

# ORGANISING ACCESSIBLE EVENTS: A PLAYBOOK

A Step-by-Step Guide to Event Accessibility and Inclusivity



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# **ORGANISING ACCESSIBLE EVENTS: A PLAYBOOK**

**A Step-by-Step Guide to Event Accessibility and Inclusivity**



In collaboration with



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## 1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation defines disability as “a restriction or inability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being, mostly resulting from impairment.”<sup>1</sup> It estimates that approximately 1.3 billion people in the world experience a significant disability, making persons with disabilities the world's largest minority. In India, the 2011 Census estimated that 2.21% of the country's population - or 26.8 million people- are Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). For reference, this was more than the population of Australia at the time, which was approximately 21 million.

Having events that are easily accessible is vital to enable individuals to participate in the event. Through this playbook, we intend to provide a starting point for organisations to make their events inclusive, equitable and accessible.

## 2. About Zero Project India

The Zero Project India Conference and CII-IBDN National Conference is a unique event that brings together diverse stakeholders to introduce and promote groundbreaking innovations to foster greater inclusivity within society, particularly for persons with disabilities. The conference is organised by Zero Project and Youth4Jobs (Y4J). Other partners of the conference are the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), GDi Partners, the Hans Foundation, and the Axis Bank Foundation.

The Zero Project India Conference is part of the Zero Project's work to support all stakeholders interested in scaling innovation. The conference is designed to be an annual hub for all these activities in India and the whole region.

## 3. How to Use the Playbook

This playbook is a simple guide to planning accessible events, structured primarily under pre-event, during the event and post-event categories. In addition, the playbook has categories for venue and communications and outreach accessibility which have been elaborated upon in the Annexure. Under each category, the target areas have been presented as sub-categories.

The purpose of this playbook is not to provide an exhaustive list of elements to make events accessible to their participants, but more as a building block upon which event organisers can build their own accessibility practices. Indeed, a one-size-fits all approach should not be adopted towards an area as vast and vital as accessibility.

In case organisations wish to build upon or improve accessibility in other specific areas, a list of useful resources is also provided in the last section of this document.

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1 <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/268464>

## 4. Event Accessibility Guidelines

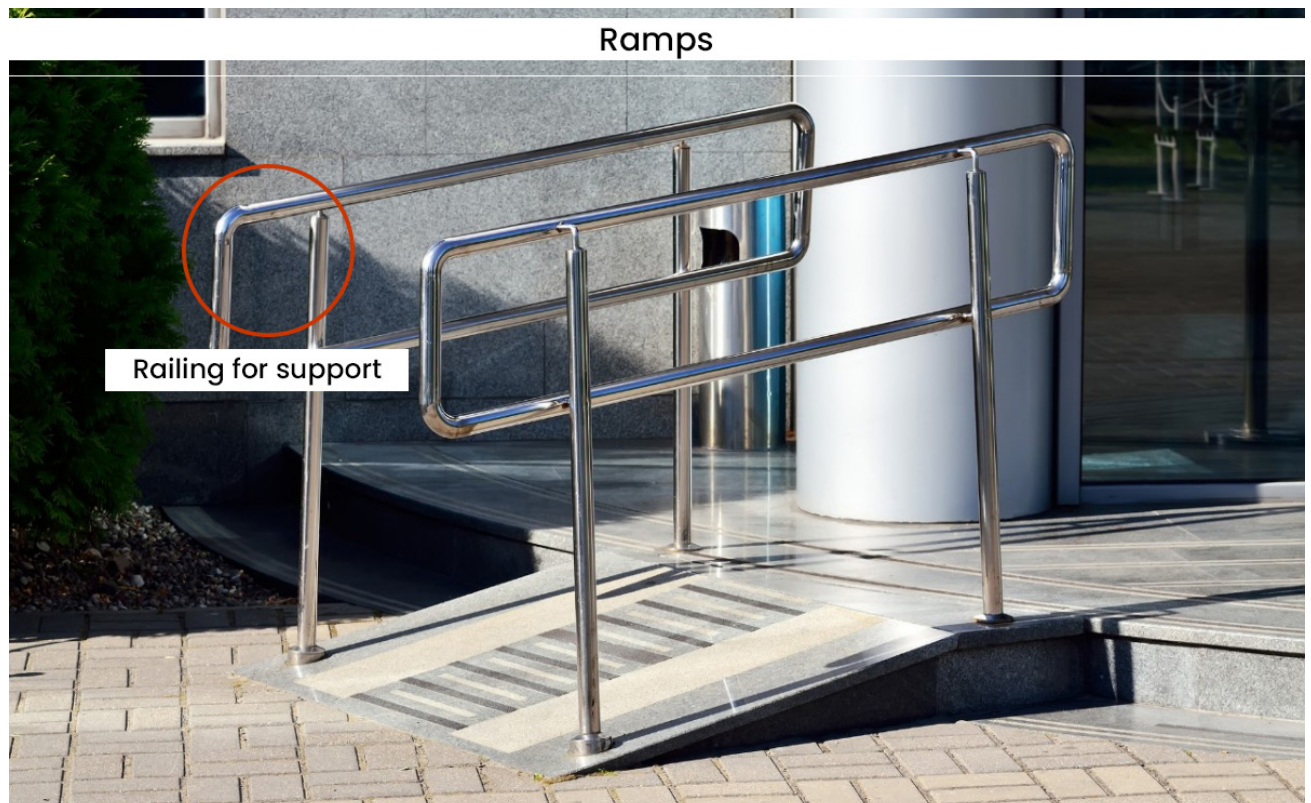
### 4.1. Pre Event Accessibility

It is vital for accessibility to be incorporated in the event before it starts, through means such as travel support, accommodation accessibility and pre-event guidance materials. The scope and type of pre-event accommodations to be made are highly contingent on the scale of the event. So while it might be difficult to have an exhaustive pre-event checklist, efforts should be made to incorporate the needs of as many attendees as possible.

Key elements in this regard, adapted from the Zero Project's experience organising their annual conferences, include-

#### 4.1.1 Venue accessibility (a detailed list of what features an accessible venue should possess can be found in Annexure 1)

4.1.1.1 Physical accessibility should be checked while selecting the venue; this includes, but is not limited to, easy access to all areas of the venue via lifts, ramps or step-free access, uniform heights of furniture and proximity to parking and travel facilities.



4.1.1.2 Seating arrangements made before the event should be such that persons in wheelchairs have a clear and level floor space of not less than 900 mm x 1200 mm and writing surfaces are not more than 800 mm from the floor.

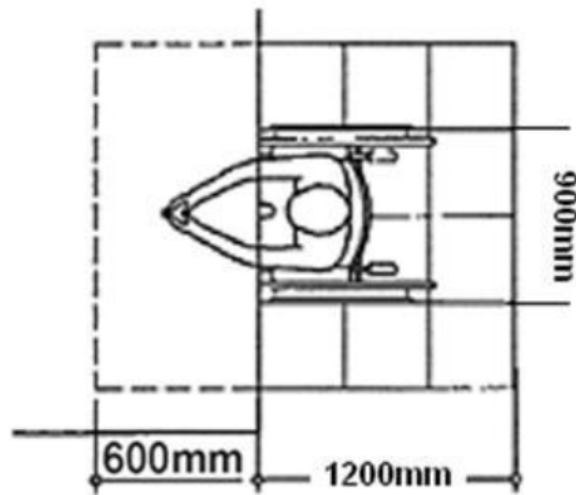


Figure: Clear floor space for wheelchair

4.11.3 Before the event, provisions should be made for support desks, wheelchair support and navigation help via maps set up across the venue.

4.11.4 Clean and hygienic washroom facilities should be provided, with at least one unisex accessible washroom/toilet and a clear manoeuvring space of 1800mm x 1800mm.

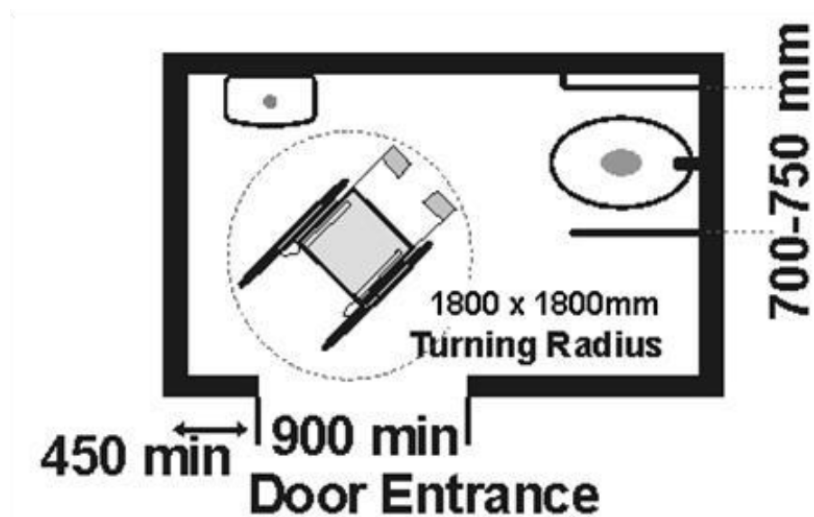


Figure: Wheelchair maneuvering space in washroom

4.11.5 Clean drinking water should be provided (preferably, in a way that generates as low waste as possible).

## 4.1.2 Accessible accommodation

4.1.2.1 Ideally, only accessible hotels, that address needs of persons with disabilities should be used for available event accommodation; these hotels can be identified by checking for the presence of essential universal design elements (such as accessible entrances, ramps near doors and other elements elaborated on in Annexure 1).

4.1.2.2 Accessibility checklists should be shared with hotels and information on the travel arrangements needed and individual-specific arrangements required (such as wheelchair access for persons with physical disabilities), should be communicated and arranged prior to the event. More information on barrier-free venues can be found in the resources listed at the end of this playbook.



### 4.1.3 Travel support

4.1.3.1 Ease of travel can be ensured by having basic facilities such as buses or shuttle services for 3 way to-and-fro travel (i.e., between the event venue and accommodation site, between venue and transit points such as railway stations and airports,, and between the accommodation and transit points).

4.1.3.2 Information on travel support available, schedule of buses or shuttle services for conveyance of attendees, should be relayed in all digital communication with the attendees.

### 4.1.4 Pre-event communication (more details in Annexure 2)

4.1.4.1 Uniform, large fonts should be used in all communication material . Recommended fonts include those in the Sans serif family of fonts, such as Arial, Helvetica Medium and Futura.

4.1.4.2 The spacing between lines should be 50% of the line height and the overall text should be tactile embossed with Braille.

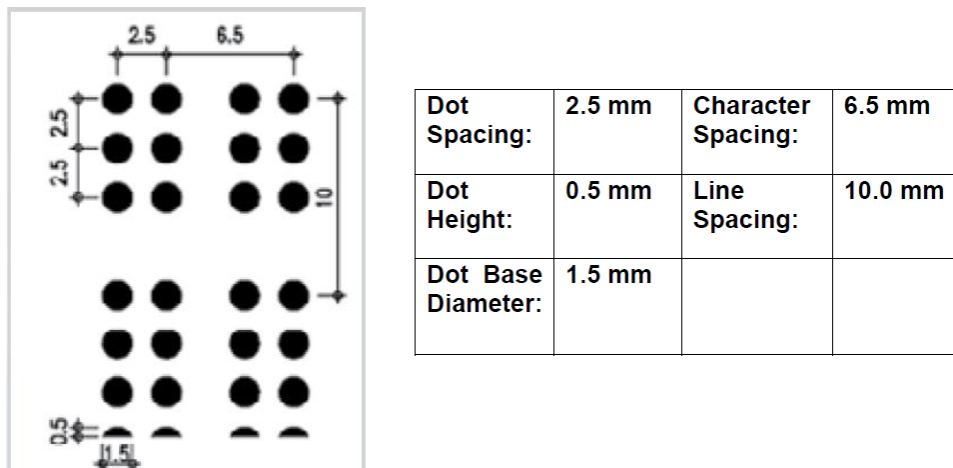


Figure: Braille specifications

4.1.4.3 Availability of alternative format material such as audio descriptions or alternative captions for images, to assist attendees with specific types of disabilities. Audio description of material shown in the conference can be done either live, or pre-recorded and integrated into an existing video file.

4.1.4.4 A detailed website, following accessibility guidelines such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), with a user guide having the details of accessibility features at the event, event itinerary, travel facilities and accommodation options should ideally be available.

4.1.4.5. Contact information of event staff that attendees can reach out to with queries should be provided.

4.1.4.6 Registration details taken from prospective attendees should include an exhaustive list of dietary requirements, travel support needed, accessibility support required, and so on. Based on the details provided, the required arrangements can then be made in collaboration with all stakeholders.

## 4.2 Accessibility During The Event

Ensuring accessibility during the event involves having adequate capacity and resources to respond to and effectively address any issue that attendees face, and providing ample resources and aid to participants with disabilities wherever possible. While arrangements for accessible venues, accommodation and travel are made before the event, it is equally important to ensure effective utilisation of these resources.

In this regard, some vital steps to take during the event include-

### 4.2.1 On ground support

4.2.1.1 For all participants with disabilities, guides or escorts should be paired with disability-specific support. Ideally, support desks staffed by trained guides or volunteers should be set up across the venue in order to allow participants with disabilities to effectively locate and avail aid.

4.2.1.2 Sign language interpreters should be available, preferably throughout the event. While the number of interpreters required is contingent on the number of participants who are hard of hearing, at least 2 interpreters should be available per day.

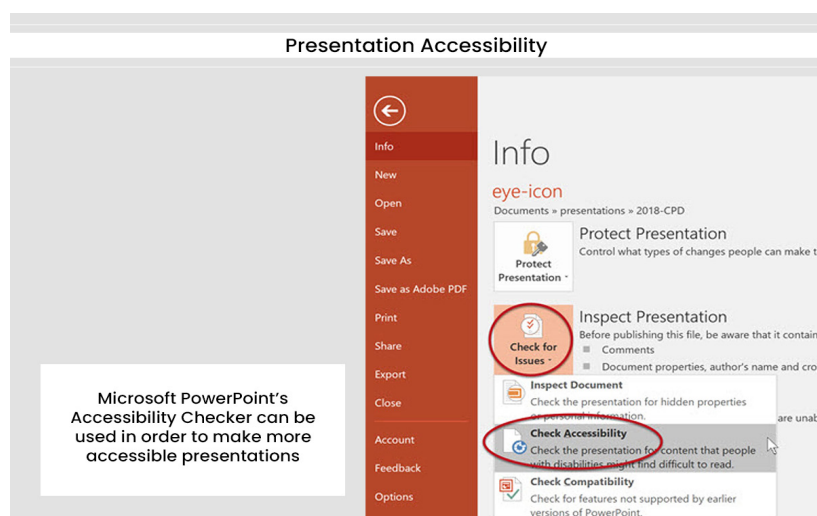
4.2.1.3 Live captioning facilities should be available upon request, preferably in partnership with a specialised agency.

4.2.1.4 In case of a medical emergency in the event, details of the nearest hospital should be kept handy and provided to all participants.

### 4.2.2 Presentations

4.2.2.1 While most of the guidelines from ensuring accessible communication (Annexure 2) apply to presentations, an accessibility checklist for presentations should also be prepared and shared with all presenters. A sample accessibility checklist for presentations, based on the Zero Project's guidelines for speaker presentations, can be found in the section below.

4.2.2.2 Presentations can be shared with the team beforehand to ensure captioning, sign language, graphic facilitation, and audio description.



## Accessible Presentations at Zero Project

1. Communicating presentation length and number of slides to speakers, with an emphasis on keeping them as brief and compact as possible (ideally, a maximum of 10 slides should be used).
2. If possible, presenters should include 1-2 lines per slide in the 'Notes' feature of PowerPoint; this text can be easily used for audio-translation, subtitling and for accessible YouTube videos of the presentation.
3. The material used should use less text and preferably not have any animations or pictures as background to the text.
4. Features such as Microsoft Powerpoint's Accessibility Checker can be used to review slides and make necessary improvements.
5. Organisations should ideally provide a presentation template to all speakers; if not, presenters should follow the following guidelines-
  - a. Using white backgrounds with black text.
  - b. Font-sizes of 24pts or bigger.
  - c. Adding captions to all videos.
  - d. Adding alternative text to images (photos, graphics etc.).

### 4.2.3 Proof of Disability

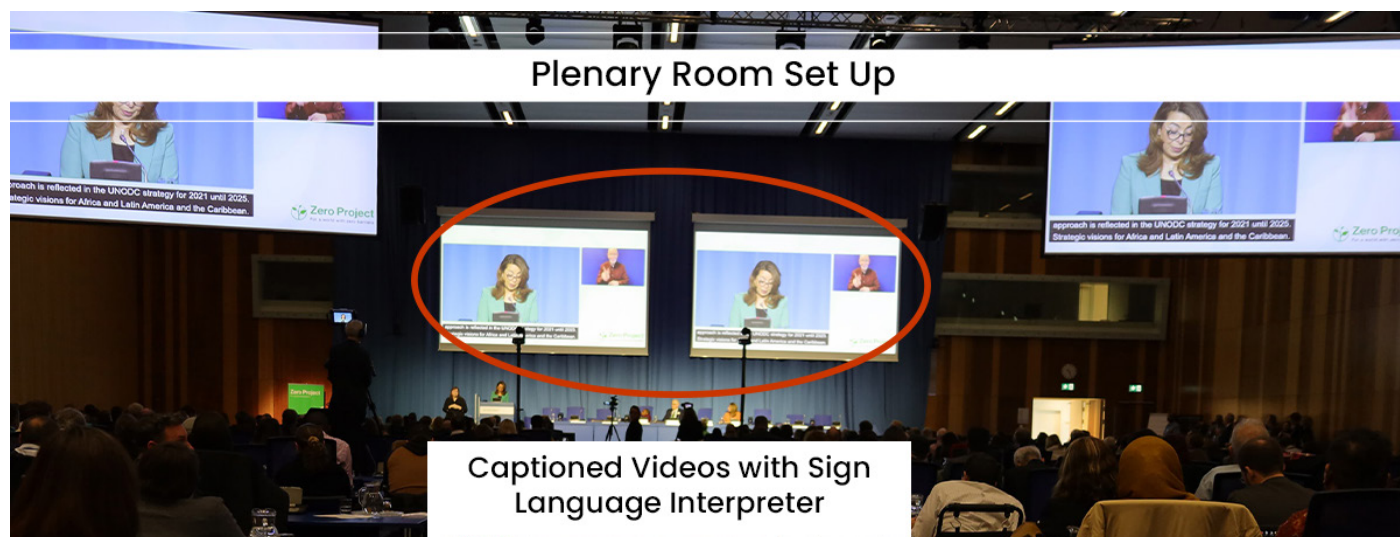
Ideally, proof of disability should not be required to be submitted; however, if proof is needed from persons with disabilities, the scope of acceptable documents should be wide enough (instead of a government issued UDID card, for instance, hospital reports can also be considered).

### 4.2.4 Hybrid Events

During the event, the choice of platform used should allow for a hybrid conference.

4.2.4.1 If possible, live streaming facilities should be arranged.

4.2.4.2 Closed captions should be enabled in the video and live captioning facility should be available upon request.



### 4.3 Post Event Accessibility

After the event, it is important to collect data and feedback from the attendees in order to effectively assess gaps in the current accessibility framework and plan a more accessible event in the future.

Post event elements should include-

#### 4.3.1 Feedback

4.3.1.1 Feedback should be collected from all stakeholders, including guests, attendees, speakers and event partners.

4.3.1.2 The feedback form should have all features of accessible communication (Annexure 2), along with the additional option for the responder to stay anonymous.

4.3.1.3 Feedback collected should be factored in while making future plans; the best way to do so would be to make an internal best practices document that also lists potential problem areas to work on in the future.

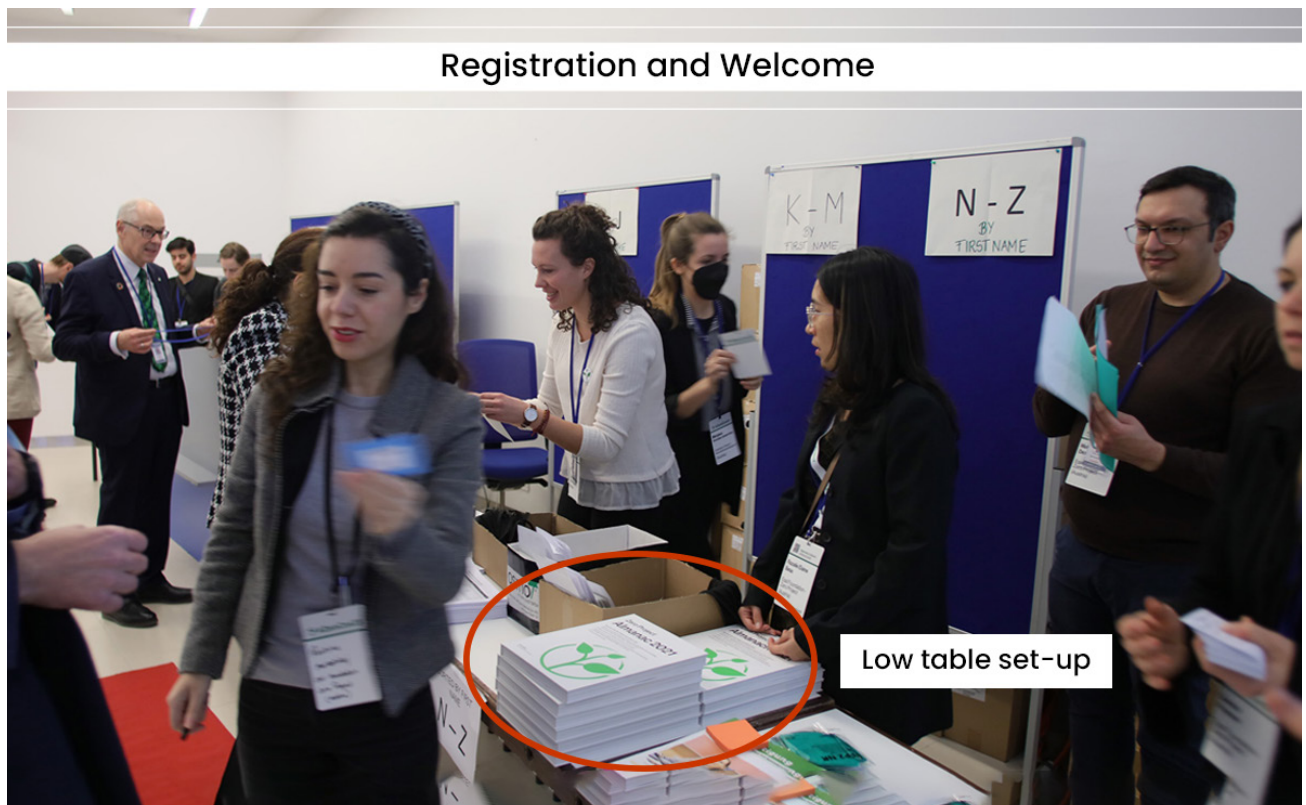
## 5. Annexure

### 5.1 Annexure 1

#### 5.1.1 Accessibility of Venue

The venue selected for the event needs to be accessible for all, such that participants have minimal difficulties accessing and navigating the venue. Key elements include step free access to the venue wherever possible, ease of navigation and accessible travel arrangements. The larger the size of the event, the broader the scope of accessibility services provided.

Key elements of an accessible venue include-



##### 5.1.1.1 Physical Accessibility

5.1.1.1.1 Step free access to all areas of the venue needs to be provided (if not this, then access via ramps or lifts).

5.1.1.1.2 The maximum recommended slope of ramps, per United Nations' standard, is 1:20, with minimum width 0.90 m.

5.1.1.1.3 The heights of objects placed throughout the venue need to be uniform. This includes podiums, counters and tables in the conference rooms, catering areas, and the networking areas.



## Networking Area



- Quiet corners
- Easily moveable Chairs and
- Tables

5.1.1.1.4 Accessible parking spaces should be available within 50 metres of building entrances; ideally, they should be walking distance from the venue and/or accessible via lift.

5.1.1.1.5 Physical accessibility should be supplemented by lift access wherever possible, with the lifts having a working emergency intercom system; if possible, the intercom system should not require verbal communication.

## Audience Participation



Microphones for voice amplification

Chairs with armrests

## 5.1.1.2 Ease of viewing

5.1.1.2.1 The screens in the venue need to be large enough that all participants can enjoy an easy viewing experience.

5.1.1.2.2 The text size and font used in presentations and materials such as standees, banners, etc., ideally should be uniform and large enough to allow easy viewing.

5.1.1.2.3 Live captioning facilities, preferably in collaboration with a local agency with a dedicated team of trained specialists, should be provided, ideally throughout the event.

### 5.1.1.3 Seating

5.1.1.3.1 The seating plans need to be finalised well in advance, such that there is wide space for accommodating those with special needs such as wheelchairs and support animals.

#### Seating Arrangement





5.1.1.3.2 Seats should not be too far away from the main podium or presentation screen; if the size of the venue or the number of attendees is high, it is recommended that screens be placed in designated areas of the venue, to live-stream the presentations or speeches from the main podium.

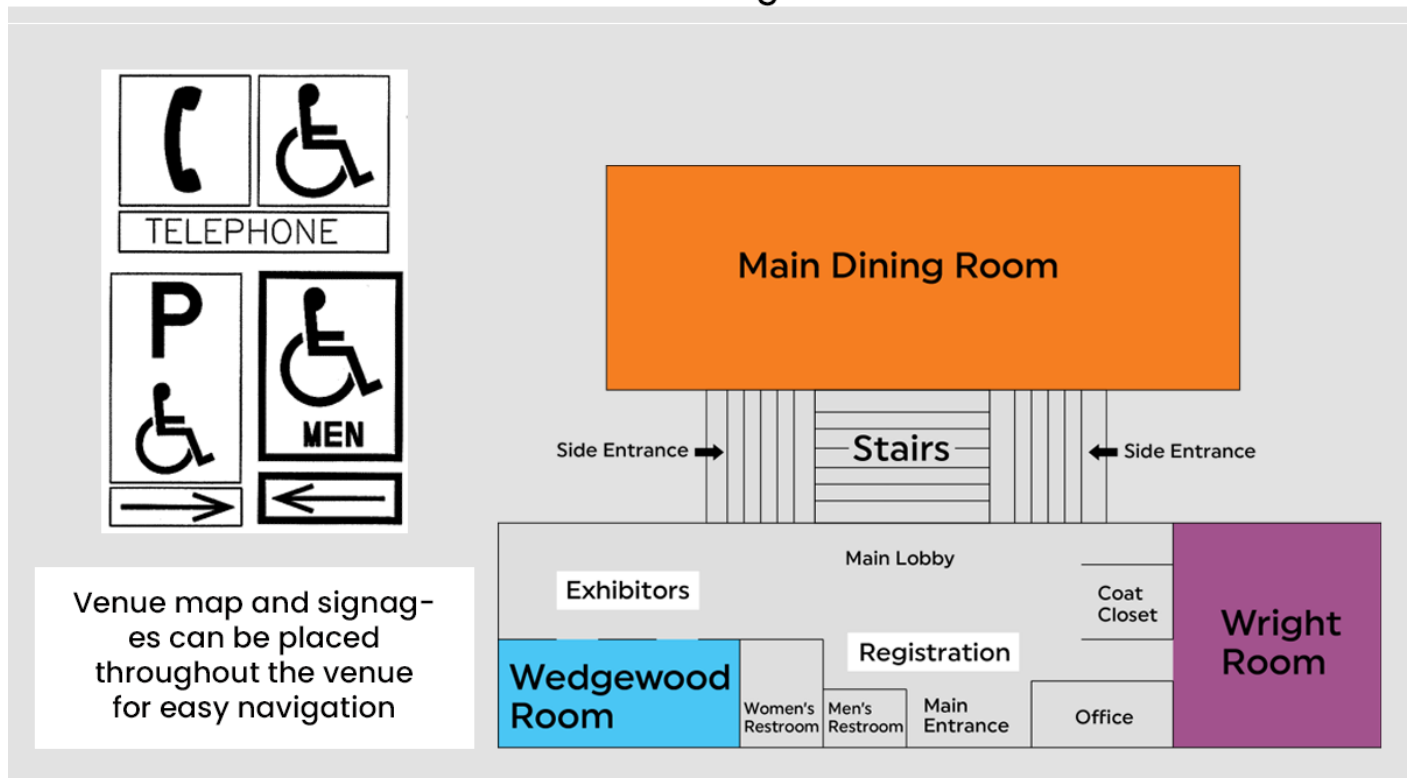
### Seating



### 5.1.1.4 Navigation

5.1.1.4.1 Venue maps with highlighted emergency exit points and designated areas such as the main conference hall, refreshments' areas, and so on, should be displayed at prominent locations.

### Ease of Navigation





5.11.4.2 To facilitate ease of navigation, signage in accessible formats and languages should be placed at prominent areas in the venue.

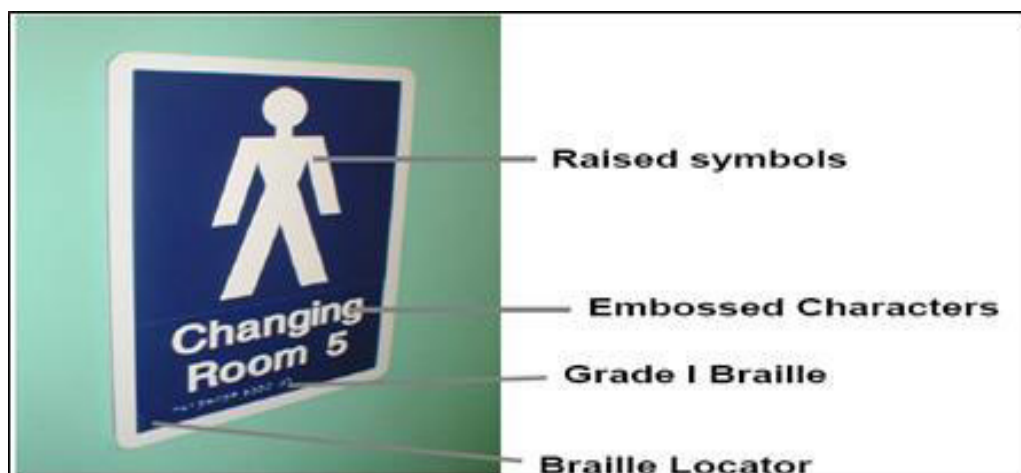


Figure: Example of a Universally Usable Signage

5.11.4.3 For attendees with physical disabilities or visual impairments, there should be guides or escorts to help with navigation throughout the event.

5.11.4.4 Tactile flooring to help those with visual impairments navigate the venue should be arranged, if possible.



5.11.4.5 In addition to guides and escorts, navigation facilities should be supplemented by wheelchair accessibility.

- An adequate number of wheelchairs, scooters and other aids (based on participants' requirements communicated before the event) need to be provided.

### **5.1.1.5 Washroom facilities**

5.1.1.5.1 The washrooms provided need to be clean and hygienic, and if needed, stocked with products such as sanitary napkins.

5.1.1.5.2 Availability of male, female, gender neutral and wheelchair-friendly washroom facilities needs to be checked in advance.

### **5.1.1.6 Drinking water facilities**

5.1.1.6.1 Facilities to avail drinking water should be provided throughout the event; access to the facilities needs to be at zero cost, and they should be well maintained and hygienic.

5.1.1.6.2 If possible, plastic water bottles should be avoided to prevent wastage. Instead, water can be provided via water coolers.

### **5.1.1.7 Ease of travel**

5.1.1.7.1 The venue should ideally be near transportation facilities such as railway stations, airports, or bus stands.

## **5.2 Annexure 2**

### **5.2.1 Communication and Outreach Accessibility**

This aspect pertains to several accessibility measures that can be taken before, during and after the event. It involves several platforms, based on the scope of the outreach being done for the event, and includes both, online as well as offline measures that are intended at ensuring that all communication and outreach channels are as inclusive and disability-friendly as possible.

Key elements of accessible communication and outreach plans include-

#### **5.2.1.1 Comprehensive communication plans**

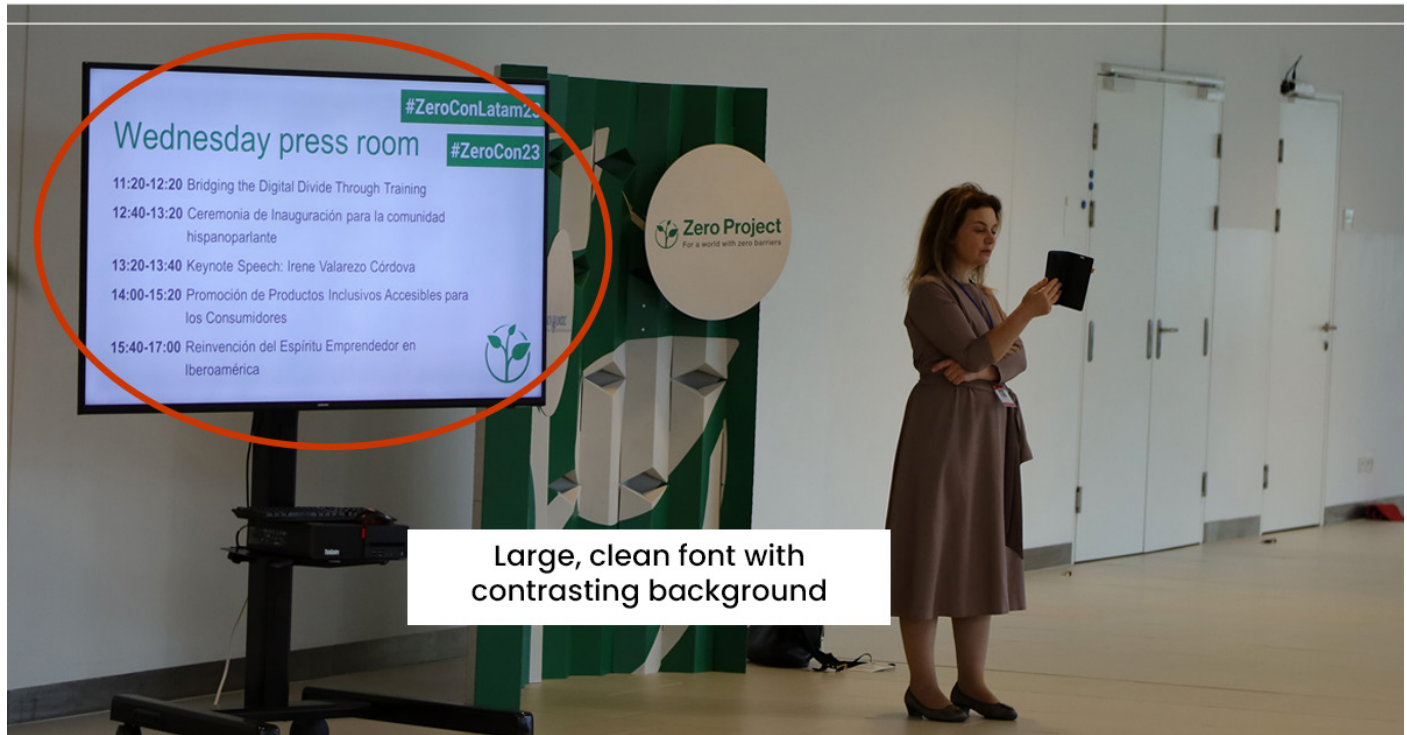
5.2.1.1.1 Prior to the event, a comprehensive communication plan with necessary accessibility check-points should be made and shared with all stakeholders organising the event, to ensure that all organisers are well aware of the basic communication and outreach guidelines and that the overall event follows pre-decided accessibility standards.

### 5.2.1.2 Accessible digital communication

5.2.1.2.1 Easy to read font that contrasts well with the background should be used. The commonly employed colours are white for the figure or text and blue for the background.

5.2.1.2.2 Block letters, italics, and the use of different fonts should be avoided.

#### Digital Signages



5.2.1.2.3 Alternative format materials should be made available, including-

- QR Codes to convert text to audio for people with visual impairments, or the option to use text-to-speech technology or audio files once the code is scanned.
- Captions for videos (on-screen text of the dialogue and other audio in the video).
- Soft copy of collaterals in the form of accessible PDFs.
- Wherever images are used, alternate text (preferably, a description of the image) should be provided.
- Video materials should have captions and/or audio descriptions.

5.2.1.2.4 Large buttons should be used, with the option to get audio descriptions for people with low vision.

5.2.1.2.5 The website should provide a clear accessibility statement, and encourage attendees to reach out with any questions or concerns they may have.

5.2.1.2.6 It is recommended that the website have a section on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) providing information on (but not limited to)-

- The basic details and schedule of the event.
- Guidance on how to reach the venue (from the nearest railway station, bus stop and airport).
- Accommodation details and how to avail them.
- Links to Google Maps for the accommodation site, the venue and routes to and from travel facilities.

### **5.2.1.3 Accessible formats and languages**

5.2.1.3.1 Offline communication and conference material should also be made available in different languages and accessible formats, per the attendees' requirements.

### **5.2.1.4 Registration Form**

5.2.1.4.1 The registration form provided to the prospective participants needs to have the following elements-

- Questions for detailed contact information of the participant, including email address, phone number, and an alternate phone number (preferably, Whatsapp).
- Questions for information around support needs regarding transport, personal assistance, interpretation or any additional needs such as allergies and dietary requirements.

## 6. Accessibility Checklist

### 6.1 Pre-Event Accessibility

#### 6.1.1 Venue Accessibility

##### 6.1.1.1 Physical Accessibility

- ☐ Provide step-free/ramp/lift access to all areas
- ☐ Ensure ramps meet 1:20 slope standard
- ☐ Maintain uniform heights of objects such as tables
- ☐ Offer accessible parking within 50 metres of the venue
- ☐ Provide lift access with emergency intercoms installed in them

##### 6.1.1.2 Ease of Viewing

- ☐ Use sufficiently large screens for easy viewing experience
- ☐ Use uniform and large text in presentations and materials
- ☐ Offer live captioning facilities

##### 6.1.1.3 Seating

- ☐ Finalise seating plans with clear and level floor space of not less than 900 mm x 1200 mm and writing surfaces that are not more than 800 mm from the floor
- ☐ Keep seats close to podiums or screens

##### 6.1.1.4 Navigation

- ☐ Display venue maps with emergency exits throughout the venue
- ☐ Place accessible signage throughout the venue
- ☐ Provide guides or escorts for attendees with disabilities
- ☐ Consider tactile flooring for visual impairment
- ☐ Ensure availability of wheelchairs and aids as needed

##### 6.1.1.5 Washroom Facilities

- ☐ Maintain clean and hygienic washrooms with necessary hygiene products
- ☐ Check availability of male, female, gender-neutral, and wheelchair-friendly facilities, with clear manoeuvring space of 1800mm x 1800mm for wheelchairs



### 6.1.1.6 Drinking Water Facilities

- ☐ Provide free, well-maintained drinking water facilities
- ☐ Minimise plastic bottle use, use water coolers if possible

### 6.1.1.7 Ease of Travel

- ☐ Ideally locate the venue near transportation facilities

## 6.1.2 Accessible Accommodation

- ☐ Choose accessible hotels by checking for the presence of essential universal design elements
- ☐ Share accessibility checklists with the accommodation chosen and communicate specific needs (such as wheelchair access for persons with physical disabilities) to the hotels

## 6.1.3 Travel Support

- ☐ Arrange transportation facilities for 3 way to-and-fro travel (i.e., between the event venue and accommodation site, between venue and transit points such as railway stations and airports, and between the accommodation and transit points) and share travel info with attendees

## 6.1.4 Pre-event Communication

### 6.1.4.1 Accessibility Check-Points

- ☐ Develop and share a comprehensive communication plan with accessibility guidelines for all event organisers

### 6.1.4.2 Accessible Digital Communication

- ☐ Use easy-to-read fonts with good background contrast, preferably from the Sans serif family of fonts
- ☐ Avoid block letters, italics, and multiple fonts
- ☐ Keep spacing between lines at least 50% of the line height and tactile emboss the text with Braille
- ☐ Provide alternate format materials, including QR codes for text-to-audio conversion
- ☐ Provide soft copy of collaterals in the form of accessible PDFs
- ☐ Add captions to videos and audio descriptions to images
- ☐ Use large buttons with audio description options
- ☐ Include an accessibility statement on the website and an FAQ section covering event details, venue directions, accommodation, and travel links

### 6.1.4.3 Accessible Formats and Languages

- ☐ Make offline communication materials available in various languages and accessible formats based on attendee requirements

### 6.1.4.4 Registration Form

- ☐ Ask for detailed contact information of attendees (email, phone, and alternate phone number, preferably WhatsApp)
- ☐ Gather information about support needs (transport, personal assistance, interpretation, allergies, dietary requirements)

## 6.2 Accessibility During the Event

### 6.2.1 On-Ground Support

- ☐ Set up support desks with trained staff or volunteers across the venue
- ☐ Assign guides or escorts for all disabled attendees
- ☐ Ensure sign language interpreters are available, at least 2 per day
- ☐ Provide live captioning facilities upon request
- ☐ Keep details of the nearest hospital handy in case of a medical emergency

### 6.2.2 Presentations

- ☐ Make and share accessibility checklists for presentations with all presenters, communicating elements such as-
  - ☐ Presentation length and slide count (ideally, limit to 10 slides)
  - ☐ 1-2 lines per slide in the 'Notes' feature of PowerPoint
  - ☐ Using text and avoiding animations or background images
  - ☐ Utilising tools like Microsoft PowerPoint's Accessibility Checker
  - ☐ Presentation template to be used (if needed)
- ☐ Get presentations from speakers beforehand for captioning, sign language, and audio description of the content

### 6.2.3 Proof of Disability

- ☐ If needed, accept a wide range of documents (e.g., hospital reports, government certifications, etc)

### 6.2.4 Hybrid Events

- ☐ Choose a platform that supports hybrid conferences
- ☐ Arrange for live streaming facilities
- ☐ Enable closed captions in videos and provide live captioning upon request

## 6.3 Feedback Collection

### 6.3.1 On-Ground Support

- ☐ Collect feedback from all stakeholders, including guests, attendees, speakers, and event partners
- ☐ Incorporate feedback received in future event planning, via an internal best practices document that includes both, successes and areas for improvement

## 7. Important Resources

### Zero Project

The annual Zero Project Conference highlights innovations supporting people with disabilities; their website provides details of practices associated with Zero Project's experience organising an inclusive and accessible conference.

### United Nations

This manual was prepared by the Urban Management Department of the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District (SOLIDERE) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It provides in-depth checklists for designing barrier-free buildings.

### Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs released these guidelines in 2016, in order to ensure universal design and barrier-free access in public buildings in India, and has supplemented their in-depth recommendations with useful line drawings and illustrations.

### European Disability Forum Guide for Accessible Meetings

The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. Their accessibility guide provides useful information on venue accessibility as well as sources for further research in the European Union.

### International Telecommunication Union

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies. This document outlines the requirements for ensuring that meetings are accessible to remote participants, including those with disabilities and those using assistive technologies.

### W3C Web Accessibility Initiative

The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) develops standards and support materials to understand and implement accessibility. Their webpage lists resources, including checklists and videos, especially for making accessible presentations and websites.

### **European Union**

The European Union has developed a set of guidelines for making information easy to read and understand. These standards are intended to make information more accessible to people with intellectual disabilities, people with low literacy skills, and people for whom the language of the original text is not their first language.

### **International Organisation for Standardisation**

This article provides a list of standards developed by ISO, such as ISO/IEC Guide 71:2014, which provide guidance to developers on addressing accessibility requirements and recommendations in standards that focus, whether directly or indirectly, on systems (i.e. products, services and built environments) used by people.

### **Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center**

The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center (ISLRTC), under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, publishes resources, including a list of certified Indian Sign Language Interpreters.

### **World Federation of the Deaf, World Association of Sign Language Interpreters**

The WFD-WASLI International Sign Interpreter Accreditation is a joint initiative of the WFD and WASLI that exists to meet the increasing demand of International Sign Interpretation internationally. As part of this initiative, a list of International Sign Interpreters is also published by the organisations.







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