

# **Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**Making everything in society  
easy for people with disabilities  
to use and take part in**

Plain English version of:

**General Comment No. 2 (2014)**

**Article 9: Accessibility**

**Note:** Please note this is not a United Nations official document.

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# **1. About us**

We are the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or the Committee for short. We are part of the United Nations. The United Nations is an organization of 193 countries that works to make the world a better and safer place.

The Committee is a group of experts who check that countries are following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (from now on called the Convention).

The Convention is an agreement that many countries have made about the rights of people with disabilities. It aims to make sure that people with disabilities everywhere are treated fairly, have the same chances in life as people without disabilities and are fully included in society.

Countries that have signed up to the Convention must now follow what it says. In this document, these countries are called States parties.

## **2. About this document**

This document is about accessibility. Accessibility is about making everything in society easy for people with disabilities to use and take part in. This includes buildings, transport, information, communication systems, public services and sports and leisure activities.

The Convention recognizes that accessibility is very important. People with disabilities can only take part in society and enjoy their rights when the buildings, products and services they need are easy for them to use.

The Convention contains a section on accessibility called article 9. The Committee made this document to help States parties understand their duties under article 9 and other parts of the Convention.

### **3. Why is accessibility important?**

People with disabilities are often left out of society because places, products and services fail to meet their needs.

For example, many buildings don't have ramps, lifts or clear signs to show people the way. Information is often hard for people with disabilities to understand or in the wrong format. This stops people with disabilities from having their say and making their own choices.

Transport is often hard for people with disabilities to use. This stops people with disabilities from going out, having a job or receiving the health care they need. And staff who provide public services may not have the right training or skills to support people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have a right to be independent and take part in society in the same way as everyone else. For this to happen, all places, products and services for the public must be accessible. Accessibility can enable people with disabilities to enjoy all their rights. For example, their right to go to school and work and to make important decisions about their lives.

Information and communications technology (ICT) is important

because it can make society more accessible to everyone. Information and communications technology includes the internet, mobile phones, radio, television, computers and computer equipment. Under the Convention, States parties have a duty to make the internet and other information and communications technology accessible to people with disabilities.

The Committee works with States parties to examine how they are following the Convention. The Committee has found that all States parties need to improve on accessibility.

## **4. Other Conventions and agreements that relate to accessibility**

Various other Conventions and agreements in the world contain rights related to accessibility. For example:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 13 and 19)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (articles 12, 19 and 25)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- The International Telecommunication Regulations (article 12)

The Conventions and agreements contain rights that people have to:

- travel and live in their own countries, leave any country and come back to their countries
- have their own ideas and opinions, and get and share information and ideas

- use public places and services, including transport, hotels, restaurants, theatres and parks
- use information and communication services, including radio, television, mobile phones, computers and the internet

The rights in these Conventions and agreements are closely related to the right to accessibility for people with disabilities. For example, people with disabilities can only travel or leave their countries if transport and roads are accessible.

Another important agreement for States parties to refer to is the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The rules require States parties to make buildings and places, transport, information and communication accessible to people with disabilities.

Many other important documents refer to accessibility, why it is important and the problems that people with disabilities face when society is not accessible. For example:

- Reports by the United Nations Committees on the Rights of the Child and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- The World Report on Disability Summary (by the World Health Organization and the World Bank)



- Making Television Accessible (by the International Telecommunication Union and the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies)
- Declaration of Principles from the World Summit on Information Society

## **5. What does article 9 of the Convention say?**

Under the Convention, States parties have a duty to make sure that people with disabilities can live in the community with everyone else, make their own choices and take part in all aspects of society. This can only happen if all places, products and services for the public are accessible to people with disabilities.

Places, products and services for the public include:

- Public buildings and roads
- Transport
- Information and communication. For example, information aimed at the public, computers and computer equipment, the internet, phones, radio, television and emergency services
- All indoor and outdoor places and services that the public may use. For example, health centres, schools, housing, workplaces, shops, restaurants, banks, cinemas, theatres,

museums, prisons, important old buildings and religious centres

- Activities that the public take part in, such as sports, leisure and political activities

The duty to make places, products and services accessible applies to public and private organizations. It also applies to every location, including towns, cities and the countryside.

All people with disabilities must be able to use places, products and services for the public, or else it is discrimination.

Discrimination is when certain people are treated in a worse way than other people in the same situation because of who they are or where they are from. For example, it is discrimination if only people without a disability can use a bank or enter a restaurant. Or if a blind person can't bring their guide dog into a public building.

The Convention says that States parties must stop all discrimination against people with disabilities. Laws must protect people with disabilities against discrimination. And people with disabilities should get help from courts and tribunals if organizations fail to follow accessibility laws.

States parties must develop standards (rules) about accessibility and make sure that organizations follow them.

States parties must also identify the issues that people with disabilities face when they use places, products and services and make action plans to solve the issues.

States parties must:

- Say when they will solve accessibility issues by
- Make sure there is enough money and enough staff to solve accessibility issues
- Say what public and private organizations must do to make their places, products and services accessible
- Take action if organizations don't follow accessibility laws and standards. For example, organizations should pay a fine if they fail to make their products or services accessible

The Convention recognizes that not all places, products and services can be accessible straight away. But States parties must keep working to make places, products and services

accessible over time, whatever the cost.

## **6. Places, products, equipment and services that are easy for everyone to use (universal design)**

States parties must make sure that all new public places, products, equipment and services are easy for everyone to use from the start, including people with disabilities.

Universal design is a way to make new products, places, services and equipment work for everyone. Universal design is when people who design a new place, product or service think about what everyone needs right at the start. For example, a new train station should include features for people with disabilities and older people, such as lifts, ramps and platforms that are the same level as the train.

Universal design can help people with disabilities move from one place to another without problems. For example, it should be easy for people with disabilities to move down the street, get on a bus or train and visit a public building, even if they still need some extra support.

Universal design is ideal because it also saves money. For

example, it is usually cheaper to make buildings or computer systems accessible from the start than to change them later on. But States parties must still make existing places, products or services accessible if they need to, however much it costs.

States parties should:

- Include universal design in laws and standards for the country
- Work to get more products, equipment and services that are accessible to people with disabilities

## **7. Accessibility standards and laws**

States parties must develop standards about accessibility for public and private organisations to follow. The standards will cover the basic steps that organizations must take to make their places, products and services accessible.

The standards should consider the needs of all people with disabilities. And there should be standards for different places, products and services. For example, there should be separate standards for making public buildings, the internet and communication services accessible.

States parties must work with people with disabilities and the organizations that represent them to develop the standards. States parties should also work with other States parties and organizations in different countries. This will help make places, products and services accessible to people with disabilities around the world.

Accessibility standards help organizations meet the needs of people with disabilities. But the standards may not cover the particular needs of all people with disabilities.



Organizations may still need to make reasonable accommodations where they can.

Reasonable accommodations are changes that an individual with disabilities needs to use a product, place or service. For example, a person with a disability may need a special chair or desk to help them at work. Organizations have a duty to make reasonable accommodations where they can, or else it is discrimination.

Before States parties develop accessibility standards, they must have the right laws in place. States parties must review all current laws about accessibility and change them where necessary. States parties should work with other experts, including people with disabilities and the organizations that represent them to review the laws. Laws should allow for accessibility standards to be made and action to be taken if organizations fail to follow the standards.

### **Training about accessibility standards and laws**

States parties must make organizations aware of the standards and how to follow them.

Relevant staff should receive training about accessibility and accessibility standards, including:

- people who plan towns or decide if new buildings can be built
- people who design and build new buildings, technology or equipment
- organizations that run services, including transport and the media
- people with disabilities and the organizations that represent them

Organizations should involve people with disabilities when they design new places, products and services where possible. This will help organizations understand what people with disabilities need.

### **Making sure organizations follow accessibility laws and standards**

Organizations must follow accessibility laws and standards so that all public places, products and services become accessible over time. States parties must set up good systems to check that organisations are following the laws and standards and that staff who carry out the checks have the right training.

### **Buildings and places open to the public**

It can be hard for people with disabilities to use public buildings and places without clear signs to show them around, information they can understand about the building or service or support to communicate with staff.

Article 9 says that public buildings and places should provide support for people with disabilities, including:

- clear signs in Braille and easy to understand formats to show people the way
- communication and support services, including people who can show people with disabilities around the building or communicate in sign language

### **Accessible information**

People with disabilities need information they can understand to make their own choices, take part in society and have their say.

States parties must work to make public information accessible to people with disabilities. For example, people with disabilities may need:

- Support to communicate and receive information, including people who can communicate in sign language
- Information in different formats, such as Braille, audio,

electronic text or easy to read

The internet and new information and communications technology should be available and accessible to people with disabilities at an early stage.

## **8. How article 9 relates to the rest of the Convention**

All areas of life must be accessible to people with disabilities. That is why accessibility is an important part of the Convention as a whole. States parties must think about how article 9 relates to other parts of the Convention.

### **Discrimination (article 5)**

Article 5 says that States parties must stop all discrimination against people with disabilities. It is discrimination if everyone in the community can use products, places and services except people with disabilities.

### **Universal design (part of article 4)**

Article 4 says that States parties must develop products, equipment, places and services that are easy for everyone to use, including people with disabilities. This is called universal design.

**Work that States parties must do to change wrong ideas and beliefs about people with disabilities (article 8)**

States parties have a duty to change wrong ideas and beliefs about people with disabilities and their rights.

Some people may not understand accessibility. Or they may think that accessibility is only about making buildings easy to use. States parties must help people understand why accessibility is important in all areas of life.

States parties must make people aware that:

- Public and private organisations have a duty to make places, products and services accessible
- Universal design is important and can save money

States parties should work with people with disabilities, the organizations that represent them and other experts to make people aware about accessibility. The media can help by making their services accessible and by informing people about accessibility.

**The right of people with disabilities in emergency situations including wars, floods and famine (hunger) (article 11)**

Emergency services must be accessible to people with disabilities or else their lives could be in danger. And plans about how to cope and recover in emergencies must include the needs of people with disabilities.

**The right of people with disabilities to get help from the justice system. The justice system is the police, courts and prisons (article 13)**

People with disabilities can only get help from the justice system if the justice system supports their needs. For example:

- Police stations, courts and prisons should be easy for people with disabilities to enter and move around in
- People with disabilities should get support to understand what is happening at court or to communicate with police, court or prison staff if they need it
- Police, court and prison staff should receive training about how to make their services accessible to people with disabilities

**The right of people with disabilities to be free from**

## **violence, abuse and people forcing them to do things they don't want to do (article 16)**

People with disabilities have a right to be safe if someone is violent to them or treats them badly. Support services should be accessible to all people with disabilities, including women and children with disabilities. For example, support services for women and girls who experience violence should meet the needs of women and girls with disabilities.

## **The right of people with disabilities to live in the community with everyone else (article 19)**

People with disabilities have a right to be independent and live in the community with everyone else. This can only happen if everything in the community is easy for people with disabilities to use, including public buildings, transport, information and communication systems and sports and leisure activities.

The right of people with disabilities to have their own opinions and ideas, have their say and get the information they need (article 21)

The Convention says that people with disabilities have a right to receive public information in whatever way works for them. This



could be audio, Braille, sign language, easy to read or another format.

Private organizations and the media should consider how to make their information accessible, including information on the internet.

Article 49 of the Convention requires the Convention to be available in accessible formats.

### **The right of people with disabilities to education (article 24)**

People with disabilities have a right to learn in the same classrooms as people without disabilities and receive the same quality of education.

This means the whole education system must be accessible to people with disabilities. For example, children with disabilities may need:

- Accessible transport to school
- A ramp to enter the school building and accessible toilets
- Extra support to learn, including someone to help them communicate with teachers and other children
- Lessons in sign language, Braille or other formats

Teachers may need to change the way they teach or the materials they use to help all children with disabilities learn and do well.

## **The right of people with disabilities to health and rehabilitation (article 25 and 26)**

All health services must be accessible to people with disabilities. This includes the buildings that services are in, transport to get to the services and information for patients.

Health services should never discriminate against people with disabilities. For example, women's health services must have beds and equipment that women with disabilities can use, or else it is discrimination.

## **The right of people with disabilities to work (article 27)**

Everything about working life must be accessible to people with disabilities. For example:

- Workplaces must be easy for people with disabilities to enter and move around in
- Job information and adverts should be available in different formats
- Work training must be easy for people with disabilities to take part in

## **The right of people with disabilities to have enough money to live on (article 28)**

People with disabilities often need extra money and support to help with their living costs and standard of living. Services that provide this money and support must be accessible. Housing should also be suitable for people with disabilities and their needs.

### **The right of people with disabilities to take part in politics and public life (article 29)**

The Convention says that people with disabilities must have an equal say in what happens in their communities and countries.

States parties have a duty to make sure that:

- It is easy for all people with disabilities to vote
- Information about elections and political parties is available in accessible formats
- People with disabilities can take part in community and political meetings

### **The right of people with disabilities to take part in culture, leisure activities and sport (article 30)**

People with disabilities have the same right as everyone else to take part in culture, leisure activities and sport. Culture includes music, theatre, television, film, museums, art galleries, libraries and important places of interest.

People with disabilities may need extra support to participate in culture, leisure activities and sport. For example, people with disabilities may need:

- A wheelchair ramp or lift to get into a theatre
- An audio recording to describe what a painting is like
- Subtitles to explain what is happening in a film or television programme

It can be harder to make some old buildings and important places of interest accessible to people with disabilities, but States parties must do what they can.

## **Books and information in print**

Books and printed information should also be accessible to people with disabilities and available in formats including Braille, audio and easy to read.

Laws about printed information can stop information being available to people with disabilities. For example, laws can prevent books and information being available in other formats

or countries.

States parties should follow an agreement called the Marrakesh Treaty. The Marrakesh Treaty aims to make books and printed materials more accessible to people with disabilities.

## **Sports and leisure activities**

States parties have a duty to make sure that people with disabilities can take part in sports and leisure activities in the same way as everyone else.

People with disabilities must be able to:

- take part in the same sports activities as people without disabilities where possible
- develop and take part in sports and leisure activities only for people with disabilities
- visit and use sports, leisure or tourism places

## **Different States and organizations working together to improve the lives of people with disabilities (article 32)**

States parties should work together to make products, places and services across the world accessible to people with disabilities. For example, States parties could work together to

make standards about new computer equipment and technology based on universal design.

States parties should only spend money and time on projects that improve accessibility. States parties should also share information on how to make products, places and services accessible.

### **How States parties follow the Convention (article 33)**

States parties must set up systems to check how their work on the Convention is going. This includes work related to accessibility.

Different organizations must be involved in checking States parties' progress on the Convention. People with disabilities and community organizations must also be involved. For example, people with disabilities and community organizations should help to:

- Develop accessibility laws and standards
- Make people aware about accessibility and why it is important

## 9. Word bank

**Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** – a group of experts from all over the world who make sure that countries follow the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**United Nations** - An organization of 193 countries that works to make the world better and safer for everyone.

**Accessibility and making things accessible** - Making places, products, equipment, services and activities for the public easy for people with disabilities to use and take part in.

**Information and communications technology (ICT)** - The internet, mobile phones, radio, television, computers and computer equipment and other technology to used to communicate.

**Discrimination** - When some people are treated in a worse way than other people in the same situation because of who they are and where they come from.

**Tribunals** -Similar to courts. For example, people can go to a tribunal if they feel an organization has discriminated against

them.

**Standards** - Rules for organizations to follow. Accessibility standards show organizations how to make places, products and services accessible to people with disabilities.

**Universal design** - A way to make products, equipment, places and services easy for everyone to use right from the start.

**Reasonable accommodation** - Changes that organizations and companies must make where they can so that people with disabilities can take part in everyday activities

**The justice system** – Police, courts and prisons

**The media** - Radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the internet.