice instead of a keyboard or mouse. Many operating systems include built-in speech recognition and voice access features (e.g., voice access in Windows).

Who may benefit from it? E.g., persons with mobility impairments or conditions that make typing difficult.

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Ensure all functions can be accessed without drag-and-drop.
- ✓ Use clearly labelled buttons and form controls.
- ✓ Avoid interactions that rely only on mouse movements.

Links:

→ Acadaimy: How Does Speech Recognition Work? (Video)

→ Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI): Speech Recognition

Screen Magnification

What is it? Screen magnification enlarges all or part of a screen as if you are looking though a magnifying glass. It allows users with low vision to read and interact with digital content more easily. Most computers, smartphones, and tablets include built-in magnification features.

Who may benefit from it? Persons with low vision, some older persons with age-related vision loss.

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Ensure content resolution remains usable at high zoom (200–400%).
- ✓ Use sufficient colour contrast.
- ✓ Avoid text embedded in images.

Links:

- → AbilityNet: Screen Magnification
- → Tufts Technology Service: Screen Magnification (video, YouTube)

Hearing or Induction Loops

What is it? A hearing loop (also: induction loop) is an assistive listening system that transmits sound wirelessly to hearing aids or cochlear implants. This reduces background noise and improves speech clarity in meeting rooms, conference venues, and reception areas. It consists of a sound source (e.g. microphone, telephone), an amplifier, a wire loop, and a compatible hearing aid or cochlea implant.

Who may benefit from it? Persons who are hard of hearing, some cochlear implant users

What requirements must be met?

- ✓ Ensure microphones are used consistently.
- ✓ Inform participants when a hearing loop is available.
- ✓ Combine with captions where possible.

Links:

- → European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH): Hearing Loops

2.5 Buildings and Office Environment

In many low- and middle-income country (LMIC) contexts, creating accessible and inclusive workplaces requires a combination of **practical adjustments**, **inclusive design**, and **context-appropriate solutions**, rather than reliance on highly specialised or costly equipment alone. Measures should always be done in consultation with employees with disabilities and, when it comes to structures and buildings, with involvement of OPDs.

A building becomes truly accessible when everyone can:

- easily reach it
- enter effortlessly
- understand it quickly
- use it independently
- leave it safely

Accessible entrances and exits

- A **step-free access** enables more people to enter and leave buildings independently. Where necessary, install ramps that follow general accessibility guidelines.
- Provide automatic **doors**, push-button-activated systems, or somebody who helps open and close the doors. Doorways should have a minimum width of 0.80 – 0.90 meters.
- Provide **clear and tactile signage** that guide individuals to accessible entrances and exists.
- **Accessible parking spaces** should be located close to the building entrance.

Moving within the building

- Ensure **sufficient space** for movement and manoeuvring within the rooms. Pathway corridors must be at least 1.20 metres wide for single use and 1.80 metres for two-way traffic.
- Accessible **elevators** allow easy movement between floors. Provide one with an audio floor announcement system and Braille buttons.

- Ensure good lighting and **obstacle-free navigation**.
- Provide clear, consistent signage at key decision points with high contrast, readable fonts, placed at heights accessible to all (standing and seated users) and in tactile formats where needed.
- Ensure accessible **emergency exists** and visual and/or vibrating **alert systems** for persons with visual or hearing impairments.

Workspace

- **Desks** must be height-appropriate or -adjustable and allow wheelchair access underneath. Position **storage** (e.g. shelves) within a reachable height (i.e. between 0.40 and 1.40m). Essential equipment (e.g. printers) should be provided close to the workstation.
- Provide **assistive technologies** as appropriate and feasible, e.g. screen reader or screen magnification software. (see Chapter 2.4, p. 44).
- Provide **quiet or low-stimulation workplaces** to minimise sensory overload. Make sure to mark these rooms accordingly.

Common areas

- **Accessible toilets** within the workplace that align with official standards are a must. Make sure to sign them accordingly.
- Ensure that the **canteen** is physically accessible and provides appropriate seating options. Serving counters and payment areas must be reachable from different heights and provide clear signages.
- Make sure that **shared areas** such as kitchens, are accessible for everyone (including its equipment and facilities).

Links

- → CBM: Guidelines – Promoting Access to the Build Environment
- → UNICEF: Toolkit on Accessibility for Programme-Related Buildings
- → NCBI: Braille and Tactile Signage Position Statement

Construction & Urban Planning

This guide is unable to cover construction and urban planning in depth, since the range of subject areas (e.g. type of building/space, intended use, legal requirements, local conditions) is extremely broad. Some key considerations:

Standards & norms: There are no internationally standardised technical building specifications, and domestic regulations and policies vary. The DIN EN 17210 (EU standard) describes basic, common minimum functional requirements and recommendations, applicable across the full spectrum of the built environment.

Accessibility audits help identify and reduce potential or existing barriers and safety risks in given spaces (buildings, public transport, streets, etc.). They are therefore the basis of design, technical planning, and cost calculation. The process, priorities, and participants of course vary depending on local conditions.

Testing & maintenance: Minor oversights or design flaws can lead to major obstacles. Testing with persons with disabilities is therefore essential, as is constant monitoring and maintenance (updating signage, maintaining elevators, keeping outdoor paths clean and free of obstacles, etc.).

Links

- → Federal Institute for Building and Urban Planning: Guidelines for Accessible Construction 2.0 (GER)
- → Handicap International: Conduct an accessibility audit in low- and middle-income countries
- → NTA: Universal Design Walkability Audit



Elly Savatia at the Global Disability Summit 2025. He is founder of a Kenyan Assistive Technology enterprise, which is developing a real-time sign language translation tool. The AI is trained using motion sensors that capture hand movements and gestures.

List of Abbreviations

AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
ADP	African Disability Protocol
ASL	American Sign Language
AT	Assistive Technologies
BFSG	Accessibility Strengthening Act (Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz
BGG	Federal Disability Equality Act (Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz)
BITV	Accessible Information Technology Ordinance (Barrierefreie-Information-stechnik-Verordnung)
BSL	British Sign Language
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
EAA	European Accessibility Act
IS	International Sign
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development‘s Development Assistance Committee
OPD	Organisation(s) of Persons with Disabilities
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Glossary

Accessibility: The design and adaptation of products, services, devices, or environments that can be accessed, understood and used by all individuals, including those with disabilities. (See Chapter 1.2)

Alternative Text: Alternative texts (or alt texts) describe digital images for visually impaired persons who are using screen reader software. The software recognises the picture automatically and reads aloud the embedded text. Everybody who shares photos or graphics to a broader audience must add those short descriptions to the image before publication. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 27)

Amman-Berlin Declaration: The Declaration was adopted 2025 and aims at making international development cooperation more inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities. Among other things, it calls for at least 15 percent of international development programmes to pursue disability inclusion. 103 countries and international organisations endorsed the declaration (May 2026). It is not legally binding. (See Chapter 1.1, p. 7)

Assistive Technology: An umbrella term for systems, tools, devices and services used to deliver assistive products and services, including digital technologies, to support individuals with disabilities perform everyday tasks, increase independence, and enhance their quality of life. (See Chapter 2.4)

Braille: Tactile writing system using raised dots arranged in cells. It allows blind or visually impaired people to read and write by touch, using their fingers to feel the patterns that represent letters, numbers, and symbols. (See Chapter 2.4, p. 48)

(Closed/Real-time) Captions: Display of spoken words and important sounds as text on a screen (live or recorded). They support people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and also help viewers in noisy environments, non-native speakers, and anyone who benefits from reading along for clearer understanding. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 29 and Chapter 2.2, p. 36)

Curb-Cut Effekt: The idea that accessibility improvements made for persons with disabilities often help many others too, e.g. ramps also help elderly people and delivery workers, or closed captions are useful for deaf people, non-native speakers, or in noisy environments. (See Chapter 1.2, p. 9)

Disability: According to the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (See Chapter 1.1)

Easy-to-read (or: Easy Read)**:** Written content, that adresses people with cognitive impairments or learning difficulties. It follows clearly defined rules in terms of grammar, vocabulary, text structure and layout. Special icons or images are also frequently used. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 24, 25)

Induction Loop: System that transmits sound wirelessly to hearing aids or cochlear implants via a magnetic field. It helps people with hearing loss hear speech clearly in places like public buildings or event venues. (See Chapter 2.2, p. 35 and Chapter 2.4, p. 49)

OPD: Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) are led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities. Worldwide they advocate for their rights and support persons with disabilities. The UN CRPD explicitly says, OPDs must be consulted and involved in law and policy making, and in all disability related programmes. This aligns with their key principle: "Nothing about us without us!" (See Chapter 1.1, p. 7)

Plain Language: Written text, that makes information as easy to understand as possible for people who have difficulty reading or concentrating, or who are not native speakers. It is not standardised, but there are recommendations on how to use concise and clear language, without ambiguity, foreign expressions, or complicated sentence structures. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 24, 25)

Reasonable Accommodation: Refers to individual modifications or adjustments that remove barriers and enable the full participation of persons with disabilities. (See Chapter 1.4)

Screen Reader: Software that converts on-screen text and interface elements into speech. It helps blind or visually impaired people navigate computers, smartphones, and websites without needing to see the screen. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 18–23, 26, 30, Chapter 2.2, p. 36 and Chapter 2.4, p. 47)

Sign Language: Used by deaf and hard-of-hearing people to communicate through hand, face, and body movements and expressions. Different countries use different sign languages with their own grammar, vocabulary and syntax. International Sign (IS) supports exchange among them, but only a fraction of the global deaf community understands the IS, mainly those who are working on an international level. (See Chapter 2.1, p. 26)

Universal Design: The design of products, environments, programmes, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. (See Chapter 1.4)

UN CRPD: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is an international human rights treaty adopted in 2006. Its purpose is to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities worldwide. The key ideas are equality and non-discrimination, accessibility, inclusion, respect for automomy and full participation. 192 states (plus the EU) have ratified the convention. (See Chapter 1.1, p. 7)

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