

BREAK THE BARRIERS

Working with accessibility

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THIS IS HANDISAM

Handisam – Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Coordination has been tasked by the Government to coordinate and accelerate the implementation of the disability policy. Handisam speeds progress towards a society in which everyone can participate on equal terms regardless of functional capacity.

Working with accessibility improves the society as whole

People with disability are an unused resource in working life. Because of inadequate accessibility people are too often excluded from the labour market. Having been tasked to effect change, the central Government administration is leading the work to create an accessible Sweden. Handisam supports the authorities in their work, among other things through the guidelines for accessibility.

It is important that cohesive accessibility work is started up in areas where it is not yet started – and is pursued further where it has made some progress. We hope that the material that we have compiled will provide good support and be a source of inspiration. The Government and its authorities must represent a model in working with accessibility.

The goal for the Swedish disability policy is to ensure a social community based on diversity, where society is formed so that men and women, and similarly boys and girls, with disability become fully participative in the life of the community and have equal conditions of life. The disability policy therefore not only relates to people with disability, but to everyone in society.

THE DISABILITY PERSPECTIVE

The disability perspective in change

In order to attain the disability policy objectives, the Government has prescribed the orientation of the policy. It is necessary to rectify obstacles to participation, prevent and combat discrimination and also establish the preconditions for independence and self-determination. The perspective is being shifted from the individual to environment and surroundings, improvement and facilitation. The main alternative is to choose general solutions that function for as many people as possible. How an individual's disability can be compensated by individual support or through special solutions should be viewed as a complement.

Work with the disability perspective

The Swedish disability policy proceeds on the basis that people have different capacity and that reduced functional capacity is one of several natural variations among the population. The disability perspective results in a strategy and working method that is oriented towards identifying the obstacles prevailing, rectifying them and/or offering the support that may be needed.

It is intended that every sector in society should be designed so that it becomes accessible to all citizens. The costs should be borne by the ordinary operation. This is referred to as the 'principle of responsibility and financing'. This makes the policy sustainable in the long term. In the short term it is important to have a strategy.

This brochure is an introduction to the guidelines on accessibility. You can use it as an aid in getting started, a checklist for current accessibility work or quite simply as a source of inspiration. The brochure especially addresses you as a director and/or a member of the management group. You have a decisive role in removing the barriers and establishing a society in which everyone can participate, regardless of functional capacity.

DIRECTORS

Everyone should be able to participate!

Your responsibility as an employer includes ensuring that everyone, regardless of functional capacity, will be able to gain access to and participate in your operation. This applies both to employees and the public. It should be possible to have contact with your operation and to work to gain access to information. The physical environment should be designed so that people with disabilities can get into the building and use the premises.

Visits and contacts

The general public needs to contact and meet authorities and organisations in various ways when dealing with business or completing a standard form - for example via telephone, e-mail, letter or by a personal visit. It is important that people with disabilities can communicate on the same terms as other people. People with a hearing impairment should be able to make contact via text telephone; people with a visual impairment should be able to receive their written replies in Braille.

Information

There are various ways of providing information – for example via printed matter, websites and conferences. But we all gain access to information in different ways. If information is to reach everyone, it must consequently be produced in various versions, known as ‘alternative formats’.

People with reading and writing difficulties may, for example, prefer to have the text recorded on a cassette. If the text is translated into easy-to-read, people with mental development disabilities can gain access to it. People who are blind may prefer to have the information in Braille.

How to get started

The success of the work to create an accessible operation depends on management being goal-orientated, committed and clear. It is essential to combat ignorance, negative attitudes and prejudice. At worst, these may result in the necessary improvements in accessibility not being implemented, or in people being unfairly treated. Various initiatives to enhance skills are therefore important.

Think about allocating sufficient resources to your accessibility work. Also appoint key persons with responsibility for planning and monitoring accessibility regarding information, premises and personnel. Also appoint someone to be responsible for coordinating accessibility work.

- The first step for an operation is to analyse its organisation. The responsible officers can then on the basis of the analysis decide what the accessibility requirements mean. This is summarised in a policy.
- An action plan should then be drawn up. This contains an analysis of the current situation, an inventory, a plan for measures to be taken and follow-up. It is important that the work does not come to a halt with a work plan, but that it is rapidly transformed from words into action – with the objective of improving accessibility.
- Certain fundamental principles should be observed when prioritising the work. Regardless of functional capacity, everyone should be able to gain access to the operation's basic information, communicate with the operation, get into premises where you work, get to the frequently visited parts, participate in meetings and in training and also use the toilets.

ORGANISATION

Everyone should be able to work!

Employees with disabilities should be able to work on the same conditions as their colleagues. It is therefore necessary that premises, computers and other office equipment can be used by everyone.

Employees with impaired mobility should be able to move around freely in the premises. The intranet should be structured so that employees with visual impairment can gain access to information.

In addition to general accessibility, individual employees may also need special adaptations to be able to perform their work tasks. This may, for example, be an enlargement program for the computer or a text telephone. It may also involve flexible working hours and the opportunity to be able to work from home.

Efforts made in respect of human resources and to improve the work environment determine whether your operation is accessible to everyone. How is your recruitment, promotion and in-house training managed? How is the work environment designed? It is important that the disability perspective is emphasised in your operation's policy document.

How to get started

In order to start making your operation accessible, large parts of your organisation must be reviewed. What this entails will vary from workplace to workplace.

This review may involve, for example:

- Policy documents: What important directives are in place? How are the HR policy, diversity plan, competence resource and work environment policy handled – is the disability perspective emphasised? What skills enhancement is needed?

- Buying and procurement. Are accessibility requirements imposed in connection with procurement, making calls under framework contracts and when consultants are engaged? How are requirements imposed when buying consumables, furniture and office equipment? Is 'Break the barriers' used as a basis when buying and for procurement?
- General accessibility. Are your operation's premises and information accessible to employees? Have the requirements presented in Handisam's Guidelines been observed?
- Special adaptations. Does any employee require special adaptations for their individual needs? Does any technical aid need to be acquired? Is there scope for flexible working hours and is it possible to work partly from home?
- Routines in connection with recruitment, promotion and in-house training.
- Are there skills in non-discriminatory recruitment and selection methods? Are job advertisements formulated so that applicants with disabilities are not excluded? Are promotion procedures conducted fairly and consistently? Is in-house training held in accessible premises? Can information material be obtained in alternative formats?

Getting started thus also involves setting priorities. A first step may be to review important policy documents and to formulate an accessibility policy in these. It is important to then move quickly from words to action and to establish routines for, for instance, buying, procurement, recruitment, promotion and in-house training.

Also, maintain close collaboration with the officers responsible for ensuring that the organisation's premises and information will be accessible to visitors and employees.

Increased awareness can break barriers

In order to enable the inclusion of people with disabilities in your operation, we first need to be aware of any physical and mental barriers within our own organisation. In addition to tangible deficiencies in information and premises, attitudes and prejudice are also obstacles to participation. Through general skills enhancement, supplemented by targeted initiatives for key persons, we can break such barriers together.

Discrimination in working life is prohibited by law

The Prohibition of Discrimination in Working Life of People with Disability Act applies to the entire labour market. The prohibition applies to discrimination against both jobseekers and employees – and applies even when the employer does not intend to discriminate. The prohibition applies when an employer:

- recruits
- decides on promotion or training for promotion
- applies pay or other employment conditions
- supervises and distributes work
- terminates, dismisses, lays-off or implements another significant measure against an employee.

On appointment and during employment, an employer must implement reasonable support and adaptation measures to ensure that people with disabilities will be able to perform their work on equal terms. This may, for example, involve changing work tasks, working hours and methods. An employer who does not implement such measures in these situations may be guilty of discrimination.

This is how your operation becomes accessible to everyone

To make operations accessible means integrating the disability perspective in planning, decisions and processes. This may involve policy work, in-house training and procurement – as well as recruitment. Employees with disabilities should be able to work on the same terms as others.

The accessibility work can, of course, be arranged in many different ways. Here are some suggestions on how you can proceed:

1. Find out what an 'accessible operation' means

The book 'Break the barriers' (also available in English) contains a description of the requirements imposed for an organisation to be accessible to people with disabilities.

2. Appoint an officer with responsibility for making your operation accessible

Appoint one or several officers to be responsible for your accessibility work. Certain operations appoint one person with overall responsibility; others set up a project group for the work.

3. Conduct an inventory of your operation

Review operational planning, policy documents, routines for buying and procurement and also how the organisation recruits, promotes and implements in-house training. The inventory should be summarised and be presented so that it can be used as a basis when discussing the establishment of priorities.

4. Analyse the results and prioritise measures

Analyse the results of the inventory and prioritise the areas where you will start to improve. It is important that policy documents have a disability perspective - and that the words are transformed into practical action. When prioritising, the benefit of a particular measure should be placed in relation to other measures creating accessibility.

5. Draw up a plan for measures to be taken – and implement it

When you have prioritised the measures, it is time to draw up a plan for measures to be taken. Specify what will be done immediately and what will be done over time. The improvements that should be made immediately are those that should be implemented now!

6. Follow up the work and set new goals

A workplace can always be improved. Routines change and policy documents are revised. The plan for measures to be taken is consequently not definitive but will be changed constantly. Ensure that the plan contains times for follow-up, evaluation and revision.

INFORMATION

Everyone should be able to communicate!

Information can be made accessible in many ways. One definite prerequisite is clear and comprehensible language. In the next step – design and typography – play a significant role in facilitating reading and understanding. This involves selecting the correct typeface, font size, line length and line spacing. A good layout does not need to conflict with good readability.

We all gain access to information in different ways. In order to ensure that the printed information you produce functions for everyone, it must be produced in alternative formats. People with reading and writing difficulties may, for example, prefer to have the text recorded on a cassette. People with mental development disabilities can access the information if the text is translated into easy-to-read. People who are blind may want it in Braille.

Accessible communication means that anybody, regardless of functional capacity, should be able to communicate at meetings, at conferences and on the telephone – and communicate via letter, fax and e-mail.

In many cases it is necessary to enhanced internal awareness to ensure that all people are able to contact and communicate with your organisation. Staff require greater knowledge about the various and differing needs of people, and routines need to be changed. It is also necessary to learn more about technical solutions and services. There are, for example, communications services (via a special switchboard operator) that facilitate calls between text telephones or videophones and an ordinary telephone.

How to get started

Review all information and communications – and prioritise! Think about how communications are effected at your specific operation. Analyse which channels of communication are most important and how the target groups prefer to communicate with your operation. Begin by reviewing and rectifying these channels.

Information channels to review may be,

- **Printed information.** Books, brochures, fact sheets, advertisements, standard forms and press releases. Is the language clear and simple? Should a language consultant be engaged? Is the form design clear? Can the information be obtained in alternative formats?
- **Website and intranet.** Is the website structured in accordance with WAI's Guidelines? Is the language plain and clear? Is the structure clear and easy to understand?
- **Film and video.** Is the speech subtitled? Is the film available translated into sign language and as an audio description version?

Communication channels to review may be,

- **Telephone calls.** Is it possible to call you from text telephones and videophones? Are staff aware of and able to use the communications services.
- **Voice response system.** Is the menu limited to a maximum of four choices? Is it easy to get to your switchboard operator?
- **Correspondence and messages.** Is it possible to contact your operation via letter, fax and e-mail? Is it possible to receive written replies in alternative formats?

Alternative formats

Those who want to should be able to order printed information material in an alternative format. It should be stated in books, brochures, folders, fact sheets and other printed matter that they may be ordered in these formats – and also how to place an order. The most common alternative formats are:

- **Easy-to-read.** The text is translated into easy-to-read with simple concrete words and short sentences.
- **Braille.** The text is translated into Braille.
- **Daisy.** The text is read onto CD with good search capacity. It is necessary to have a special Daisy player. Daisy is the abbreviation for Digital Accessible Information SYstem.
- **Audio cassette.** The text is recorded on a cassette.
- **Sign language.** The text is interpreted into sign language. The interpretation is filmed and may be distributed on video cassette, DVD or via a website.
- **Large print.** The text is set with a particularly large font size, at least 14 point.
- **Word or accessible PDF.** The text is saved in an electronic format so that – with various aids such as screen readers – it can be read on a computer. In an accessible PDF file, headings, main text, captions and images are stated.

How to make information accessible to everyone

To make information accessible means making it possible for people with disabilities to communicate with your operation – and gain access to information via printed and digital media, the Web, film, telephone, correspondence and meetings.

Your accessibility work can, of course, be arranged in many different ways. Here are some suggestions on how you can proceed:

1. Find out what accessible information and communications means

The book "Break the barriers" (also available in English) contains a description of the requirements imposed for an organisation to be accessible to people with disabilities.

2. Appoint an officer with responsibility for making your operation accessible

Two strategies: either one person is responsible for all the work or the areas of responsibility are divided up, with different people to be responsible for different parts. For instance, one person may be responsible for ensuring that everyone can communicate with your organisation and another for ensuring that the information that you provide is accessible. Many operations also set up a project group for their work.

3. Conduct an inventory of the range of information

Review information and communications. This means, among other things, examining the language and layout of printed matter, examining internal and external websites as well as routines for the production of alternative formats.

4. Analyse the results and prioritise measures

Analyse the results of the inventory and prioritise the areas where you will start to improve. Think about which channels of information are most important for your particular operation - and give priority to making that particular information accessible. If, for example, the website is the most important channel, begin by ensuring that it becomes accessible.

5. Draw up a plan for measures to be taken – and implement it

When you have prioritised the measures, it is time to draw up a plan for measures to be taken. Consider reporting the costs of the various measures and indicating which will be done immediately and which will be done later.

6. Follow up the work and set new goals

Work on improving accessibility is also affected by constant developments in technology and products. The plan for measures to be taken is consequently not definitive but will constantly evolve. Ensure that the plan contains times for follow-up, evaluation and revision.

PREMISES

Everyone should be able to get in!

The paramount priority is of course that people with disabilities should be able to visit your operation, and also be able to work there. This means, for example, that people using wheelchairs should be able to move around, that people with impaired vision should be able to orientate themselves and that people with reduced hearing should be able to participate in your operation.

In order for this to be possible, the building, the design of the rooms, and fittings and equipment should be accessible. It is important to work on general accessibility all the time, and not just adapt when the need arises.

Correcting something retroactively increases costs. It is better to ensure that premises are accessible from the beginning – or take the opportunity in conjunction with other measures, for example, on renovation. But planning is required for this to be feasible, as you must first be aware of any inadequacies.

Accessibility aspects also involve maintenance and care. This applies, for instance, when you purchase or procure material and equipment. Maintenance work can be a good opportunity for improving accessibility.

If you engage consultants, for example, for reconstruction or to fit out premises, ensure that they have sufficient knowledge about accessibility issues.

How to get started

Setting priorities is the beginning and the end. Start with the most important matters. The goal is to make it possible for everyone, regardless of functional capacity, to:

- Get into the premises and get to the most frequently visited parts.
- Participate in meetings and in training.
- Use the toilets.

It must be possible for everyone to use the entrance. If, for cultural historic reasons, the main entrance cannot be made accessible, an alternative entrance may function as a solution. It must be open at the same times as the main entrance, be clearly signposted and as welcoming as the main entrance. It is also important to generally enhance security by, among other things, clearly indicating large panes of glass/glass partitions and stairs.

The Planning and Building Act (PBL) imposes requirements that 'simply rectified barriers' that are considered to be easy to rectify without unreasonably onerous expenditure should be removed. This applies to obstacles that impede accessibility by people with impaired mobility or orientation. Give priority to:

- Removing small changes in level; for example steps and thresholds.
- Doing something about heavy doors or improperly placed manoeuvring devices such as door openers.
- Improving illumination.

New and old buildings

Even if you work in a new building, it is not certain that it is accessible. This may involve inappropriately placed door openers or poor contrast marking. It is therefore important that you always inspect the premises – even if they are new.

New buildings offer an opportunity to make the premises quite good without this needing to cost very much more. For new construction, the accessibility requirements imposed are more extensive than the minimum requirements contained in the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning's Building Regulations.

Many authorities and organisations conduct their operations in older buildings. Making such premises accessible requires care and consideration for cultural historic value. It may therefore not be possible to comply totally with the guidelines presented in 'Break the barriers'. In buildings that have been declared cultural heritage properties, existing illumination, colouring and acoustics, for example, may be acceptable if accessibility measures would impair the environment. An assessment must be made in each individual case.

However, this does not mean that you can refrain from making a building as accessible as possible. There are many examples demonstrating that it is possible to conserve cultural historic value while at the same time creating better accessibility.

A move to new premises is a golden opportunity to live up to the guidelines. Select premises with good accessibility or ensure that the property owner rectifies any inadequacies before you move in.

Who bears the responsibility?

The property owner is responsible for ensuring that the requirements contained in the building legislation are satisfied; namely, that simply rectified barriers are eliminated in public premises and also that Building Regulations are complied with in the case of new buildings and major reconstruction work.

The Ordinance with which national authorities must comply imposes more extensive requirements, primarily as regards existing premises. Authorities shall conduct their operations in accessible premises. Consequently, the elimination of simply rectified barriers is not always sufficient. Each authority is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Ordinance.

However, burdening your own budget with extensive measures is not realistic. It may therefore be appropriate to have the property owner implement the measures. One good opportunity for discussing accessibility is when your tenancy agreement is being renegotiated. Also, remind the property owner of the statutory requirement regarding simply rectified barriers. It may sometimes be easier to effect accessibility measures if they are coordinated with fire and safety issues.

It may be good to become acquainted with three abbreviations used by the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning's Rules and Regulations: HIN (simply rectified barriers), BBR (building regulations for buildings) and ALM (accessibility in public places).

This is how the premises become accessible to everyone

Making premises accessible means that people with disabilities should be able to visit your workplace – and also gain access to and participate in the operations conducted there. The term 'accessible premises' involves the actual building, including fittings and equipment, as well as its management and routines. Your organisation should also function as a workplace for staff with disabilities.

The accessibility work can, of course, be arranged in many different ways. Here are some suggestions on how you can proceed:

1. Find out what 'accessible premises' means

The book 'Break the barriers' contains a description of the requirements imposed on an organisation for it to be accessible to people with disabilities.

2. Appoint an officer with responsibility for making the premises accessible

Two strategies: either one person is responsible for all the work or the areas of responsibility are divided up, with different people to be responsible for different aspects. You can also make use of outside experts such as accessibility consultants. Many operations also set up a project group for their work.

3. Conduct an inventory of the premises

Go through premises and routines by reviewing how their current status. If the inventory is conducted in stages, it is also important to look ahead and draw up a plan for when other premises should be reviewed. The inventory should be summarised and presented so that it can be used as a basis for discussing the establishment of priorities.

4. Analyse the results and prioritise measures

Analyse the results of the inventory and prioritise which parts you must start to improve. Entrances, entrance halls and toilets have the highest priority. Bear in mind also that people with disabilities should be able to gain access to and actively participate in the operations there. Initially, this primarily involves the rooms most frequently visited, such as meeting and training premises. When prioritising, the benefit of a particular measure should be placed in relation to other measures creating accessibility.

5. Draw up a plan for measures to be taken – and implement it

When you have prioritised the measures, it is time to draw up a plan for measures to be taken. Specify what will be done immediately and what will be done over time. It is now time implement the improvements that should be made immediately! Ensure that money is reserved in the budget for these measures.

6. Follow up the work and set new goals

Work on improving accessibility is also affected by constant developments in technology and products. The plan for measures to be taken is consequently not definitive but will constantly evolve. Ensure that the plan contains times for follow-up, evaluation and revision.

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Handisam – Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Coordination has been tasked by the Government to coordinate and accelerate the implementation of the disability policy. Handisam speeds progress towards a society in which everyone can participate on equal terms regardless of functional capacity.

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