



International
Labour
Office

Making ILO offices
a c c e s s i b l e
to persons with disabilities

A c c e s s H a n d b o o k



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Preface

Many people with disabilities find themselves on the margins of society, excluded more by their social and physical environment than by their individual impairments. The International Labour Organization is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in the world of work for persons with disabilities.

Within our own offices and in our activities, one of our goals should be to contribute to the elimination of the barriers that prevent women and men with disabilities from fully participating in and using their full potential for the benefit of their community and society. This Access Handbook can help renew our efforts to put principle into practice to the utmost extent possible.

The Handbook is an important tool to help all ILO staff create an enabling environment for people with disabilities. It is based on the principle that people with disabilities should, as far as possible, be able to obtain access to ILO buildings and services. We should make good use of this Handbook which is also part of the first step in a wider ILO policy initiative to promote access and participation for people with disabilities.

Awareness about what access means for people with disabilities is key – it is not simply about ramps but also about access to information, effective lighting and communications systems and other ways of promoting fuller participation. Very importantly, it is about having a welcoming environment that reflects our respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities. It is about being attentive to situations where special solutions are needed for particular sensory or mobility impairments. It is about being tuned in and responsive in our activities to the needs of people with disabilities.

Naturally, there may be constraints in operating from existing buildings but we must make a determined effort to find solutions. And when new offices are being constructed or new properties acquired or leased, the Handbook can be helpful at the design or negotiation stage.

We can all contribute to making ILO offices accessible to persons with disabilities. Directors of ILO offices and others in management positions should set an example by drawing on the Handbook every time a decision is made concerning the physical facilities and environment of ILO offices and external venues for ILO events.

Let us do all that we can to open ILO work places and work spaces to people with disabilities.

Juan Somavia *Director General*



Foreword

Purpose of the Handbook

This Access Handbook is intended to assist the efforts of ILO directors and staff in headquarters, field and project offices to make ILO premises and services throughout the world accessible to people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. The Handbook can help renew ILO efforts to advance in promoting access of persons with disabilities. In particular, it will help in:

- preparing for an access review
- putting in place an evaluative process, including appropriate consultation with people and organizations concerned
- ensuring that the review is relevant and appropriate to local conditions
- taking into account locally established standards on accessibility
- carrying out the review of ILO premises for people with physical and sensory disabilities
- making recommendations for change.

Benefits of improving access

While improving access for staff and delegates with disabilities is the primary focus, the benefits of improved access are more widespread and will be felt by:

- their friends, family members or support workers accompanying them
- older persons who may not have a disability but find access easier
- persons making deliveries or carrying heavy items
- persons accompanied by children
- persons with temporary mobility impairments (such as a broken leg, sprained ankle).

The Disability Access Review Process

General principles

The following sections examine how people with disabilities can make better use of ILO premises and services with better access. When initiating the process to improve access, it is useful to bear in mind the general principles outlined below.

Addressing diverse access needs

The objective is to take an ‘inclusive approach’, meeting the access needs of as many people as possible. There will be some circumstances, though, where particular provisions may have to be made for people with certain disabilities either permanent or temporary (such as a broken leg, strained ankle and many others).

Also, some physical improvements specifically benefit people with particular types of disability. For example, repairing a loose-fitting carpet that might cause a tripping hazard will particularly benefit blind or partially-sighted people and those with physical impairments such as poor balance.

Existing offices

■ Practical improvements

In existing buildings (as against new buildings), it is often not possible to meet all “recommended” design solutions. The most useful approach is to look for practical improvements that can be made, bearing in mind that the solution devised should reflect recommended practice as closely as possible, rather than being confined to minimal compliance.



■ Design guidance

While some general standards and solutions have been provided in this handbook, it should be borne in mind that many international variations apply. A design solution may work well in one building, at one location, and may be inappropriate or simply not possible in another. Local design guidance should be sought, if possible.

■ Rethinking use of space

It may be possible to improve access for people with disabilities with little or no physical alteration - by rearranging the layout of the premises. This can maximize the use of accessible areas. For example, in an office where interview or meeting areas are needed, it may be possible to relocate this function from an upper floor to the ground floor.

■ Retaining existing good access

Ensure that any features that assist access are retained. Opportunities for improvements should be considered when undertaking routine maintenance or refurbishment.

■ Inaccessible ILO offices

There may be some ILO offices which are not easily made accessible to wheelchair users, those with mobility impairments and others. The important issue in such a situation is to seek to achieve the results sought through alternative means. It is recommended that temporary solutions be put in place – such as using an alternative, accessible venue for meetings or events involving people with disabilities. This could be a partner organization's premises or a local hotel or restaurant. In the long term, a more permanent solution should be sought such as relocation or major works.



Providing services from other locations

■ Larger meetings or conferences

When other locations are used for meetings, seminars, workshops or conferences, these guidelines should be applied in selecting and preparing such locations. When choosing hotels or other places to hold meetings, consideration should be given to the level of accessibility that is already present or can be achieved. The venue managers should be informed that accessibility considerations will form part of the evaluation and selection.

■ Access considerations

Managers of different venues will have varying degrees of knowledge of access issues, so it will be important in the evaluation to clearly establish what can be provided. A list of the main considerations is set out below:

- Reception staff available to direct visitors.
- Accessibility of building and meeting rooms, car parking, toilets, catering facilities.
- Physical access to podia and the presentation equipment.
- Effective lighting for all delegates and staff.
- Availability of presented materials in alternative formats for participants who are deaf or blind.
- Meeting rooms large enough to enable blind and mobility impaired people to get around safely.
- Availability of a portable induction loop for hearing aid users.
- Availability of accessible transport to the venue for use by participants with disabilities.
- Ideally, staff at the chosen location will have received disability awareness training so that interaction will be effective

Timing of improvements

■ Making a start

Some of these ideas may already have been implemented. Others



might be applied quickly and at very little, or no cost. Substantial changes may need longer term planning by incorporating them when undertaking routine maintenance, redecorating, or replanning the interior of the premises. They do not necessarily have to be done all at once. The important thing is to get started.

■ **Planning for the longer term**

This requires a long-term plan of gradual improvements to make it easier for staff and others with disabilities to access the ILO premises and services.

■ **Consulting and getting advice**

Some solutions will be self evident, while others may need additional input. In many cases, it may be sufficient for ILO staff responsible for improving access to conduct an informed review of usage and priorities, consulting as appropriate. In some cases, technical advice from professionals may be required. Some changes to buildings may need local permissions.

Making a difference with staff skills

■ **Staff management, policies and attitudes** towards serving persons with disabilities are just as important as the premises themselves.

■ **Staff awareness**

It is important to ensure that all staff are aware of what ILO Office is aiming to achieve and to provide training in how to meet the needs of disabled persons.

Public or common areas in the ILO Office building

Many ILO offices are located in buildings where they do not have direct responsibility for the immediate external environment. This situation is common to leased offices, for example, as well as to cooperatively owned buildings.

In such cases, it is still helpful to think about how people with disabilities gain access to the premises. Identify physical features that may create difficulties for them, then do something about it, such as:

- consult the applicable lease or other use or ownership instrument for specific rights and responsibilities. Consider negotiating improved access upon renewal or any change of location. Refer to the Lease Checklist.
- speak to whoever does have control over the space - for example the landlord, cooperative council, or neighbouring business. Explain the problem and ask if there is anything they can do to make access easier to the premises. The landlord may be entitled to charge for such work if this is permitted under the lease.
- If appropriate, hold discussions with the host government with a view to engaging the local authorities to see what can be done to tackle problems presenting consistent and serious obstacles to access for people with disabilities. It is recommended to first consult the provisions of the applicable host agreement or other relationship agreement before approaching the relevant authorities.

Finding the ILO Office

General considerations

People with disabilities will have different issues to overcome in finding the ILO buildings for the first time. For example, some disabled people will have difficulties in following directions while others may need a large-scale map.

The entrance to the office should be easy to find from the street, car park, or other routes to the building. People with visual impairments or learning disabilities, for example, may have more difficulty identifying the premises and the entrance door than others. Many may not like to say they have difficulties.

Practical suggestions

■ Clear ILO Office address and signs

Could there be clearer signs directing people to the entrance and also identifying the premises by street name and number and telephone number? Perhaps adding a sign at right angles to the office would be an improvement. Signs should use upper and lower case to aid word identification by visually impaired people and people with learning disabilities.

■ Maps

When maps are sent out to first time visitors, ensure they are clear and easy to understand. Include a contact name, telephone, fax number and e-mail address.

■ Using colour at the door

Could the entrance door itself be made easier to see, for example by painting the door a contrasting colour or tone from the surroundings?



■ **Signs for a second entrance**

If disabled persons need to access the premises by an alternative entrance to the one normally used by non-disabled persons, the alternative entrance should be clearly signed.

Approaching the ILO Office

General considerations

People with different types of disabilities will have different concerns when approaching the ILO Office. Routes that are easy to negotiate by staff, visitors and service users using sticks, crutches and wheelchairs are also likely to present fewer obstacles to staff, visitors and service users with visual impairments, as well as making it easier for those with children in pushchairs or carrying heavy loads.

Practical suggestions

■ Better lighting

Could external lighting be improved to help people find their way to the premises?

■ Car parking

If there is a car park for staff, visitors and service users, could there be better provision for disabled people to manoeuvre a wheelchair in and out of a car? This requires a wider parking bay than standard. Is there a way to ensure that drivers who are not disabled do not occupy bays intended for persons with disabilities? If there is usually no parking provision for visitors and delegates but there are staff car parking spaces, could these be made available for disabled persons by prior arrangement?

■ Paths and other routes

Could routes, path surfaces or the frontage to the premises be improved to make them more even, less slippery and free of obstacles? Some common problems are:

- cracked or uneven street surfaces



- rough surfaces or sudden changes in level
- positioning of litter bins and free-standing advertising boards
- protruding or overhanging objects, branches or vegetation
- ice, standing water or mossy growth.

Getting into the ILO Office

General considerations

Steps are the biggest barrier to independent access for people with mobility impairments. If there is a step, or steps to the main entrance door, it is worth looking at all the possibilities and then deciding which ones are realistic. Alterations might include:

- raising the pavement or other approach up to the level of the entrance
- installing a permanent external ramp, ideally in addition to the steps rather than as a replacement. As a guide a ramp should be no steeper than 1 in 12 and have a level section at the top to assist in opening the door. If a ramp is too steep it may be difficult for a wheelchair user to use it independently. This detracts from the aim of empowering disabled people to live independent lives.
- moving the entrance to a position where it is more easily accessible from the street.

If there is no reasonable and practical way of replacing the step, or steps, there are some other adjustments that are possible.

Practical suggestions

■ Ramps

In situations where it is not feasible to create wheelchair access with a permanent solution, a temporary ramp could be used. The disadvantage of temporary ramps is that they need to be stored when not in use and they can be awkward to handle. Instructions for their safe use are needed. Importantly, the wheelchair user may feel uncomfortable at the inconvenience.



■ **Fitting handrails**

Fit a handrail to stepped entrances to help people with mobility impairments up and down the step(s). Having something to grip and provide support makes access much easier and safer. Handrails should be on both sides, or in the middle, to assist people with impairments that affect one side or the other. Handrails also assist visually impaired people and should be contrasted against the background with bright colours.

■ **Marking the steps clearly**

Could the edges of steps as viewed from the top be made easier to see using a colour that contrasts with the main part of the step? This can help people with visual impairments or learning difficulties to identify the existence of a step or steps.

■ **Lighting**

Could lighting at the entrance be improved if it is very dull or casts shadows?

■ **Call or entry bells**

If the layout of the premises means that staff cannot easily see if someone needs assistance to get in, could a call bell or an entry-phone with instructions in print and Braille be fitted? If this is done, think about how someone in a wheelchair would reach it and how people with hearing or visual impairments would use it. Call systems for people with disabilities may not promote equality of treatment and independence, but may be needed as a practical matter.

■ **Relocating the main entrance**

Is there an alternative entrance where level access is possible? If so, could this be made into the main entrance for everyone, so all visitors use the same entrance?

■ **Designating an alternative entrance with level access**

If the main entrance cannot be made accessible or relocated, could



a rear or side entrance nearby - perhaps one normally used for deliveries - be designated as an accessible entrance for wheelchair users and others? Although not ideal, this might be the only way to enable people with disabilities to have access to the premises. Ensure that the entrance is clearly marked, left open and clear of obstructions during business hours or that there is a call bell or other means of alerting staff so that the door can be opened on request.

■ Offering help

Where stepped access cannot be avoided, ask if a disabled person would like assistance. Wheelchair users and others may be willing to accept assistance from staff to get into the premises. As with call systems, this solution is not consistent with promoting equality of treatment and independence and it is discouraged other than in exceptional circumstances.

■ Multiple door entrances

In some larger offices, there may be a second set of doors after the initial set. There should be a clear area of 1.5 metres between the two sets of doors.

■ Stairlifts or platform lifts

Would a platform lift be appropriate in some situations to get around a short flight of steps? Some are designed for external installation. Consultation is especially important when considering these lifts, as they can be unpopular with some disabled people.

■ Exploring alternatives

There may be situations where, for example, there is a flight of stairs that cannot be avoided. In such cases, are there alternative ways of providing the service, such as meeting elsewhere or communicating by telephone? In the longer run, it may be possible to re-locate the ILO Office to other more accessible premises.



■ Making doors easier to use

Door openings and doors are another barrier for people with disabilities. Factors to be considered include their width, design of threshold, heaviness of operation, difficulties in operating the door handles or absence of colour contrast.

For wheelchair users, a door opening should be at least 750 mm wide. Any threshold or edge must be no more than 13mm at the entrance.

■ Entrance mats should be flush

This can prevent a tripping hazard to people with visual impairments and to those using aids such as walking sticks or crutches, or who have difficulty keeping their balance. It is best to avoid bristle matting that tends to catch the small front wheels of wheelchairs and make pushing quite difficult.

■ Door handle

If the door handle is very high, it could be lowered to a maximum height of 1m.

■ Replacing the door handle

Could the handle be replaced by one that is easier to grip, such as a D-shape handle, and with better colour contrast? These adjustments would benefit people with arthritis or visual impairments. Many older persons who would not necessarily consider themselves to have disabilities nonetheless have difficulties using knobs that have to be twisted to open.

■ Glass doors

People with impaired vision may not recognise fully glazed doors and can walk into them. It is important to have visible bandings half way up the door or ideally, two sets, one around 1.5m and a lower one for children and short people at 85cm.

**■ Easy opening doors**

Door opening pressure can often be altered easily to make the door much easier to open. This benefits people who have mobility impairments or difficulty balancing. Magnetic devices that hold the door open for normal use but allow them to close for fire protection may be considered. As a general guide, doors should require no more than the effort to lift 5 litres of water to pull open.

■ Keep doors serviced

Ensure that door closers are regularly maintained, and door handles are kept clean. Standard side-hung doors, accompanying revolving doors at larger ILO offices, should be kept unlocked. This can especially benefit people with mobility impairments, those using assistance dogs and those accompanied by children or carrying bags.

Finding the way around the ILO Office

General considerations

How easily would disabled people find their way around the ILO office, be able to locate particular persons and rooms, or find the toilets? Bear in mind that logically planned and well lit premises - with good, clear signs and use of colour contrast in internal decoration - are essential to good access.

Practical suggestions

■ Signage

Ensure that there is adequate signage not only on the route to the ILO office but also within the ILO office. This should include which floor staff and services are located, names and office numbers on doors, location of toilets, catering facilities, how to find help, any other facilities and exits.

■ Are the signs easy to read?

Could more signs be used or could they be used more effectively in the ILO office? Signs that work best are:

- simple and short
- easy to read and understand with clear typefaces in a mixture of upper and lower case. Use of capital letters at the start of each word helps visually impaired people find the start of a word.
- well contrasted with background – that is, with strong contrast of light and dark between lettering and background.
- pictures and symbols can be perfect communicators.

Light reflections from windows can make it difficult to read writing on glass. In this situation a background to reduce the reflection is needed.



Ensure that any new signs integrate with the existing signs and that signs are replaced correctly after being removed for redecoration.

■ **Using colour contrast**

Colour can be used to help people with visual impairments who may see areas of colour more easily than detail. Visually impaired persons find it easier to find their way if floors, walls, ceilings and doors are painted in contrasting colours - or light and dark tones of the same colour.

A practical tip for assessing colour contrast in the ILO office is to take a black-and-white photograph of a colourful area and then see how easy it is to distinguish between different coloured surfaces.

■ **Glass panels**

People with impaired vision may not recognize glazed panels or internal glass walls and walk into them. Could visible safety bandings half way up be added?

■ **Staff assistance**

It is not always possible to create conditions in which people with different disabilities can move easily and safely around the premises independently. In such cases, ensure that staff are trained to provide adequate assistance, for example, to escort a blind person around the office or to a safe place where the service can be provided to them.

Improving lighting

General considerations

Improving lighting in the ILO office can be of particular benefit to people with partial sight.

Practical suggestions

■ Increased lighting in hazardous areas

Could extra lighting be added in potentially hazardous areas like staircases or changes in floor level? Ensure that lighting creates even illumination and does not cause strong shadows and contrasts concealing potentially hazardous objects and areas.

■ Increasing natural light

Ensure that windows, lamps and blinds are kept clean and free of restrictions in order to maximize available light. Replace burned out light bulbs as quickly as possible.

■ Highly reflective surfaces

Large surfaces of a white or highly reflective finish (such as ceramic tiles, mirrors or stainless steel) may create glare and reflection, causing problems for people with partial sight. Could the lighting be adjusted or relocated to reduce these effects?

■ Reception lighting and location

Where offices have a reception desk, ensure that it is well lit and not located in front of a light source - such as a window - where bright sunshine will make lip-reading difficult. Many people with hearing impairments lip read.

Moving about within the ILO Office

General considerations

Think about how people with mobility impairments in particular are able to move around within the premises. Making major structural changes such as installing an internal platform lift will require consultation, planning and technical advice, as well as the legal right to do so in leased premises. Advice may also be needed with things like widening doorways and installing internal ramps but there are many other changes that might be possible without major expense or upheaval.

Practical suggestions

■ Making moving around easier

Corridors, areas near doors and other spaces are often restricted because of furniture and fittings, displays of goods and leaflets, deliveries, rubbish or storage. Improvements in moving around can be made by making sure that these spaces are kept free of clutter. This will benefit wheelchair users and people using walking sticks or frames, as well as people pushing trolleys.

■ Fitting handrails

Where there are one or more internal steps or internal ramps, handrails can help. Handrails should extend beyond the rise or fall of a ramp or steps to indicate the end of the rise or fall to people with visual impairment and to provide support for those who have difficulty balancing.

■ Markings of internal steps and safety hazards

Mark clearly, in a contrasting colour, the edges of internal steps and protruding features.



■ Ensuring that surfaces are as level as possible

Re-lay poorly fitted mats or, if possible, repair uneven junctions of floor surfaces.

Ensure that:

- cleaning and polishing do not make floors overly slippery
- junctions between different flooring materials do not become too worn, presenting a tripping hazard
- when flooring is renewed, careful consideration is given to the type of surface chosen
- the redecoration of interiors such as door frames, control panels, signs does not compromise a carefully selected colour scheme designed to impart information to people with a visual impairment or compromise contrast.

■ Making lifts accessible

- Call buttons for lifts should be at a level no more than 1.2 metres from the ground
- Ensure that there is sufficient space outside the lift and that access to the call buttons is not blocked.
- The entrance to the lift should be at least 80cm wide
- Ensure that the arrival of the lift is indicated by an audible announcement or a beep, along with a light signal.
- The lift should stay open for long enough to allow people with limited mobility to enter
- An infrared beam should be in place to maintain the door open if necessary, as someone enters, or something gets blocked
- Tiling or thin non-pile floor covering is recommended in place of deep matting, which causes difficulties for people using crutches, sticks, poor walkers generally and wheelchair users.



- A mirror is recommended on the back wall to aid reversing by wheelchair users.
- There should be a handrail inside the lift at an optimal height of approximately 90cms.
- Raised lift button numbers or Braille numbers are suggested to aid floor finding by visually impaired people.
- Consider introducing audible floor announcements for blind and visually impaired users. The language used would need to be agreed.
- Locate or relocate the telephone or alarm button, if possible, at a height of approximately 1.2 metres.

Improving communications

General considerations

In communicating about issues of concern, people with different disabilities have diverse communication requirements. It is recommended that office staff be able to respond to the disabled person's preferred means of communication. If in doubt, staff might ask people with visual, hearing, speech and learning difficulties what would help them best.

These are some of the means of communication used in different circumstances.

- Some people with speech or hearing difficulties may prefer to exchange written notes.
- Some people with a hearing impairment may use a hearing aid for which an induction loop would improve hearing.
- Some people with a profound hearing loss may like to send faxes or use a textphone. Some will need sign language interpreters.
- Some people with visual impairments may use e-mail using text enlargers or automatic readers if totally blind.
- Some will need information in large print (**16pt bold as a minimum**), Braille or on audio tape (or CD, mini disc or other electronic format).
- Some people e.g. a Deafblind person, may bring a support worker to help with communication.

There is a range of systems to enhance communication for people with hearing impairments that may be considered. Some are relatively simple, such as induction loops (particularly suitable at reception desks and in interview or meeting rooms), while others are more complicated, such as infra red systems (more suitable for lecture rooms where headsets can be borrowed from a central source).



Practical suggestions

■ Basic environment considerations

Keeping background noise to a minimum enables people with hearing impairments to maximise use of their hearing.

■ Install an induction loop

These are modestly priced and should be installed to help hearing aid users at reception desks, meeting rooms and elsewhere.

■ Sound insulation

If the office is next door to noise sources, (such as a road, or a factory) consider putting in sound insulation and avoiding hard surfaces that create echo and tend to cause problems for people with hearing impairments.

■ Lighting conditions

Could improved lighting make it easier for people with hearing impairments to lip-read? Light shining onto the face is preferable to lighting from behind.

■ Making communication easier

Staff can be encouraged to look straight at people with hearing impairment and not cover the mouth when they are speaking. This will benefit people who use any level of lip reading, including many who would not consider themselves to have a hearing impairment. Allowing extra time, and using repetition to check accuracy and understanding can also benefit people with learning difficulties or speech impairments.

■ Separating quiet and noisy areas

Plan the use of the space to benefit all visitors and service users, particularly those with hearing impairments, by locating a customer helpdesk away from noisy machinery or equipment such as computers, photocopiers and air conditioning units.

Information about facilities and services

General considerations

Think about how people with visual impairments and with learning difficulties get the information they need about the services.

Practical suggestions

- **Making labels, display signs, menus clearer** by using symbols, bigger typefaces, stronger contrast between the lettering and the background. Provide an alternative larger format specifically for people with visual impairments e.g. large print list.
- **Providing Braille information**, for example, on where to find items and services within the ILO office.
- **Staff assistance**: train staff to assist people who are blind by describing and explaining items and services to them.

Accessing the services provided at ILO Offices

Access to information materials

Think about access to information such as leaflets on shelves and display racks. If refitting with new units, it is important to consult widely to achieve the best accessibility. Even without major re-planning of the fittings and fixtures, there are many simple things that can be done.

Practical suggestions

■ Repositioning existing units

Sometimes a free-standing shelf unit that is restricting access, for example very near a door, might be able to be moved to a location that improves access.

■ Adapting existing units

Make simple changes to existing units to make access to them easier. Consider the heights of shelves and display racks for people using wheelchairs or short people and those with limited reach or impaired dexterity.

■ Arranging goods so that the same items are available at a range of heights

If there is a popular, high-volume publication or item, then rather than putting them all on a very high or very low shelf, arrange the items over a range of shelf heights.

■ Lowering equipment to make it easier to use such as telephones.

■ **Making display information easier to read:** labelling, prices and other important customer information should be made larger and easier to read.



■ **24 point size** is recommended for display labels.

■ **Using alternatives**

Sometimes the barrier may be to part of the premises - such as a flight of stairs to another level. In these cases, it may be possible to relocate certain services, offer services at the entrance level or come up with an alternative.

■ **Staff assistance**

In situations where people cannot see or cannot reach items, staff could fetch the item and make sure that people know that this service is available.

Waiting areas and queues

If people have to wait to receive a service, or to walk considerable distances within the premises, consider whether it is possible to provide suitably designed seats for people with mobility impairments to sit and rest.

In very small premises where there is not enough space to provide seating near to queuing areas, it is important to make alternative provision for people who cannot stand and wait. Any such arrangements should be made clear to everyone to avoid the impression that some are queue jumping.

Practical suggestions

■ **Providing additional seating**

Provide a mixture of seating with and without armrests. Armrests help many people get to a standing position but some people can find them troublesome.



■ Queues

Where some are standing and others are seated, provide a means of ensuring that those seated do not lose their place in the queue.

■ **Rearranging furniture in waiting areas** so that there is space for a wheelchair user to pull up alongside a seated companion without the wheelchair being stuck out in the middle.

■ **Announcement systems should be both visible and audible** so that they can be understood by people with hearing and visual impairments.

Counters, service desks, restaurants and checkouts

Think about how people with disabilities get to and use counters, service desks, restaurants and checkouts. Consider fitting an induction loop or a microphone at counters with glazed screens (for example at cashiers' windows) or where there is background noise.

Practical suggestions

■ **Creating a lowered section of the counter or service desk** with sufficient space to sign documents etc, to suit both standing and wheelchair-using visitors, service users and short people. Alternatively, a lower writing shelf could be provided. A simple clipboard for people to sign papers on is a practical solution.

■ **Making sure** that any service call bell is in an accessible and obvious position.

■ Issuing Security Passes

Where security passes are issued, extra consideration will be needed to ensure that people can sign in without difficulty and that any pass can be issued without further problems. Security passes that



hang around the neck seem to suit most impairments, both sexes and most styles of dress.

■ **Keeping glass screens clean** and clear of notices, grilles or other distractions that make it difficult for people to lip-read.

■ **Improving lighting** over the head of staff will make it is easier for someone who is lip-reading to see the staff member's face.

■ **Positioning service desks** so that they are not located in front of windows where bright sunshine will cause the staff member to be in silhouette, making lip-reading difficult.

■ **Ensuring some tables** of restaurant areas are accessible to those with mobility impairments and wheelchairs.

■ **Staff practices**

In situations where it is not reasonable to make counters and service desks fully accessible, it may be possible to alter practices. For example a member of staff could come out from behind a service desk to meet a person using a wheelchair who cannot approach the desk and talk to them in another part of the office, maintaining any necessary privacy.

Toilets facilities

General considerations

For those larger ILO offices where toilets are provided, thought and planning must go into ensuring that all people with disabilities can make use of them.

If there is sufficient space available, a toilet compartment might be modified to wheelchair-accessible standards. This may be achieved in a variety of ways, such as fitting out an existing compartment that is already big enough, knocking two compartments into one to create enough space, or moving a toilet from an inaccessible location to an accessible location.

Technical advice will be needed on creating a wheelchair-accessible toilet compartment, as the layout, dimensions and positioning of fittings can be critical. Legal considerations are also involved if the ILO premises are leased.

The following checklist suggests other improvements that can be made to toilets (even without creating full wheelchair access) that will benefit many other people with disabilities.

Practical suggestions

■ Grabrails

Appropriately positioned grabrails can be of great benefit to people with limited movement, balance or grip.

■ Lighting

Improving lighting in toilets will particularly benefit people with visual impairments.



■ **Colour contrast**

People with visual impairments may find it difficult to orientate themselves in “all-white” areas and to identify fittings such as basins and the toilet itself. Making fixtures and fittings stand out more easily through use of contrasting colour makes toilet compartments and washroom areas much easier to use for these people.

■ **Floor surfaces**

For safety reasons, it is recommended to change shiny or slippery floor surfaces to non-slip surfaces. This will especially benefit people with visual or mobility impairments.

■ **Outward-opening doors**

Particularly in small toilet compartments, if the door can be changed so as to open outwards, this can greatly improve manoeuvring space within the compartment. This will determine whether or not some people with disabilities may be able to use the toilet.

■ **Shiny ceramic tiles and floors**

These can cause reflection and glare that may be visually confusing. Replace them, if possible, with less shiny tiles when undertaking a refurbishment or redecoration.

■ **Signs for the toilets** including pictorial symbols are particularly beneficial to people with visual impairments or learning difficulties.

■ **Providing information on nearest accessible toilet facilities**

If it is not reasonable to provide a wheelchair-accessible toilet on the ILO premises, it may be possible to arrange for access to such a toilet in a neighbouring business. Alternatively, it may be possible to direct people with disabilities to the nearest accessible public toilet.



■ **Management**

Ensure that toilets are not used as storage areas and are kept free of obstructions.

■ **Alarm systems**

It may be desirable to install an alarm system, particularly if the toilets are located far from passers-by. Ensure that such alarm systems are regularly checked. Pull-cord alarms should be capable of being activated from floor level. It is important that staff are familiar with any alarm systems.

Getting out of the ILO Office in an emergency

General considerations

Consider means of escape in case of an emergency evacuation. The needs of individuals with disabilities are not always known. Often people's only knowledge of the premises is the route by which they entered.

As a general rule, the easier it is for people with disabilities to get into and move around the ILO office, the easier it is for them to get out.

Have in place arrangements to enable people with disabilities to escape from the building, or at least to a place of relative safety or refuge where assistance can be provided if necessary. Management procedures, staff training and awareness are the key to the operation of emergency evacuation arrangements.

Practical suggestions:

- **Keep exit routes free of obstruction** such as stored boxes, old furniture, rubbish or other clutter.

- **Check systems regularly**

Ensure that alarm systems are in working order and that procedures for emergency evacuation (such as fire drills) are in place and tested regularly.

- **Staff training**

Ensure that new staff are trained in alarm response procedures. Staff should be briefed to pay particular attention to assisting people with visual or mobility impairments from the ILO office and to alerting people who are not reacting to audible alarms.

Where to get further help and technical advice

Local and national disability organizations will be able to provide further suggestions. Their details may be available in local telephone books, via the local government agencies or central government departments.

The web site **www.disabilitymatters.com** acts as a portal to a whole range of international disability organizations. If any questions arise relating to barriers relevant to particular disabilities, then it is suggested that contact is made with the relevant organization and ask them for contacts in the local region.

In addition, the ILO Disability website (www.ilo.org/employment/disability) lists the addresses of various Internet websites, where further information on access can be obtained.

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