



GUIDANCE NOTE: REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Who is this guide for

This guidance is for people who work on disability inclusion and equality, including civil society organisations, organisations of people with disabilities, public institutions, donors, event organisers, facilitators and justice sector actors.

Whether shaping policy, designing programmes, organising events or delivering services, these actors play an important role in making sure that people with disabilities are not only included, but take part in a meaningful and fair way.

How to use this guide

This guidance is designed to help organisations, movements, institutions and people who deliver programmes meet their responsibilities to ensure people with disabilities are included in programmes, activities, consultations, workplaces and decision making in a way that is meaningful, fair and non-discriminatory.

Our research in Ghana and Kenya shows that many organisations and activists are committed to including people with disabilities but are often uncertain how to provide appropriate reasonable accommodations. Inclusion efforts often focus on physical accessibility, overlooking many other access requirements, particularly those of people with sensory, intellectual, psychosocial and other disabilities.

Despite good intentions, many organisations and activists are uncertain about what kind of individual accommodations are appropriate to make, when to make them, and how to provide them effectively. As a result, inclusion efforts can end up being symbolic or not effective enough to enable people with disabilities to meaningfully participate.

This guidance addresses this issue by explaining what the linked concepts of accessibility and reasonable accommodation mean. It also offers practical guidance on how each concept should be applied to create environments that are inclusive in principle and practice.

This guidance note is part of a wider toolkit. The toolkit also includes a glossary of terms, a summary of our research about collaboration and more tools. You can explore the tools and resources [here](#).

“We think about inequality without factoring in people with disability. You must include people with disability and you need to not just accommodate them but you need to unleash their full potential.”

Inequality activist, Ghana

Background to this guide

This guidance is grounded in the **United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**.

It uses the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' interpretations of key concepts, including on equality and non-discrimination. (See the Committee's General Comment No. 6, 2018.)

While the UNCRPD establishes binding international human rights standards, the manner in which these standards are implemented vary across national contexts. This is due to differences in countries' legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, resources and social conditions.

However, any adaptation of this guidance must remain faithful to the principles, rights and obligations set out in the UNCRPD.

This guidance should not be adapted in a way that dilutes or undermines the rights to accessibility, reasonable accommodation, or non-discrimination on the basis of disability.



Key concepts

To design inclusive programmes, events and processes, it is important to understand what two different, but related, concepts mean: accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

Understanding what these concepts mean and the difference between them will help you turn your commitment to inclusion into meaningful practice.

Accessibility

Accessibility means removing barriers, such as in physical environments, communication, information and digital spaces. It is a baseline obligation and a precondition for people with disabilities. This means it is something that must be done automatically, and at the very minimum, to enable people with disabilities to participate fully and equally in society.

Examples of accessibility

Communication: Sign language interpretation, captioning, plain language.

Information. Easy Read, braille, large print, audio

Digital access Accessible websites, platforms and documents

Physical environment: Step-free access, accessible toilets, clear signage

Transport and navigation: Accessible transport, wayfinding support

Reasonable accommodation

Reasonable accommodation is a legally enforceable right. It refers to the necessary and appropriate individual adjustments that are needed in a specific situation to ensure that a person with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with others.

What makes an accommodation 'reasonable' is its relevance, appropriateness and effectiveness, not its convenience or cost. All reasonable accommodation must be decided in consultation

with the individual concerned, respecting their dignity, autonomy and choice. People with disabilities should never be discouraged, questioned or stigmatised for requesting accommodations they genuinely need.

Fair use of reasonable accommodation

In contexts where accessibility is not fully realised and resources are limited, providing reasonable accommodation for one person may have collective implications for other people with disabilities.

It is therefore important to know the difference between good-faith requests, which respond to genuine access barriers, and uses of accommodation that are not connected to identified access barriers or that go beyond what is needed for someone to meaningfully participate in a given context.

This distinction is not about denying rights or policing individuals. It is about making things fair between people with disabilities. Responsibility for managing this balance rests with organisers and duty bearers. It can be achieved through early planning, clear communication and respectful, needs-based dialogue.

Disproportionate or undue burden

Accessibility and reasonable accommodation are different legal obligations. But some reasonable accommodations may be similar to general accessibility measures when they are provided to meet the individual needs of a person with a disability in a specific situation.

This distinction is important because the concept of disproportionate or undue burden applies only to reasonable accommodation. It does not apply to accessibility.

As stated by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reasonable accommodation must not be misunderstood as a limitation on rights:

“Reasonable accommodation is a single concept and should not be understood as an exception clause. The term ‘reasonable’ does not relate to cost or resources, but to the relevance, appropriateness and effectiveness of the accommodation for the person with a disability.” (General Comment No.6, 2018, para. 26)

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation is limited only by the concept of disproportionate or undue burden. Assessing whether a specific access request amounts to a disproportionate or undue burden can only be done after assessing whether the access request is relevant, appropriate and effective for that person.

Procedural accommodation (this means making necessary changes to processes, especially in legal or workplace settings) is a core requirement of equality before the law. This means it is not subject to claims of disproportionate or undue burden, in line with Article 13 of UNCRPD.

Limited resource settings

Limited resources or funding constraints do not remove the obligation to ensure inclusion.

As a duty bearer, if you are assessing whether something is a disproportionate or undue burden, you must continue to explore alternative accommodations if one option is not feasible due to your organisation’s resources, size, mandate and positionality.

Effective practice requires early planning and partnership with organisations of people with disabilities. You need to prioritise meaningful access and participation, even if this means changing the number of participants.

Examples of reasonable accommodation

Facilitation and communication: Adjusted facilitation style, alternative communication methods

Time and participation: Additional breaks, flexible schedules remote participation

Physical arrangements: Modified seating, alternative room layout

Individual access support: Personal assistants, communication assistants, other tailored supports

Participation-related assistance and responsibilities

Some people with disabilities will need assistance from another person to fully take part in meetings and consultations.

Support roles include access assistants, personal assistants, sign language interpreters and sighted guides. The kind of assistance role will depend on the individual's preferences and needs.

A person in an assistance role might support the person with disabilities to:

- follow and understand the conversation
- participate in the conversation
- participate in group work and plenary (whole-group) sessions.

In some countries, such as the UK, these kinds of roles are formal relationships between the person with a disability and the supporter or personal assistant, who is often their employee.

In Ghana and Kenya where our research took place, most people described as aides or personal assistants are unpaid caregivers who may be family, friends or neighbours of the person with a disability.

When working with people with disabilities and their personal assistants, it is important to remember that these are often personal, rather than professional or paid relationships, which can make it harder for people with disabilities to have full choice and control.

There are many different names for different types of assistance. An important thing to consider is what the person with disabilities wants and how they define the support. This may be different to the examples described on the next page.

The differences between accessibility and reasonable accommodation

Accessibility (group-based obligation)

Reasonable accommodation (individual-based right)

Planned and provided in advance	Triggered by an individual's specific access needs
Guided by universal design and accessibility standards	Tailored to a particular person
Applies to everyone, including all people with disabilities:	Applies to one individual in a specific situation
Proactive and systemic (always applied)	Reactive and situation specific
Not limited by cost or the concept of disproportionate or undue burden	Subject to disproportionate or undue burden assessment
A precondition for inclusion	A precondition for inclusion

Examples of what different support roles do before, during and after activities

Role	Reasonable accommodation (individual-based right)
Access-support assistants - can also be called a personal assistant	<p>Before Activity: Prepare in advance with the participant (e.g., reviewing the process and key questions beforehand and ensuring informed consent).</p> <p>During Activity: Ask for pauses if needed so the participant can follow the discussion. Help the participant to contribute their views.</p> <p>After Activity: Possibly provide travel assistance to and from the venue. Debrief with the participant and help raise any queries.</p>
Personal assistant	<p>Before Activity: Possibly provide travel assistance to and from the venue.</p> <p>During Activity: Help the participant contribute their views, or assist them if they find the topics challenging. May provide break and lunch assistance.</p> <p>After Activity: Follow the participant's instructions if they require follow-up assistance, such as help with paperwork.</p>
Visual or sighted aide - can also be called a personal assistant	<p>Before Activity: Provide travel assistance to and from the venue.</p> <p>During Activity: Help the participant with any printed or written materials used in group work, or any writing tasks. May provide break and lunch assistance.</p> <p>After Activity: Follow the participant's instructions if they require follow-up assistance, such as help with paperwork.</p>
Sign language interpreter (two needed for activities longer than an hour)	<p>Before Activity: Connect with the participant and check if they have any specialist needs.</p> <p>During Activity: Work with a second interpreter to ensure smooth translation of the discussion and voice the participant's contributions if needed.</p> <p>After Activity: Debrief with the participant and help raise any queries or feedback.</p>
Local language interpreter	<p>Before Activity: Connect with the participant, and identify what level of translation support they need.</p> <p>During Activity: Ensure that the participant is following the conversation, understands any tasks set and is able to contribute confidently.</p> <p>After Activity: Debrief with the participant and help them share feedback with the organisers.</p>

Tips for working with support roles

Participants should receive invitations well in advance of any planned activities. This is to give participants with disabilities enough time to organise their own assistance or say what support they need.

Two weeks' notice is the minimum time you should give, and providing more time is helpful. People with disabilities need to be given the choice about whether to organise their own assistants or whether they would like the organisers to provide this.

Activity organisers should take the time to brief all types of access-support roles before the start of any activity. This can be done verbally or with a written briefing note. Briefing should happen with the agreement of the person with disabilities who is using the access-support.

The organiser's goal should be to run an inclusive and participatory discussion which provides for a range of access needs. All participants should also be patient while people make their point and be prepared to repeat questions.

Sometimes participants can find questions confusing. So it is important to be clear what is being asked, especially when interpreting. This might mean pausing the facilitation to clarify key points.

When an access-supporter is voicing for a participant, it is important that they use the same terms as the participant. An access-supporter should not change the language or terms to meet social or cultural norms.

Remember that different kinds of personal assistants play different roles. Sometimes, access support happens before and after an event, so it might not be visible during the event.

For example, someone might be assisted to:

- get ready to attend the event
- travel safely to the event
- access the washroom at the event
- get refreshments or meals at the event
- move around the venue
- take notes on what happens
- speak up or say what they want to say
- network with others

- deal with stressful or overwhelming situations at the event
- understand their immediate environment, for instance, through descriptions of surroundings and potential barriers
- deal with bus travel, or in some cases airport check-in, security screening, bus or aircraft boarding/deplaning, baggage collection and station or airport transfers
- be made aware of potential emergencies (an access-support role may be responsible for providing the participant with personal emergency evacuation assistance)
- facilitate an activity or appear as a panellist (if the participant has been invited to do so)
- travel safely home.

The level of assistance needed will vary from individual to individual. Sometimes, a person might need two different types of support. For example, a Deaf person with a physical disability might need a sign language interpreter and a personal assistant.

It is always helpful for event organisers to ask participants to explain their needs in advance so they can plan what needs to be done to meet these needs.

Keep in mind that accommodations should be reasonable, and organisations may need to reduce the overall number of people taking part to be able to budget for personal assistants.

Troubleshooting common challenges

Using children as assistants

Some people with disabilities may use a child as an assistant. This is culturally acceptable in some parts of the world. But it means that the child may experience some challenges, including:

- being out of school
- being treated poorly by the person they assist
- being at risk of harm due to the nature of the topics being addressed at the event
- being at risk of abuse from other adults at the activity or event.

The rights of children must be respected. For this

reason, it is recommended that no-one under the age of 18 should be used as an assistant at an event or activity.

Childcare at activities

Some people with disabilities might bring children to a project activity because they are caring for them and have no alternative childcare solutions.

These children may be at risk during the activity if they are not being supervised by their caregiver. With the exception of breastfeeding babies, children at activities are strongly discouraged, unless qualified care can be organised. Giving plenty of notice for activities will help participants arrange alternative childcare. It is important for organisers to consider the timing, length and location of activities so that, as far as possible, people are not taken away from their child-caring responsibilities, or feel they cannot attend due to child-caring responsibilities.

Suspicion about unnecessary accommodation requests

Organisers should trust participants' self-reported needs and avoid invasive checks. Carrying out such checks often costs more than it saves.

Paying personal assistants and interpreters

Personal assistants should get the same transportation allowance as the participant they are assisting. Even though they may have travelled with the person they are assisting in the same vehicle, they may need to travel to the individual's house before and after the event, depending on the level of assistance they are providing.

Rates for different types of access support should be agreed with disability organisations so that all people get the same level of pay for their time and support.

It is good practice to provide payment directly to the personal assistant so they can sign for receipt of funds. The person with a disability should be made aware of this before the event or activity happens. Equally, the person with a disability should be given their honorarium or transport costs directly. These should not be given to their personal assistant.

Dual roles

Some people have drivers who also provide personal assistance throughout the event. Such a situation should be discussed with event organisers in advance.

Many personal assistants may have other skills and experience that they think is relevant for the activity. For example, they may have media experience, or they may be a great facilitator. While recognising these additional skills, it can be helpful to ask personal assistants to remain focussed on meeting the needs of the person they are supporting.

Abuse by the access-support worker

Sometimes the personal assistant might abuse the person they are supporting. For example, they might refuse or neglect to provide needed assistance, try to take a share of the individual's travel refund, or hurt the person they are supporting. Such incidents must be reported to the safeguarding lead with the organisation, or to a senior person.

Abuse by the person with a disability

Sometimes the person who has a personal assistant may abuse or mistreat them. For example, they may shout at them, hit them or expect them to work without a break. Such incidents must be reported to the safeguarding lead with the organisation, or to a senior person.

Reminder about confidentiality

All types of access-support workers should be asked to sign confidentiality agreements if the content of the activity is sensitive. Everyone should feel confident and safe to express their views and not worry that people outside the activity might find out about it.





Acknowledgements, references and further resources

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Activists and organisations are welcome to adapt the guidance to meet their needs. Please note that the guidance may need to be updated as time passes and circumstances and local contexts change.

Other resources include:

- United Nations, 2006, 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 2515, p.3'. Available [here](#).
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2018, 'General Comment No. 6 (2018) on Equality and Non-discrimination (CRPD/C/GC/6)'. Available [here](#).

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