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Good Practices Collection as a tool for Accessibility Audits

We hold the Key to Accessibility

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Good practices collection as tools for accessibility audits

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Open Buildings Project

The Open Buildings of Europe: Good practices collection as tools for accessibility audits (OBLIGE) is a European initiative launched to address a crucial gap in how accessibility is understood, implemented, and promoted across the continent. Funded through the Small-scale partnerships in vocational education and training under Erasmus+ Programme, this strategic partnership brings together organizations from Austria, Romania, and Turkey. Its overarching ambition is to elevate the standard of accessible architecture through the identification, analysis, and promotion of exemplary buildings that showcase good practices.

The project emphasizes real-world applications, bridging the often-wide gap between regulatory frameworks and practical implementation. By investigating public buildings such as museums, hotels, and religious sites, the project showcases how accessibility can be achieved across different architectural styles and historical contexts. The insights collected from the basis of a detailed publication and a hands-on toolkit for building audits, which together aim to empower professionals and the public to implement changes in their own environments.

The OBLIGE project is structured around three overarching objectives: to document and promote the diversity of European architectural styles while highlighting integrated accessibility solutions; to advance innovative, sustainable approaches for creating barrier-free environments; and to raise public awareness around accessibility and inclusion. Through these objectives, the project not only contributes to physical transformation but also fosters a broader cultural shift toward equity and universal design in the built environment.

The publication you are now reading is the result of intensive collaboration, fieldwork, and interdisciplinary dialogue. It is meant to inspire reflection and action, whether you are a policymaker, an architect, an engineer, a building owner or manager, or just a citizen interested in making your community more inclusive.

Project Consortium and Partner Roles

MOVEO International Verein für soziale Nachhaltigkeit und Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen (Austria) serves as the lead coordinating organization of the OBLIGE project. Based in Vienna, MOVEO is an NGO dedicated to social sustainability and inclusion, with particular focus on the rights and participation of people with disabilities. The organization has coordinated numerous transnational projects in the fields of accessibility, inclusion, and civic education. Within OBLIGE, MOVEO contributes not only as coordinator but also with extensive technical and on-

site experience. The team brings over a decade of hands-on work in certifying buildings, hotels, and public facilities in line with European norms, as well as post-disaster assessments following fires and structural damage, and in developing proposals for rehabilitation and adaptation.

Asociația CED Romania Centrul de Excelență prin Diversitate - CED (Romania) is a specialized NGO working on accessibility, cultural heritage, inclusive education, and social cohesion. CED brings strong expertise in accessibility audits and is the author of the Audara assessment tool, which is used in this project for evaluating the public buildings, historical included. The team has contributed to the evaluation and certification of dozens of institutional, cultural, and private spaces in Romania and beyond, including adaptation proposals for educational and health facilities. Their deep familiarity with European and national standards ensures that this publication is grounded in real-world application and technical rigor.

Türkiye Gençlik Birliği Derneği - TGBD (Turkey) is a national youth-focused NGO that works at the intersection of education, social justice, and disability inclusion. TGBD has experience in inclusive European youth mobilities with mixed ability groups, has hosted and mobilized groups with diverse disabilities, disability rights, and accessibility in tourism and hospitality. Its multidisciplinary team includes professionals who have worked for over ten years in safety assessments, building inspections, and the planning of adaptive reuse of public institutions and hotels. Their experience in applying accessibility standards across diverse building types ensures that the insights in this publication are not only inclusive but also technically and operationally sound.

1.2 The Importance of Accessibility in Architecture and Construction

Accessibility in architecture is foundational to a democratic and inclusive society. When thoughtfully implemented, accessible design empowers individuals by giving them control over their environment, thereby enhancing dignity, independence, and participation. It goes beyond technical checklists and reflects a value system that prioritizes equity and equal access to opportunities, education, employment, and culture.

Architectural accessibility affects a wide range of users, not only people with disabilities, but also those with temporary injuries, chronic illnesses, or age-related mobility issues. Parents pushing strollers, travelers with luggage, delivery workers, and even children, all benefit from environments designed with inclusivity in mind. The cumulative effect is a built environment that functions better for everyone. Universal accessibility improves efficiency, reduces accidents, and fosters stronger community life.

In urban contexts, the design of barrier-free infrastructure is especially critical. Walkways, public buildings, and transportation systems must be navigable, safe, and welcoming. When cities prioritize inclusive design, they create places where all

residents can thrive. This not only enriches public life but also contributes to social cohesion by affirming the value of every citizen's participation in shared spaces.

1.3 Social and Economic Aspects of Accessibility

The benefits of accessible architecture extend far beyond moral obligations they are economically sound and socially transformative. Investment in accessibility stimulates long-term savings by reducing the need for later retrofits and emergency adaptations. It increases building utility, allowing spaces to serve a broader audience more effectively. For commercial buildings, hotels, restaurants, and retail centers, accessibility attracts a wider customer base and improves user satisfaction.

From a tourism perspective, accessible infrastructure enables inclusive travel, opening destinations to people who may otherwise be excluded. Countries that invest in accessible public transportation, cultural sites, and accommodations are better positioned to attract international visitors, including elderly travelers and people with disabilities - populations that represent significant market segments with increasing mobility.

On a macro-economic level, accessible environments reduce dependency on institutional care and promote community-based living. When people with disabilities can move independently and safely through public spaces, are involved in education and training activities, or go to work, the entire society benefits through reduced welfare costs, increased productivity, and social inclusion. Accessibility is therefore not just a legal mandate - it is an engine of progress and a catalyst for an equitable development.

1.4 Overview of Relevant European Regulations

The European Union has long recognized the critical importance of accessibility and has developed a regulatory framework to support inclusive design across member states. These regulations provide the legal foundation for architects, developers, and public authorities to implement and enforce accessibility standards in construction and digital services. Among the most influential legal instruments are **Directive 2019/882** on the Accessibility of Products and Services (the **European Accessibility Act - EAA)**, **ISO 21542 Building construction - Accessibility and usability of the built environment**, which outlines technical specifications for accessible building design, and **EN 17210:2021 Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements**, that describe basic, common minimum functional requirements and recommendations, applicable across the full spectrum of the built environment, for an accessible and usable built environment, following the Design for All/Universal Design principles which will facilitate equitable and safe use for a wide range of users, including persons with disabilities.

The harmonized standard EN 301549 specifically addresses accessibility for information and communication technologies (ICT), ensuring that digital tools, interfaces, and services are usable by people with disabilities. These policies form a

coherent set of requirements that guide the design of physical and virtual environments. Moreover, the EAA seeks to harmonize accessibility requirements across EU countries, promoting consistency, interoperability, and innovation throughout Europe and specific requirements for the rest of the world willing to do business in the EU.

European cities and regions have often gone beyond basic compliance, creating ambitious plans that combine legal frameworks with proactive design strategies. Municipalities are integrating accessibility into sustainable urban development, using smart technologies, participatory planning, and performance-based monitoring to ensure that their environments serve all citizens equitably. These progressive efforts show that accessibility, when approached strategically, enhances quality of life, economic opportunity, and community resilience.

1.5 Target Groups Benefiting from the Publication

This publication is designed to serve a wide and diverse audience, including professionals and laypersons alike. Architects, civil engineers, and urban designers will find practical frameworks and references to apply in ongoing and future projects. Property owners and managers - especially those responsible for hotels, restaurants, and public venues - can use this guide to understand regulatory expectations and user needs, as well as to plan improvements that enhance functionality and customer experience.

Social workers, NGOs, and advocacy groups for people with disabilities can rely on the publication as a knowledge resource for campaigns, training, and community engagement. Policymakers and municipal planners will find it useful in setting strategic priorities, designing policies, and allocating resources for inclusive infrastructure. Educators and students in architecture and urban planning programs can incorporate the material into curricula that emphasize user-centered and inclusive design.

Additionally, citizens and local activists interested in improving their communities will find accessible language, visual examples, and practical tips that empower them to act. By presenting information in a clear and engaging manner, this publication helps bridge the gap between technical language and public understanding. It invites all readers to see accessibility as a shared responsibility and an achievable goal.

1.6 How to Use This Guide?

This guide is structured to support easy access to both conceptual and practical information. Readers can explore definitions and principles of accessible architecture, review detailed case studies from Austria, Romania, and Turkey, and apply step-by-step recommendations for improving accessibility in buildings. The document includes photographs, pictograms, and checklists to enhance clarity and usability.

The content is organized in thematic chapters that allow readers to find what they need quickly. For professionals, technical specifications and toolkits are provided to

support implementation. For general users, summaries and visual elements simplify complex ideas. For institutions and investors, the publication outlines cost-benefit analyses and policy recommendations that make the case for accessibility as a smart investment.

Ultimately, this guide serves as a call to action. It encourages readers not only to understand accessibility but to take meaningful steps toward implementing it. Whether designing a new building, renovating an old one, or advocating for better urban planning, the knowledge within these pages is meant to inspire change. Accessibility is not a trend, it is a standard that reflects the values of equality, participation, and dignity in the built environment.

2. Accessibility in Architecture and Construction

2.1 Defining Accessibility in the Built Environment

Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, and environments to be usable by all people, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. In architecture and construction, this means creating spaces that accommodate diverse users, including individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and those with temporary impairments.

Ensuring accessibility involves eliminating barriers that limit movement and usability for certain populations. This extends beyond physical obstacles, such as stairs without ramps, to include sensory and cognitive accessibility measures, such as clear signage, auditory signals, and intuitive design layouts. In a truly accessible environment, people with various abilities can navigate spaces independently and safely.

Moreover, accessibility is not just a legal requirement; it is a fundamental human right. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) mandates equal access to the built environment, transportation, and public services. As societies become more aware of inclusion, there is a growing push to make accessibility a standard feature of urban planning and architectural design rather than an afterthought.

2.2 Basic Principles of Accessible Design

Accessible design is based on several fundamental principles that ensure usability and comfort for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. These principles include:

- **Ease of Navigation:** Spaces should be intuitively designed with clear pathways, logical layouts, and visible landmarks to assist all users in orientation.
- **Multisensory Communication:** Important information should be presented in multiple formats, including visual, auditory, and tactile cues, to accommodate people with different sensory abilities.
- **Barrier-Free Mobility:** Architectural elements such as ramps, wide doorways, and step-free entrances should be standard to allow independent access for people with mobility impairments.
- **Human-Centered Approach:** Designs should focus on the needs and preferences of users rather than forcing individuals to adapt to inflexible built environments.
- **Safety and Comfort:** Environments should minimize risks by incorporating slip-resistant surfaces, appropriate lighting, and ergonomic features.

2.3 Legal Frameworks and Accessibility Standards in Europe

Europe has established a variety of accessibility regulations to ensure the built environment is inclusive and functional for all users. Some of the most important legal frameworks and standards include:

- **ISO 21542:2021 "Building construction - Accessibility and usability of the built environment"**: An international standard specifying accessibility requirements for buildings, including entrances, routes, and internal spaces.
- **EN 17210:2021 "Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements"**: Describes basic, common minimum functional requirements and recommendations, applicable across the full spectrum of the built environment, for an accessible and usable built environment, following the Design for All/Universal Design principles which will facilitate equitable and safe use for a wide range of users, including persons with disabilities.
- **EN 301 549 "Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services"**: A European standard that outlines accessibility requirements for ICT products and services, ensuring usability for people with disabilities.
- **EN 17161:2019 "Design for All - Accessibility following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users"** is a European standard that provides guidance on how to use a "Design for All" approach to create products, goods, and services that are accessible to the widest possible range of users, including people with disabilities. The standard is a framework for organizations to integrate accessibility into their processes from the very beginning of design and development, rather than adding it as an afterthought
- **ISO 21902:2021 "Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations"**: An international standard that provides a comprehensive set of requirements and recommendations for making tourism and related services accessible to all people, regardless of age or ability. The standard applies to all stakeholders in the tourism value chain, including public administrations, travel agencies, tour operators, and providers of accommodation, transport, and leisure activities. **The European Accessibility Act (EAA):** A directive that establishes common accessibility standards for a range of products and services across the European Union's internal market, effective June 28, 2025. Its main goal is to improve access for people with disabilities by harmonizing national laws, facilitating cross-border trade for businesses by removing barriers, and ensuring greater choice and lower prices for consumers. The Act applies to both public and private sector organizations and covers products such as computers, smartphones, e-books, and services like e-commerce, banking, and emergency numbers aimed at improving accessibility across digital and physical environments within the EU member states.

- **National Accessibility Laws:** Many European countries have their own legislation that governs accessible design, such as Germany's DIN 18040, France's Accessibility Code, and the UK's Building Regulations Part M.

By adhering to these frameworks, architects and urban planners can create environments that meet legal obligations while fostering inclusivity.

2.4 Integration of Accessibility with Sustainable Solutions

In the context of contemporary architecture and urban development, accessibility and sustainability are no longer viewed as separate or competing objectives. On the contrary, they are increasingly understood as **complementary** forces that, when integrated, create environments that are healthier, more inclusive, and more resilient for current and future generations.

Accessibility ensures that the built environment can be used by everyone - regardless of age, ability, or circumstance - while sustainability emphasizes environmental responsibility, efficient resource use, and long-term adaptability. When thoughtfully combined, these two principles form the foundation of what we might call **holistic inclusivity**: a design approach that respects both people and the planet.

One of the most promising areas of integration lies in the design of buildings that are both **energy-efficient and inclusive**. Architectural elements such as advanced insulation, solar panels, and energy recovery ventilation systems are now being developed with accessible interfaces, allowing people with limited mobility or sensory impairments to control indoor conditions independently. Touch-free technologies, such as voice-activated lighting and climate systems, serve not only as energy-saving solutions but also as critical enablers of autonomy for users who might otherwise be dependent on assistance. The intelligent building, in this sense, is not just smart in function, but **ethically intelligent** - it considers diverse human needs as part of its operational logic.

Material choice is another area where accessibility and sustainability naturally intersect. Low-emission, non-toxic, and hypoallergenic materials enhance indoor air quality and support the health of occupants, particularly those with chronic illnesses or sensory sensitivities. Durable, easy-to-maintain finishes reduce the frequency of renovations, which in turn minimizes waste and long-term costs. Moreover, flexible materials - such as modular flooring or mobile partition systems - allow for the adaptive use of space, which is especially important in homes or facilities that accommodate people with disabilities or changing physical conditions over time.

Public space design also benefits immensely from this dual approach. In parks and urban green zones, the creation of smooth, step-free paths, tactile navigation aids, and shaded seating areas encourages inclusive use while promoting environmental goals like heat reduction and biodiversity. When community gardens, green rooftops, and nature-based recreation zones are designed to be reachable by ramps or elevators, they become truly **shared spaces**, open not just to the physically agile but to everyone, including elderly residents, children, and individuals with physical or

cognitive limitations. These spaces foster social interaction, reduce isolation, and support mental well-being, all while improving the ecological footprint of cities.

Sustainable mobility systems, too, are undergoing transformation through accessibility lens. **Public transportation networks** that feature level boarding, real-time audio-visual navigation systems, and intuitive ticketing interfaces ensure that everyone can move freely, safely, and affordably. When electric buses, trams, and trains are made not only climate-friendly but also barrier-free, they enable a form of green mobility that truly leaves no one behind. In this context, inclusive transport is not merely a social service - it becomes an essential element of sustainable urban living.

At the policy level, integrating accessibility and sustainability requires cross-sector collaboration. Urban planners, architects, environmental scientists, and disability rights advocates must work in unison to shape regulations, incentives, and funding strategies that promote both aims simultaneously. Municipalities that invest in this dual agenda often find that the benefits multiply: not only are their cities more livable and resilient, but they are also more economically attractive to residents, investors, and tourists alike.

Ultimately, the integration of accessibility and sustainability represents a profound cultural shift - from reactive compliance to **proactive care**. It acknowledges that true progress means designing with everyone in mind, while honoring our obligation to preserve natural resources and ecosystems. It also recognizes that inclusive environments are not only more just - they are also more efficient, adaptable, and sustainable in the long term. By aligning these two pillars of future-oriented development, we pave the way for buildings and communities that are not only functional and beautiful but also fair, empowering, and enduring.

2.5 Universal Design Principles

Universal design is a philosophy and design strategy that aims to create environments that are inherently accessible and usable by all people, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance. Rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 2), it recognizes human diversity as natural and expected, and promotes inclusion from the outset, without relying on adaptation or specialized solutions. It promotes accessibility, usability, inclusion and equity, ensuring that environments, products and services can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by everyone, without the need for subsequent modifications or specialized design. Universal design leads to more independent living, reduced barriers, wider market appeal, and a more sustainable and equitable society.

The value of universal design extends beyond physical infrastructure - it shapes how people feel in and interact with space. A universally designed environment does not make individuals feel like exceptions or afterthoughts; it communicates that everyone belongs. This principle is especially relevant today as societies confront shifting demographics, climate challenges, and the need to reimagine public and private

spaces that support health, dignity, and independence. Whether planning a public library, retrofitting a historic monument, or designing new residential units, universal design provides a comprehensive framework for equitable and resilient development.

At the heart of universal design are **seven foundational principles** developed in 1997 by a team of architects, product designers, engineers, and environmental design researchers, led by the late Ronald Mace in North Carolina State University (NCSU). These principles guide the creation of buildings, products, and systems that are inclusive by intention rather than by retrofitting. They include Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Tolerance for Error, Low Physical Effort, and Size and Space for Approach and Use. Each principle represents a core dimension of usability and ensures that the built environment accommodates the full range of human diversity.

Equitable Use refers to design that is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. It calls for eliminating segregation and providing access through the same means whenever possible. In the built environment, this could mean sloped entrances that replace stairs, doorways wide enough for all users, and seating arrangements that are inclusive of wheelchair users without relegating them to the margins. True equity in design ensures that no one has a 'separate but equal' experience but instead participates fully and with dignity.

Flexibility in Use emphasizes accommodation of a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. This includes spaces that can be rearranged easily, furniture that adapts to user needs, or services that offer multiple modes of interaction. A conference room, for example, that provides both visual presentation aids and spoken descriptions, or classrooms that support both sitting and standing workspaces, exemplify this principle. Designing with flexibility not only supports users with disabilities, but also allows for multigenerational and multicultural usability.

Simple and Intuitive Use prioritizes clarity, ease, and universality of understanding. Environments should not require users to interpret complex instructions or learn unfamiliar codes to navigate or function within them. Wayfinding systems, user interfaces, and public services all benefit from logical sequencing, standard symbols, and minimal reliance on language. In transit hubs, hospitals, and civic buildings, clear layout, color-coded navigation paths, and multisensory indicators reduce stress and increase independence for all users.

Perceptible Information ensures that necessary information is communicated effectively, regardless of sensory abilities. This means reinforcing messages visually, auditorily, and tactilely. Examples include tactile floor indicators, Braille signage, audio announcements, and visual alarms. In digitally enabled spaces, it involves ensuring screen readers can interpret interfaces and that content is presented with adequate contrast and adjustable font sizes. This principle is especially critical in emergencies, where communication must reach everyone rapidly and clearly.

Tolerance for Error focuses on minimizing the consequences of accidental or unintended actions. In physical spaces, this translates to safe, forgiving environments: guardrails near drops, rounded corners, automatic shutoff mechanisms for appliances, and generous clearance in doorways to prevent bumping. In digital or operational systems, it could mean undo options, clear confirmation steps, and feedback that helps users recover from mistakes. The goal is to build spaces that support human variability and prevent harm.

Low Physical Effort addresses the physical exertion required to interact with a space or perform a task. Doors that open with sensors, elevators with reachable controls, lever handles instead of doorknobs, and hands-free faucets reduce strain and expand usability to people of different sizes, strengths, and energy levels. Especially in healthcare settings, transportation, and educational facilities, minimizing physical demands helps create equitable and stress-free user experiences.

Size and Space for Approach and Use concern the physical dimensions and spatial layout necessary for users to navigate and engage with the environment. It includes providing adequate turning space for wheelchairs, seating that accommodates service animals, and layouts that consider assistive device users. Clear floor space near controls, knee space under counters, and appropriate sight lines for seated and standing users all contribute to environments that are not only accessible but comfortable and dignified.

Beyond physical access, universal design promotes emotional and social inclusion. A well-designed environment reduces feelings of anxiety, dependence, or exclusion. It enhances confidence, autonomy, and participation. In schools, this can support inclusive learning; in offices, it can contribute to equitable employment opportunities. In homes and care settings, universal design can enable aging in place with dignity and safety. Its holistic impact on quality of life is profound and measurable.

Moreover, universal design is aligned with sustainability. By reducing the need for costly future modifications, it supports long-term resource efficiency. It enables buildings to serve multiple generations without radical reconstruction. It allows environments to remain functional in the face of social and demographic changes. Inclusive environments are inherently more resilient, adaptable, and future-proof.

As the global conversation on equity, well-being, and accessibility evolves, universal design emerges not only as a set of technical recommendations, but as a value-driven approach to development. It invites us to think about whom we design for, what barriers we accept as normal, and how we can shift toward spaces that genuinely reflect human diversity. In this sense, universal design is a human rights strategy, a public health tool, and a hallmark of design excellence. Its application requires creativity, collaboration, and the courage to rethink our standards - placing dignity, inclusion, and usability at the center of the built world.

3. Analysis of Nine Selected Buildings

3.1 Methodology for Assessing Accessibility

The assessment of accessibility in buildings follows a structured methodology that evaluates multiple aspects of usability, safety, and compliance with international accessibility standards. The methodology incorporates both qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques to ensure comprehensive results.

Criteria for Assessment

Accessibility assessment is based on several key criteria that determine how effectively a building accommodates diverse users. These include:

- **Entrance and Egress Accessibility:** Examining entrance pathways, ramps, door widths, and automatic door mechanisms to ensure barrier-free entry and exit.
- **Internal Circulation:** Evaluating hallways, elevators, and staircases to determine ease of movement within the building.
- **Accessible rooms:** e.g. lowered switches and handles, induction loops for guests with hearing impairments, and sufficient clear floor space for wheelchair maneuverability
- **Restroom Facilities:** Analyzing restroom accessibility, including grab bars, sink height, and adequate maneuvering space for wheelchair users.
- **Wayfinding and Signage:** Assessing the clarity of directional signs, availability of Braille signage, and auditory guidance systems.
- **Seating and Public Spaces:** Reviewing seating arrangements, furniture layout, and designated accessible seating areas in public facilities.
- **Emergency Exits and Safety Measures:** Ensuring accessible emergency evacuation routes, alarms with visual and auditory signals, and emergency assistance systems.

Each building is rated based on compliance with these criteria, with additional notes on areas requiring improvement.

Tools and Techniques Used

To conduct thorough evaluations, a combination of digital and manual tools is utilized:

- **Accessibility Audit Applications:** Mobile and desktop applications designed to assess accessibility compliance based on international standards.
- **Laser Distance Measurement Tools:** Used to measure corridor widths, doorway clearances, and furniture placement for precise assessments.

- **User Experience Surveys:** Gathering feedback from individuals with disabilities who use the building regularly to identify real-world usability challenges.
- **On-Site Visual Inspections:** Conducted by experts in architecture and accessibility to identify physical barriers and propose modifications.

3.2 Detailed Analysis of Selected Buildings

Nine buildings - three from Austria, three from Romania, and three from Turkey - were assessed using the above methodology. As an extra addition, one event – Diversity ball in Vienna was also audited.

Each case study includes a description of the building, implemented accessibility solutions, relevant photographs, and the main challenges encountered in achieving accessibility.

To provide a relevant basis for comparison, three types of buildings were selected: a museum, a place of worship, and a hotel.

Figure 1 – Audited venues

Buildings from Austria

1. **Klimt Villa**

Type: Museum
Ownership: Public
Cultural heritage status: Yes (protected structure)
Year of construction: ca. 1915
Renovation status: Renovated in 2012
Location: Feldmühlgasse 11, 1130 Vienna, Austria
Website: www.klimtvilla.at
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 25.000

Description:

The Klimt Villa is a museum and cultural venue located in the former studio of artist Gustav Klimt. It showcases his life, artistic process, and influence through original sketches, replicas, and curated exhibitions. The building preserves much of its early 20th-century character, while incorporating modern upgrades for public use.

Accessibility Features:

Step-free access is available via a designated entrance; interior circulation is mostly level with handrails on stair runs. A lift connects exhibition floors, and an accessible restroom is located on the ground level. Portable seating/folding stools are available on request, labels use clear print in core displays, and an audio guide with staff assistance can be provided.

Challenges and Solutions:

Some original features create tight passage points and small threshold lips (approx. 1–3 cm) between rooms. On arrival, notify staff to use the step-free route and lift; the elevator fits standard wheelchairs, while larger powered chairs or scooters may require careful, angled entry with staff guidance. Smaller rooms can get crowded at peak times, limiting turning radii—plan visits early or late in the day. Exterior garden paths may include gravel/uneven sections—follow the paved route and request assistance if needed. Plan bathroom breaks before using the lift to upper floors; portable seating can be requested to create rest points along the route.

2. Russian Orthodox Cathedral Vienna

Type: Religious object
Ownership: Private (Russian Orthodox Church)
Cultural heritage status: Yes
Year of construction: 1890s
Renovation status: Maintained, minor upgrades
Location: Jaurèsgasse 2, 1030 Vienna, Austria
Website: https://nikolsobor.org/SITE3/index.php?lang=de-at
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 35.000

Description:

The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St Nicholas in Vienna is the seat of the Russian Orthodox community in Austria. Built between 1893 and 1899 as an embassy church and consecrated on 4 (17) April 1899, it has served as the diocesan seat since 1962. Architecturally, it exemplifies Neo-Byzantine/Russian ecclesiastical design: five onion domes crowning the central volume, a tall bell tower, a red-brick façade with white stone moldings, friezes with “kokoshnik” motifs, and polychrome ceramic tiles. Inside, a rich iconostasis and wall paintings unfold within a classic cruciform layout.

Accessibility Features:

Step-free arrival is possible via the inner courtyard. Threshold-free double doors (outer wrought-iron, inner timber; one leaf >90 cm held open during services) lead to calm foyers on both levels. The Lower Church has even, level floors; the Upper Church provides perimeter seating for rest and prayer. Vertical access is provided by a platform stairlift on the interior curved stair. The souvenir shop and gathering room are located off the upper foyer, and the courtyard offers ample benches for waiting or rest.

Challenges and Solutions:

Key gaps—minimal signage, stair/edge visibility, and limited emergency cues—can be addressed with a discreet wayfinding set (pictograms, door labels, evacuation plans), durable contrast nosings and tactile warnings, plus guidance LEDs at nodes and turns. Safety and flow improve with continuous two-sided handrails on the main stair and a covered outdoor candle station to reduce soot and queues inside. For longer, dignified visits, convert one ground-floor WC to full universal-design specs. Heritage-sensitive fire protection (aspirating detection, multilingual voice evacuation, art-friendly suppression) and a microclimate package (filtration, UV/IR control, environmental sensors) protect people and artworks while respecting the listed fabric.

3. Hotel Motto Mariahilf

Type: Hotel
Ownership: Private
Cultural heritage status: Yes
Year of construction: 1870s
Renovation status: Partially renovated (2021)
Location: Mariahilfer Straße 71a, Schadekgasse 20, 1060 Vienna, Austria.
Website: https://www.hotelmotto.at/
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 18.000

Description:

Hotel MOTTO is a boutique design hotel in Vienna's Mariahilf district, blending 1920s Parisian flair with contemporary Viennese style inside a historic 19th-century building. Rooms feature thoughtful details—Egyptian-cotton linens, box-spring beds, and curated art—while the in-house MOTTO Brot bakery fuels long, lazy breakfasts. Up top, the Chez Bernard restaurant/bar sits beneath a striking glass dome with a rooftop terrace and city views, making it a popular spot for locals and guests alike. Overall, it's a chic, art-forward base right on lively Mariahilfer Straße.

Accessibility Features:

Step-free arrival and a clear, legible reception sequence set a strong baseline. Vertical circulation is robust, with lift access to guest floors and upper-level F&B areas, including the rooftop terrace; where terrace thresholds present slight level changes, mobile ramps are deployed for events. Corridors are generous and even-finished, wayfinding is intuitive, and staff receive regular training in accessibility, inclusive etiquette, and guest communication—adding consistency and dignity across the guest journey.

Challenges and Solutions:

No critical gaps—only a professional polish to an already excellent setup: add a multilingual in-room *Accessibility & Safety* card with QR for assistance and detailed features; apply light-touch visual/tactile cues on key controls for faster findability; offer an on-request fragrance/allergy-friendly housekeeping option. Medium steps include a lowered reception counter segment with an induction loop, a loanable shower/commode wheelchair with clear SOPs, and bringing the website/booking flow to WCAG 2.2 AA (including an "accessible room" filter and accurate specs). As premium options, consider a "Silent Rooms" acoustic package for neuro-inclusive comfort and ceiling-track hoists in 2–3 rooms to enable safe independent/assisted transfers. All measures are discreet, reversible, and heritage-sensitive.

4. Diversity Ball

Type: Event
Ownership: Private
Cultural heritage status: No
Year of construction: n/a
Renovation status: n/a
Location: City Hall Vienna, Friedrich-Schmidt-Platz 1, 1010 Wien, Austria
Website: https://www.diversityball.at/
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 4.000

Description:

Diversity Ball is an inclusive, barrier-free gala at Vienna's City Hall that celebrates diversity, equality, and togetherness with a multi-hour music and stage program. The latest edition (6 September 2025) brought 3,500+ guests across six stages with 100+ performers, including features like the Deaf Beat Club and on-stage sign interpretation. Its core focus: accessibility, sustainability, and a safe space for every community.

Accessibility Features:

Step-free arrival at Vienna City Hall via the Lichtenfelsgasse entrance (with ramps and automatic doors) leads into clearly signposted, elevator-served routes across halls and evacuation ways. Seven accessible toilets are available (five on the ground floor, two on the first floor), and an accessible cloakroom sits by the Hof 3 entrance. On the main stage, the full program is interpreted in Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS) through 00:30, with Deaf performers featured; QR codes at all bars link directly to ÖGS drink menus. Trained "Communication Angels" and visible Assistance staff (yellow vests) support guests with cognitive or communication needs at two Info Points (Arkadenhof and Feststiegen), while vibration vests/belts are offered at the main stage for Deaf/hard-of-hearing visitors. Digital access follows WCAG 2.2 AA with PDF/UA brochures and an Accessibility-first web presence. These measures together deliver a barrier-free, safe, and dignified large-scale event.

Buildings from Romania

1. Metropolitan Church (Romanian Orthodox Patriarchal Cathedral)

Type: Religious object
Ownership: Private (Romanian Orthodox Church)
Cultural heritage status: Yes (protected structure)
Year of construction: ca. 1658
Renovation status: Renovated in 2008
Location: Aleea Dealul Mitropoliei nr. 25, 4th District, 040163, Bucharest, Romania
Website: www.patriarhia.ro
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 25.000

Description: The Metropolitan Church is one of the city's most important landmarks. Built in the 17th century, it became the main church of the Romanian Orthodox faith and later the seat of the Patriarch. The cathedral stands on Patriarchate Hill, close to the city center, and is known for its traditional style and peaceful atmosphere. Many visitors come here to admire its frescoes and to take part in religious celebrations, especially during the feast of Saint Dimitrie the New, the patron saint of Bucharest.

Accessibility Features: The church is located on a hill, which can make access challenging for visitors with reduced mobility due to the slope leading up to the site. However, once on the hill, the main courtyard and entrance areas are relatively level and there is also a wheelchair accessible entrance in the church.

Challenges and Solutions: The church is quite dim inside and there are no tactile maps or Braille signs. It's best to come with a companion or guide who can describe the artworks and architecture. Audio apps or recordings can also make the visit more enjoyable.

2. The National Museum of Art of Romania

Type: Museum
Ownership: Public
Cultural heritage status: Yes (protected structure)
Year of construction: 1937 – 1939
Renovation status: Renovated in 2013
Location: Calea Victoriei 49-53, 1st District, 010063, Bucharest, Romania
Website: www.mnar.ro
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 220.000

Description: The museum is the country's leading art museum, housed in the former Royal Palace on Calea Victoriei in central Bucharest. Its collections include medieval and modern Romanian art, as well as European works by masters such as El Greco, Rembrandt, Monet, and Rubens. Visitors can explore both the historic palace interiors and a wide range of exhibitions, making it one of Bucharest's top cultural attractions.

Accessibility Features: For wheelchair users the access is good, with ramps, elevators and smooth pavement inside. The toilet is also accessible. The museum also provides sensory activities such as touching the materials used in painting. Information panels in Romanian and English are available in the galleries, but there are no sign-language tours. Written materials help make the exhibitions more accessible.

Challenges and Solutions: The museum is partly adapted for visitors with disabilities. Wheelchair users can access most galleries with staff assistance through ramps and elevators. Blind visitors are encouraged to come with a companion or join a guided tour and, upon request, a tactile exhibition is available, while deaf visitors can rely on bilingual wall texts and brochures. Accessible restroom is available.

3. Novotel Bucharest City Centre Hotel

Type: Hotel
Ownership: Private (Accor Group)
Cultural heritage status: No
Year of construction: 2006
Renovation status: Major renovation in 2018
Location: Calea Victoriei 37B, 010061, 1st District, Buhcarest, Romania
Website: https://www.novotelbucharestcitycentre.com/
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 50.300

Description: Novotel Bucharest City Centre combines a historic neoclassical façade with a modern glass-and-steel structure, offering both elegance and functionality in the heart of Bucharest. Located on Calea Victoriei, it is within walking distance of the Old Town, University Square, Cișmigiu Gardens, and several museums. The hotel features 258 rooms, a wellness centre with pool, sauna, fitness and hammam, a contemporary restaurant (Winestone Victoriei 37), and multiple conference and meeting rooms, making it popular for both tourists and business events.

Accessibility Features: The hotel provides step-free access at the main entrance, elevators to all guest floors, and wheelchair-accessible rooms with adapted bathrooms (roll-in showers, grab rails). Public areas such as the lobby, restaurant, and bar are designed with wide passageways suitable for mobility aids. Underground parking includes designated accessible spaces, and staff are trained to assist guests with specific mobility or sensory needs upon request.

Challenges and Solutions: Due to the integration of a historic façade, some entry points and corridors may feel narrow or less intuitive for wheelchair users. Surrounding sidewalks on Calea Victoriei and the nearby Old Town are occasionally uneven, which can make navigation difficult. The wellness centre and pool area may pose access limitations for guests with reduced mobility. As solutions, the hotel provides alternate accessible entrances, recommends advance notice for tailored assistance, and could further improve inclusivity by adding tactile signage, clearer wayfinding indicators, and pool lifts in the wellness area.

Buildings from Turkey

1. MTA Şehit Cuma Dağ Natural History Museum

Type: Museum
Ownership: Public
Cultural heritage status: No
Year of construction: 7 February 1968
Renovation status: Renovated in 2011
Location: Çukurambar Mahallesi Dumlupınar Bulvarı No:11 06530 Çankaya/ANKARA
Website: www.mta.gov.tr/v3.0/muze/anasayfa
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 50.000

Description: The MTA Şehit Cuma Dağ Natural History Museum in Ankara is a leading natural history museum operated by the General Directorate of Mineral Research and Exploration (MTA). It showcases extensive exhibits of fossils, minerals, and geological formations, along with life-size dinosaur models and interactive displays in the adjacent Energy Park. The museum aims to educate visitors on Earth's history, natural resources, and energy systems through immersive and hands-on experiences.

Accessibility Features: The museum is equipped with wheelchair-accessible pathways, ramps, and elevators to ensure ease of movement across all levels. Exhibits include tactile models and large-print labels for the visually impaired. An audio guidance system is available in Turkish, offering narrated tours through headphones or mobile devices, enhancing access for visitors with visual impairments or those who prefer auditory learning. Bilingual signage in Turkish and English supports a wider audience.

Challenges and Solutions: Initial accessibility limitations due to uneven outdoor terrain and older infrastructure were addressed through recent renovations. Improvements include gently sloped walkways, widened paths, and designated quiet areas to create a more inclusive and sensory-friendly environment for all visitors.

2. Doğramacızade Ali Paşa Mosque

Type: Religious building (Mosque)
Ownership: İhsan Doğramacı Foundation
Cultural heritage status: No (but culturally significant)
Year of construction: 2005-2007 (opened in 2008)
Renovation status: Maintained, minor upgrades
Location: Üniversiteler Mah. Bilkent-ANKARA
Website: https://www.sera.com.tr/en/projects/dogramacizade-ali-pasha-mosque-108
Estimated annual visitors: There's no available data

Description: A modern mosque known for its distinctive architectural style, serving both religious and community functions in Ankara.

Accessibility Features: Step-free entrances, designated prayer areas for wheelchair users, and accessible ablution facilities.

Challenges and Solutions: Ensuring inclusivity while maintaining the mosque's architectural integrity led to thoughtful adaptations, such as installing subtle guidance paths for visually impaired worshippers.

3. The Ankara Hotel

Type: Hotel
Ownership: Private
Cultural heritage status: No
Year of construction: 2016
Renovation status: No
Location: Eti Mah. Celal Bayar Bulvarı. No:78/A 06570 Çankaya / ANKARA
Website: www.theankarahotel.com
Estimated annual visitors: Approx. 45-50.000

Description: The Ankara Hotel is a modern, upscale hotel located next to Ankara's high-speed train terminal. It caters to business travelers and tourists, with easy access to Anıtkabir and city landmarks.

Accessibility Features: The hotel which has 134 rooms with 225 bed capacity, offers step-free access, elevators to all floors, and wheelchair-accessible rooms with roll-in showers, grab bars, and adapted bathrooms. Accessible rooms are equipped with induction loops for hard of hearing guests. Public areas, including the restaurant and rooftop terrace, are fully accessible.

Challenges and Solutions: To provide inclusive hospitality, the hotel ensures staff training, multilingual signage, and tailored services to meet guests' accessibility needs without compromising comfort.

3.3 Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Based on the assessments, several overarching trends and challenges emerged:

Key Strengths:

- Many newly constructed buildings incorporate accessibility as a fundamental design principle.
- Public awareness of accessibility has increased, leading to more proactive inclusivity efforts.
- Emerging technology, such as smart navigation systems and digital assistants, is enhancing accessibility solutions.

Common Challenges:

- Retrofitting older buildings remains a major challenge due to structural limitations.
- Inconsistent adherence to accessibility laws and regulations across regions.
- Insufficient funding for large-scale accessibility projects in certain areas.

Recommendations for Future Developments:

- Increased financial incentives for retrofitting accessibility features in older structures.
- Enhanced enforcement of accessibility regulations to ensure compliance.
- Integration of universal design principles in urban planning policies to create more inclusive cities.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging successful case studies, the Open Buildings project aims to serve as a model for future accessibility improvements across Europe.

4. Practical Guidelines for Assessing and Improving Accessibility

4.1 Simple Tool for Self-Assessment of Buildings

Ensuring that buildings meet accessibility standards can be a complex process. To facilitate this, a structured self-assessment tool has been developed, enabling property owners, facility managers, and other stakeholders to evaluate accessibility features and identify areas for improvement.

Checklist of Key Accessibility Elements

A comprehensive checklist serves as the foundation for self-assessment. It includes essential criteria such as:

- **Entrance and Pathways:** Step-free entry, accessible ramps, handrails, and wide doorways.
- **Internal Circulation:** Wide corridors, accessible elevators, and non-slip flooring.
- **Accessible rooms:** e.g. lowered switches and handles, induction loops for guests with hearing impairments, and sufficient clear floor space for wheelchair maneuverability
- **Restroom Facilities:** Sufficient maneuvering space, grab bars, accessible sinks, shower seat and emergency alarms.
- **Signage and Wayfinding:** Clear, readable signage with Braille and auditory guidance systems.
- **Lighting and Contrast:** Adequate lighting levels and high-contrast surfaces to assist individuals with visual impairments.
- **Emergency Evacuation Measures:** Accessible emergency exits, visual and auditory alarms, and evacuation assistance points.

By following this checklist, users can systematically assess their buildings and create action plans for necessary improvements.

Examples of Good and Bad Practices

Understanding accessibility through real-world examples helps illustrate effective and ineffective design strategies.

Good Practices:

- **Universal Entryways:** Public buildings with wide, automatic doors instead of narrow, manual ones.
- **Accessible Signage:** Hospitals and airports incorporating Braille, pictograms, and voice-assisted directories.

- **Restroom Design:** Hotels offering roll-in showers with rental wheelchair, or shower seat with grab bars in every accessible room.

Bad Practices:

- **Steep Ramps:** Shopping centers with excessively steep ramps that fail to meet accessibility standards.
- **Inadequate Elevators:** Buildings with small elevators that cannot accommodate larger mobility devices, or lack Braille markings.
- **Poor Lighting:** Libraries and museums with dim lighting that creates difficulty for individuals with low vision.

4.2 Recommended Solutions for Adapting Buildings

Improving accessibility in buildings can range from minor modifications to significant infrastructure upgrades. These adaptations can be categorized into three main approaches.

Low-Budget Solutions for Homes and Small Facilities

For residential spaces and small business premises, cost-effective adjustments can enhance accessibility without requiring major renovations:

- **Installing Portable Ramps:** Simple foldable or modular ramps for improved entry access.
- **Door Widening Solutions:** Use of swing-clear hinges to maximize doorway width.
- **Non-Slip Flooring:** Adding textured adhesive strips to prevent slipping, use of anti-slip built-in flooring solutions, avoid use of textile solutions such as carpets to facilitate wheelchairs' use.
- **Smart Lighting Controls:** Motion-activated lighting to assist individuals with mobility impairments.
- **Auditory and Visual Alerts:** Installing doorbells with flashing lights for individuals with hearing impairments.

These solutions can be implemented with minimal investment while significantly improving usability.

Medium- and Long-Term Adaptations for Public Spaces

Public buildings, workplaces, and recreational areas require structured and sustainable adaptations to comply with accessibility standards:

- **Ramps and Elevators:** Retrofitting buildings with compliant ramps and installing elevators where necessary.
- **Automated Entry Systems:** Implementing sensor-based doors for easier access.

- **Accessible Seating Areas:** Creating designated wheelchair-accessible pathways and seating areas for shows and events in theaters, stadiums, conference halls and outdoor venues.
- **Wayfinding Enhancements:** Interactive digital maps and mobile applications for navigation assistance.
- **Public Restroom Upgrades:** Installation of fully accessible restrooms with emergency assistance buttons.

These measures not only improve accessibility but also create inclusive environments that serve all members of the community.

Technological Innovations in Accessibility

Advancements in technology have introduced innovative solutions that enhance the accessibility of buildings and urban environments:

- **Smart Navigation Systems:** GPS-integrated applications guiding users through accessible routes.
- **Voice-Controlled Home Automation:** Systems that allow individuals with disabilities to control lighting, temperature, and security via voice commands.
- **Haptic Feedback Systems:** Vibrating pathways and tactile ground indicators for people with visual impairments.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistants:** AI-driven services in airports and shopping centers to assist visitors with specific accessibility needs.
- **3D Printing for Custom Accessibility Features:** Rapid development of custom ramps, door openers, and mobility aids tailored to specific environments.

By integrating these technological solutions, buildings can become more adaptive and inclusive, providing a seamless experience for all users.

4.3 Summary of Recommendations

To ensure continuous improvements in accessibility, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Encouraging Property Owners to Perform Self-Assessments:** Widely distribute the accessibility checklist and promote self-evaluation among businesses and public institutions.
- **Encouraging Property Owners to Work with Persons with Disabilities**: Consult with persons with various disabilities when designing new buildings, renovating or retrofitting old ones.
- **Implementing Cost-Effective Improvements First:** Prioritize minor yet impactful changes before investing in extensive renovations.

- **Enhancing Collaboration Between Government and Private Sector:** Foster partnerships that support funding and implementation of accessibility projects.
- **Expanding the Use of Smart Technology:** Integrate digital tools and AI-driven systems to optimize building accessibility.
- **Training**: It shifts the mindset from one-time fixes to a proactive, ongoing commitment. It provides employees with practical, role-specific skills and keeps them updated on evolving standards. This approach not only reduces legal and financial risks but also builds a more inclusive culture, enhances the reputation of the organization, and empowers employees to champion accessibility improvements from within.

By adopting these practical guidelines, cities, businesses, and individuals can contribute to a more accessible and inclusive society, ensuring that built environments cater to the needs of all users.

5. Aspiration

5.1 Case Studies and Inspirational Examples: How Have Local Communities Improved Accessibility?

Across the globe, cities and local communities are redefining accessibility by embedding inclusive design principles into the core of urban development, infrastructure planning, and cultural policy. These initiatives demonstrate that accessibility is not only a human right but also a powerful driver of innovation, sustainability, and social cohesion. Below, we present an expanded set of inspirational case studies, enriched with data, timelines, and measurable outcomes, offering a realistic picture of what is possible when commitment meets action.

Barcelona, Spain - The Accessible City Initiative

Since the early 2000s, Barcelona has steadily implemented what is now internationally recognized as the Accessible City Initiative - a citywide program rooted in the belief that accessibility must be mainstreamed into every policy and project. Between 2006 and 2018 alone, the city invested more than 42 million euros in making public space accessible.

Barcelona has:

- Integrated tactile paving across 95% of pedestrian crossings.
- Made 100% of its city buses wheelchair accessible.
- Retrofitted more than 200 beach access points, featuring amphibious wheelchairs, adapted showers and dressing rooms, and trained staff at designated beaches.

Furthermore, all new municipal buildings must comply with universal design principles by law. Museums such as the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya now offer tactile exhibits and sign language tours, reflecting the city's dedication to cultural inclusion.

According to the Barcelona City Council, these efforts benefit over 100,000 people with disabilities annually and improve the city experience for millions of elderly residents and tourists. Barcelona's accessibility strategy has inspired similar policies across Europe and earned multiple awards from organizations like the EU Access City Award.

Malmö, Sweden - Inclusive Housing and Urban Living

In Malmö, accessibility is woven into urban and housing policy through the Social Sustainability Program adopted in 2010. One of the key results is that 25- 30% of new housing developments are built according to universal design criteria.

Key features include:

- Step-free building entries, automated doors, and accessible storage.

- Wide doorways and adaptable kitchens/bathrooms for wheelchair users.
- Integration of smart-home technology, allowing voice-activated or app-based control of lighting, appliances, and security.

To keep accessible housing inclusive and affordable, the city introduced means-tested rent subsidies and incentives for developers who prioritize universal design. As of 2023, Malmö reported over 4,000 accessible housing units with ongoing expansion. The program has significantly improved independent living rates among seniors and persons with disabilities, according to municipal health statistics.

New York City, USA - Digital Accessibility and Mobility Innovation

New York has emerged as a tech-forward leader in urban accessibility. The city's Department of Transportation and MTA introduced the Accessible Dispatch Program in 2012, which now enables wheelchair users to book on-demand accessible taxis in all five boroughs - serving more than 600,000 rides per year.

Additionally, the city invested in:

- The NYC Wayfinding App, launched in 2019, using AI and real-time data to guide visually impaired users through the complex subway system.
- Retrofitting subway stations: as of 2023, 28% of NYC's 472 subway stations are fully accessible, with a projected $5.2 billion investment to raise that number to 50% by 2034.
- Creation of Accessible Streetscapes in neighborhoods with high populations of elderly and disabled residents, introducing curb cuts, audio pedestrian signals, and high-contrast road markings.

The initiative has not only enhanced independent mobility but has been linked to higher employment and school attendance rates for persons with disabilities, according to a 2021 report by the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.

Ljubljana, Slovenia - Heritage Accessibility and Inclusive Culture

Ljubljana, a Green Capital of Europe (2016), is also a role model in accessibility within historical and cultural contexts. Since 2011, the city has retrofitted over 70% of its historical buildings to be wheelchair accessible, including major landmarks like Ljubljana Castle and the City Museum.

Its strategy includes:

- Modern low-floor buses with ramps and audio-visual displays across the fleet.
- Collaboration with disability organizations to organize "accessible routes" for tourists and locals.
- Sensory-friendly theater performances and museum exhibitions designed in partnership with autism support associations.

The Ljubljana Tourism Board reports that accessible tourism has increased by 45% over the last 5 years, contributing significantly to the local economy and the city's reputation as a welcoming destination.

Dubai, UAE — Toward "the World's Most Inclusive City"

Over the past decade, Dubai has embedded inclusion into city policy under the umbrella of "My Community… A City for Everyone," the emirate-wide framework that mainstreams accessibility for "People of Determination" across the built environment, services, transport, and culture. This sits alongside the Dubai Universal Design Code, which guides planning, audits, and retrofits in public and private projects.

Public realm & infrastructure. In 2025 the municipality announced that 90% of beaches and 80% of public parks are now fully accessible—with step-free access, adapted facilities, and wayfinding—marking a city-wide milestone for inclusive leisure and daily life.

Tourism & events. Dubai is positioning accessible tourism as a growth engine: the city hosts the Accessible Travel & Tourism International Conference (ATTIC) on 7–8 October 2025 at Dubai World Trade Centre, aligned with the broader AccessAbilities Expo ecosystem.

Transport & travel ecosystem. Inclusion is extending through the aviation hub: Dubai Duty Free became the world's first "Autism Certified" airport retailer in October 2025, while Emirates announced it would be the world's first Autism Certified airline after training tens of thousands of staff—steps that standardize sensory-friendly journeys through DXB.

Digital accessibility. On the e-government front, DEWA reports 100% web and app accessibility compliance under Digital Dubai standards, illustrating how the smart-city agenda is tying usability to service delivery. Dubai's broader digital push helped the city climb to 4th globally in the IMD Smart City Index 2025, reinforcing a governance culture that couples technology with inclusion.

Bottom line. With a mature policy spine (Universal Design Code + "My Community"), measurable upgrades in beaches and parks, sector-wide moves in aviation/tourism, and hard metrics in digital accessibility and smart-city performance, Dubai's 2025 trajectory credibly supports its ambition to be the most inclusive global city—and offers a replicable template: set standards, measure city-wide coverage, and align marquee industries to the inclusion goal.

Additional Examples from Around the World

Tokyo, Japan: Ahead of the 2020 Paralympics, Tokyo retrofitted nearly 90% of train stations with elevators and tactile floor paths. Over 2,000 accessible hotel rooms were created, and new accessibility laws were passed to ensure long-term sustainability.

Vienna, Austria: Through the Barrier-Free City program, Vienna has made over 500 public buildings accessible since 2010 and introduced inclusive playgrounds in every

district. Its metro system is now fully step-free and supports text-to-speech ticket machines.

Toronto, Canada: The Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines have been a national model since 2004. The city has also invested in multi-sensory parks and created the world's first Deaf Culture Centre in a heritage site.

Conclusion: A Global Aspiration, a Local Responsibility

These examples demonstrate that ambitious, long-term planning combined with community collaboration and clear legislation can transform accessibility from obligation into opportunity. From transport to housing, and from culture to digital navigation, the best practices highlighted here prove that universal access leads to better design, better service, and better societies.

For the OBLIGE project, these initiatives provide inspiration and validation. They remind us that accessibility audits, user-centered analysis, and evidence-based design are part of a global movement - a collective aspiration to create spaces that include, empower, and welcome all.

5.2 The Broader Impact of Accessible Environments

Accessible infrastructure extends far beyond its physical form - it empowers individuals, strengthens communities, and transforms societies. Buildings, transportation systems, public services, and digital platforms designed with inclusion in mind do not simply accommodate those with disabilities - they foster independence, promote equality, and reinforce the right to full societal participation for all. When implemented systematically, accessibility becomes a foundation for dignity, autonomy, and social sustainability.

Independence and Mobility

One of the most significant outcomes of accessible environments is the restoration of personal independence. Barrier-free transport networks, step-free entrances, and user-friendly mobility systems allow people to move freely without requiring assistance from caregivers or family members. This not only empowers individuals with disabilities but also reduces their dependence on social services, making inclusion both a social and economic imperative. Technological innovations like voice-controlled living environments, mobile navigation apps, and remote assistance systems have revolutionized how people with limited mobility interact with their surroundings, allowing them to live with autonomy and dignity.

Social Inclusion

Social participation is at the heart of human well-being, and inclusive design plays a pivotal role in facilitating this. Public spaces without barriers encourage engagement in cultural, social, and recreational activities - be it visiting museums, attending community events, or simply meeting friends in a park. Accessible workplaces promote diversity, enabling individuals with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to

the economy and community. Furthermore, schools and universities that implement universal design foster inclusive education environments where students of all abilities can thrive together, enhancing peer interaction, empathy, and equal opportunity. On the other hand, the principles of Universal Design are becoming increasingly important in a wide range of fields, including architecture, product design, technology, and urban planning. As our society continues to prioritize accessibility and inclusivity, the demand for professionals who understand and can apply these principles is growing. By including Universal Design as a study matter, students will learn to design for the widest possible audience, regardless of age, ability, or background. This isn't just about meeting compliance standards; it's about creating more intuitive, effective, and marketable products and environments.

Health and Safety

Designing for accessibility inherently enhances health and safety for all. Smooth surfaces, handrails, good lighting, and clear signage help reduce accidents caused by uneven terrain or confusing layouts. Tactile and auditory navigation aids support not only persons with visual or hearing impairments but also elderly individuals and newcomers unfamiliar with the space. Inclusive emergency plans - featuring visual alarms, clearly marked refuge zones, and trained staff - ensure that no one is left behind in a crisis. Research has shown that buildings designed with universal principles experience fewer safety-related incidents and contribute to overall public health outcomes.

Application of Universal Design in Hospitality, Institutions, and Housing

Universal design is no longer confined to theory - it is being implemented across multiple sectors, improving quality of life and accessibility for millions. In hospitality, public administration, and housing, we see how thoughtful design choices create dignified and seamless experiences for diverse populations.

Hotels and Resorts

Global hotel brands have embraced accessibility as part of their commitment to inclusive service. Chains like Hilton and Marriott incorporate roll-in showers, tactile signage, and low-height controls in guest rooms. Some boutique hotels in Amsterdam and Tokyo now offer sensory-adapted rooms with dimmable lighting, noise insulation, and customizable ambiance for neurodiverse guests. Coastal resorts provide amphibious wheelchairs, pool lifts, and adaptive water sports equipment - making leisure and adventure accessible to all. These efforts not only comply with regulations but also expand market reach and elevate guest satisfaction.

Public Institutions

Governments are also taking decisive steps to make civic spaces universally accessible. In Germany, municipal buildings feature step-free access, adjustable counters, and staff trained to assist people with a wide range of access needs. In Japan, libraries use robotic systems and mobile apps for autonomous book retrieval,

while real-time speech-to-text systems have been introduced in courtrooms and service centers across Canada. These innovations ensure that citizens with disabilities are no longer sidelined but instead actively supported in their public interactions and civic participation.

Residential Housing

Accessible housing is fundamental to long-term independence. Countries like the Netherlands lead the way with modular social housing that can be easily adapted over time to respond to residents' changing physical needs. Australia's inclusive living communities offer features such as rooftop gardens, shared kitchens, and co-designed common spaces that prioritize autonomy and social engagement. In Singapore, new apartment complexes are equipped with lifts on every floor, wide corridors, and digital systems that allow remote control of lighting, doors, and home appliances - helping residents with limited mobility live comfortably and independently.

5.3 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The global case studies and applications of universal design principles provide concrete guidance for cities, institutions, and private actors aiming to build inclusive environments. The following recommendations represent a synthesis of best practices drawn from successful initiatives around the world:

- Encourage Local Governments to Adopt Accessibility Standards: Municipalities should lead by example, setting clear regulations that mandate inclusive design in both public and private developments.

- Promote Cross-Sector Collaboration: Effective accessibility planning requires coordination between architects, engineers, urban planners, IT developers, policymakers, and end users. Only through such cooperation can practical and human-centered solutions be realized.

- Invest in Smart Accessibility Solutions: Embracing technological innovation, such as AI-based navigation apps, automated mobility tools, and digital interfaces, enhances usability and future-proofs infrastructure.

- Raise Public Awareness: Through campaigns, training programs, and school curricula, societies can cultivate empathy, knowledge, and proactive engagement in designing inclusive environments.

- Develop Funding Programs for Accessibility Upgrades: Accessibility improvements must be financially supported, especially for small businesses, non-profits, and lower-income homeowners.

- Encourage Innovation in Assistive Technology: Governments and private investors should support the research and development of cutting-edge solutions like wearable devices, smart mobility aids, and augmented communication systems.

By learning from these global successes and applying these recommendations, we can build a future where accessibility is not a benefit for a few, but a shared standard that uplifts all. Inclusive design does not just transform space - it transforms lives.

6. Recommendations for Decision-Makers and Investors

6.1 How to Encourage Inclusive Investments?

Creating inclusive environments is not only a moral and legal imperative - it is a strategic investment opportunity. Accessible infrastructure contributes to healthier, more equitable, and more economically vibrant societies. For decision-makers and investors, understanding the return on investment (ROI) of inclusion is essential to unlocking both social and financial value. As global demographics shift, with aging populations and increased awareness of disability rights, inclusive development is no longer optional - it is a necessity for sustainable growth.

To encourage inclusive investments, a comprehensive and enforceable legal framework is fundamental. Legislation must go beyond minimum accessibility requirements and proactively promote universal design in all sectors. National building codes and municipal development plans should mandate accessibility in all new construction and major renovation projects. These should include clear, measurable benchmarks, enforced through licensing procedures and site inspections. Additionally, procurement policies should give preference to inclusive design solutions, embedding accessibility in public contracts and urban development schemes.

Governments should consider introducing tax incentives, financial subsidies, and low-interest loans specifically aimed at businesses and developers who commit to inclusive practices. In Germany, for example, several municipalities offer fiscal benefits to private developers who include accessibility measures beyond the legal minimum. In Austria, initiatives have supported the retrofitting of cultural heritage buildings through co-financing mechanisms that combine public funding with private investment - showing that accessibility can be achieved even in protected and complex environments.

Recognition and reward mechanisms are another effective lever for encouraging accessible investments. National or regional accessibility awards, certification schemes, and public rankings can increase visibility and prestige for inclusive projects. These systems can serve as quality assurance tools and competitive differentiators for investors and property owners. Labels such as 'Design for All', 'Barrier-Free Certified', or country-specific seals build consumer trust and attract diverse client bases, including the aging population, families with young children, and international tourists.

Crucially, capacity-building in the private sector is needed to deepen awareness of the benefits of inclusive design. Workshops, continuing education programs, and multi-stakeholder forums can bridge the knowledge gap between design theory and business strategy. These platforms enable architects, engineers, and developers to engage with accessibility specialists, policymakers, and users with disabilities. By highlighting successful case studies, cost-benefit analyses, and user testimonials, these programs turn abstract concepts into actionable, profitable approaches.

Public institutions should actively promote and disseminate the results of successful inclusive investments. Cities that have reaped economic and social rewards from accessible redevelopment projects - such as increased foot traffic in commercial districts, improved customer satisfaction in hotels, or higher usage of public spaces - should publicize these outcomes. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) that include inclusive design goals should be scaled and formalized, ensuring long-term sustainability of inclusive infrastructure across sectors.

Furthermore, investors should be encouraged to integrate accessibility into their ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) strategies. As sustainable and socially responsible investing gains momentum, accessibility becomes a core component of the 'social' pillar. Financial institutions can include accessibility metrics in ESG assessments, encouraging companies to view inclusive design not just as a compliance issue, but as a value-adding opportunity that enhances brand reputation, customer loyalty, and operational resilience.

In conclusion, building a truly inclusive environment requires coordinated action from legislators, regulators, urban planners, architects, developers, and investors. With the right incentives, legal obligations, and communication strategies, inclusive investment can become the standard rather than the exception. In doing so, we not only fulfill human rights obligations, but also build cities and communities that are resilient, economically dynamic, and socially just.

6.2 Measuring Return on Investment in Inclusive Tourism

Investments in accessible tourism not only ensure equal rights for all travelers but also yield measurable economic returns. According to the European Commission, inclusive tourism across the EU could generate up to 537 billion euros in GDP annually and support more than 12 million jobs. Yet, due to infrastructure and service gaps, an estimated 142 billion euros in potential revenue and 3.4 million jobs are lost each year when destinations are not adequately accessible.

Dubai has taken strategic steps to become one of the world's most inclusive cities. With the goal of being the most accessible destination by 2025, the city has hosted international accessibility summits and implemented measures to make transportation, hotels, public services, and attractions fully accessible. In 2024, Dubai welcomed a record 18.72 million international visitors, a 9% increase from the previous year - growth that has been partially attributed to inclusive tourism initiatives and improved infrastructure for persons with disabilities.

These statistics underscore the financial and reputational benefits of inclusive investment. Destinations that prioritize accessibility are better positioned to attract older travelers, people with disabilities, families, and health-conscious tourists. This broadens the customer base, enhances destination branding, and improves competitiveness on a global scale.

Cities, regions, and investors who recognize these trends and adapt accordingly stand to gain not only in terms of social responsibility, but also in economic performance

and market leadership. As the global demand for inclusive travel rises, inclusive design becomes a core element of modern tourism development strategies.

6.3 Financing Models for Accessible Adaptations

One of the most critical barriers to achieving inclusive infrastructure is the lack of dedicated and diverse financing mechanisms. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of universal design, many property owners, entrepreneurs, and municipal authorities struggle to fund the necessary upgrades to ensure accessibility. This is particularly true in aging cities, where much of the existing infrastructure predates modern accessibility standards. To overcome this challenge, a range of strategic financing models is necessary, blending public and private resources, incentives, and expertise.

1. **Grants and Subsidies** - Government grants and support from international institutions play a crucial role in initiating accessibility improvements, especially in public buildings, transportation, education, and health care. For example, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has allocated billions of euros toward inclusive urban development, with many projects co-financing accessible infrastructure in less-developed regions. In countries like Spain, Poland, and Croatia, EU structural funds have made possible hundreds of adaptations in city centers, libraries, and train stations.

2. **Low-Interest Credit Lines** - Affordable financing products are essential for incentivizing accessibility in the private sector. Countries such as Austria and Germany offer dedicated loan programs that support SMEs, hotel operators, and public institutions in adapting their premises. In Austria, the Oesterreichische Kontrollbank (OeKB) offers concessional loans through its environmental and social responsibility finance programs, enabling barrier-free renovations in hotels, restaurants, and commercial properties.

3. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)** - PPP models combine the innovation and efficiency of the private sector with the public sector's social responsibility. In Turkey, such partnerships have enabled the development of entire neighborhoods with accessible public housing, green areas, and community facilities for people with disabilities. Similarly, in Italy and Portugal, regional governments have worked with banks and architectural firms to retrofit heritage buildings and schools through shared investments.

4. **Tax Incentives** - Fiscal incentives encourage private investors to incorporate accessibility into their development strategies. Countries like Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom offer tax deductions and exemptions to businesses that implement adaptive features such as ramps, lifts, and tactile signage. In some cases, companies can offset the cost of accessibility audits and design consultations through tax credits, encouraging them to take early steps toward inclusion.

5. **Urban Renewal Funds** - Accessibility often intersects with broader urban renewal efforts. Local governments can establish dedicated funds to ensure that older buildings and public spaces are upgraded inclusively. In Romania, for example, EU-funded urban revitalization projects have led to the renovation of over 200 historical and administrative buildings with accessible entrances, restrooms, and signage. These efforts have been praised by the disability community and have enhanced tourism and cultural engagement.

National and international funds serve as essential pillars for financing large-scale accessibility initiatives. These financial mechanisms not only provide capital but also deliver technical support, capacity-building, and policy guidance to ensure effective implementation. Countries that successfully integrate these resources into their development plans have made substantial progress in accessibility, especially in underserved and rural areas.

· **European Union** - Through the European Social Fund (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the EU supports thousands of accessibility-related initiatives across member states. In the 2021–2027 programming period, the EU allocated over €86 billion for social inclusion, part of which directly funds infrastructure for people with disabilities.

· **Austria** - Federal and regional programs promote adaptive renovations through targeted grants, especially for SMEs and historic structures. For instance, the 'Barrier-Free Austria' initiative facilitates access to public services, transport hubs, and cultural institutions.

· **Romania** - Under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and the Regional Operational Programmes 2021-2027, Romania has allocated significant EU funds for inclusive infrastructure in education and health sectors, including mobility upgrades and accessible digital learning environments. Also, the Operational Programme Inclusion and Social Dignity 2021-2027 supports the social inclusion of vulnerable groups: improving access to social and health services, especially for people in rural and marginalized communities; providing support for vulnerable populations, such as children at risk of poverty, people with disabilities, and the elderly; promoting integrated community development to address social issues holistically; offering assistance to the most disadvantaged people, including material aid and support for housing.

· **Turkey** - Accessibility is integrated into national housing and development schemes, with dedicated budget lines for small businesses and public transport systems. Co-financing from international donors such as UNDP and the World Bank complements national budgets.

· **World Bank** - The World Bank Group has supported projects in over 25 countries to integrate universal design in transport systems, urban development, and climate-resilient housing. These projects emphasize inclusive community engagement and long-term sustainability.

· **UNDP** - The United Nations Development Programme provides grants and expert assistance for accessible urban planning, focusing on vulnerable populations in low- and middle-income countries. Their recent projects in Central Asia and Latin America have introduced best practices in universal design, including community-built solutions.

In addition to financial support, these institutions offer technical expertise, including staff training, guideline development, and stakeholder engagement tools. By fostering knowledge transfer and building local capacity, such programs help scale accessibility efforts while ensuring contextual relevance.

Conclusion: Combining diverse financing strategies - ranging from grants to tax incentives - can significantly accelerate the implementation of accessibility initiatives. By working with both national and international actors, and by aligning urban policy with inclusive principles, governments and private stakeholders can drive structural change. Beyond improving the lives of people with disabilities, inclusive infrastructure fuels economic development, strengthens civic cohesion, and enhances urban resilience.

7. Conclusion and Call to Action

7.1 Summarizing Key Findings

Throughout this publication, we have explored the transformative role of accessible architecture and inclusive innovation in shaping resilient, equitable, and sustainable communities. Accessibility has emerged not as a peripheral concern but as a central driver of both social cohesion and economic development. From real estate trends and public-private cooperation to technological breakthroughs and regulatory support, we have identified multiple pathways to creating a more inclusive society. The momentum is growing, but action must now follow insight.

· Universal design offers both moral and material benefits. Spaces designed with accessibility in mind are safer, more intuitive, and more functional for all users - not only those with disabilities. Markets that integrate universal design standards report increased rental and property values, longer tenancy durations, and greater user satisfaction. Universal design also plays a critical role in emergency preparedness and resilience planning. In situations such as fires, earthquakes, or public health crises, accessible infrastructure ensures safe evacuation, access to information, and continuation of essential services. For example, wide corridors and step-free exits are not only convenient in daily use - they are lifesaving during disasters.

· Multi-sector partnerships amplify impact. Cities that unite local governments, private developers, academic institutions, and NGOs in a shared accessibility agenda succeed in developing integrated, people-centered urban spaces. This synergy drives more comprehensive, scalable solutions and accelerates adoption across sectors. Interdisciplinary education is crucial to embedding accessibility values across professions. This means not just including accessibility in urban design curricula, but also teaching doctors, software developers, hospitality staff, and policy advisors how inclusive thinking can improve service delivery and policy effectiveness. The more accessibility is viewed as a foundational competency, the more consistent its application will become.

· Emerging technologies have transformative power. From AI-driven wayfinding systems to smart home interfaces controlled by gestures or voice, technology is unlocking independence, mobility, and communication for users previously excluded from full participation. These innovations are not futuristic - they are happening now and reshaping what is possible. Finally, societal attitudes are shifting. There is growing public demand for equity, dignity, and fairness in the built environment. Social movements and digital platforms have amplified the voices of people with disabilities, exposing exclusionary practices and catalyzing reforms. This momentum can and should be translated into institutional commitments, community-driven design, and national policy priorities.

· Financial incentives break down barriers. Accessibility is often perceived as costly, but targeted incentives - such as tax breaks, co-financing, and zero-interest loans -

have proven effective in mainstreaming universal design into housing, tourism, and commercial development.

· Awareness and education ensure continuity. A long-term shift requires not only infrastructure, but also mindset change. Integrating accessibility into urban planning curricula, design competitions, and certification programs nurtures the next generation of professionals committed to inclusive spaces.

7.2 Opportunities for Further Application and Improvement

While important milestones have been reached in the global movement for accessibility, significant gaps remain in implementation, enforcement, and scalability. Real progress now depends on elevating accessibility beyond individual projects or policies and embedding it into systemic design frameworks and everyday practices. The following strategies represent high-impact opportunities to advance inclusion through innovation, collaboration, and regulation:

· Expand and institutionalize accessibility audits and certification programs at the municipal, national, and EU levels. These tools allow building owners, business operators, and city officials to assess their infrastructure based on transparent, internationally recognized benchmarks, encouraging continuous improvement and user trust. Governments should revise national labor strategies to promote inclusive hiring quotas, workplace adaptations, and incentives for accessibility investments. Companies should adopt clear guidelines and KPIs around accessible employment, ensuring progress is monitored and celebrated. Inclusive workplaces foster loyalty, lower absenteeism, and attract skilled workers across all demographics. To maximize their effectiveness, audit tools should evolve with changing technology and user expectations. For example, incorporating AI-assisted walkthroughs or virtual reality simulations can help identify access issues that may not be visible on traditional checklists. These innovations increase accuracy and foster empathy among evaluators.

· Integrate smart city technologies such as AI-enabled guidance apps, real-time accessible routing systems, and IoT-based support tools to assist individuals with mobility, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. These digital layers make the built environment more intelligent, responsive, and adaptable to a variety of user needs. Participation should extend to budgeting, monitoring, and post-implementation evaluation. Inclusive design charrettes and 'experience walkthroughs' with people who have lived experience of disability can offer deeply practical, cost-effective insights. This human-centered approach cultivates public ownership and ensures solutions respond directly to community needs. Digital infrastructure must also include cybersecurity and privacy protections to ensure safe usage by vulnerable groups. For example, wayfinding apps should avoid collecting sensitive personal data while still offering high-level personalization. Technology can only be truly inclusive when it respects both accessibility and autonomy.

· Strengthen monitoring and enforcement of accessibility standards by embedding them into all relevant regulatory processes - from building permits and public procurement to urban master plans. Governments should establish inspectorates or councils that ensure compliance and issue penalties for neglect. Enforcement should not be limited to punitive measures. Reward-based systems such as public rankings, grant eligibility, or design awards can motivate institutions to exceed basic compliance. Public recognition has been shown to influence reputational standing and stakeholder trust - key incentives for progressive action.

· Invest in accessible multimodal transport by ensuring that all urban and rural systems - buses, trains, ferries, car-sharing platforms - provide level boarding, visual and auditory navigation cues, and apps that display real-time accessibility updates. Integrated and inclusive mobility is the backbone of an equitable city. Accessibility should be integrated into all stages of transport procurement, from tender specifications to post-implementation feedback. Transit agencies can pilot new approaches such as AI-assisted scheduling for para-transit, crowd-sourced alerts for broken elevators, and on-demand mobility services tailored for persons with limited mobility.

· Foster cross-disciplinary innovation by supporting consortia that include researchers, design firms, disability rights groups, and private sector innovators. These partnerships should prototype solutions and pilot them at scale with feedback from end users. These ecosystems should operate on open-access principles, sharing findings, design templates, and coding frameworks. They can be embedded in university programs, city labs, and regional innovation agencies to ensure wide reach and sustainability. Creating physical spaces such as accessibility hubs or showrooms can also enhance public engagement.

· Scale accessible employment strategies, including remote work accommodations, inclusive recruitment platforms, adaptive tools for cognitive or motor impairments, and mentorship programs that prepare people with disabilities for leadership roles. Accessible employment must go beyond hiring. Onboarding, career progression, training, and leadership development must all reflect inclusion. Companies should also adopt inclusive branding and marketing strategies that show diversity not as a token gesture but as a strategic value.

· Encourage citizen participation in planning through participatory design methods. By holding community workshops, roundtables, and public consultations that center the voices of people with lived experience of disability, projects become more accurate, empowering, and sustainable. Policymakers can also require participatory budgeting models where residents help allocate funds for local access improvements. Crowdsourcing ideas for public space transformation not only ensures innovation but strengthens civic pride. These community-driven initiatives build deeper resilience and ownership of inclusive urban identity.

7.3 Call to Action: Leading Through Inclusion

True change requires coordinated and committed action across all layers of society. Building a future where accessibility is not an exception but a standard demands leadership, resources, and persistence. This is not the task of a single government or company - it is a societal challenge that calls on all of us to lead through our daily decisions. We urge the following actions as a framework for meaningful and sustainable transformation:

· Apply professional accessibility assessment tools like AUDARA or BREEAM-in-Use to identify gaps in physical spaces, digital platforms, and services - and prioritize updates based on user feedback and urgency. Additionally, organizations can use these audits to develop internal benchmarks that align with global iniciatives and standards like the UN CRPD and ISO 21542. Publishing this data can help clients, funders, and the public make informed decisions about inclusive services.

· Share good practices, project results, and policy innovations across networks, both online and offline. Transparency fosters mutual learning and allows local adaptations of global solutions to flourish. Case study repositories and interactive maps can visualize trends in accessibility innovation, helping to localize global best practices. Communities of practice should also be fostered to support ongoing dialogue, mentoring, and collective problem-solving.

· Engage in advocacy by attending public hearings, contributing to consultations, or organizing campaigns focused on improved enforcement, updated design regulations, or universal design mandates. Campaigns can focus on reframing accessibility as a benefit for all - connecting it to aging populations, family needs, or cultural tourism. The framing of accessibility as smart investment - not added cost - will resonate more widely with political and business leaders.

· Mainstream accessibility in education by including it in architecture, engineering, IT, urban planning, and business administration curricula. Also offer targeted training modules for public servants and private developers. Education efforts must start early, with accessibility themes integrated into primary and secondary school civics, science, and ethics curricula. Simulations, storytelling, and field visits can build empathy and awareness before students enter the workforce.

· Fund inclusive initiatives through corporate responsibility, grant programs, impact investment portfolios, or philanthropic foundations focused on social innovation. Public and private funders alike should require an accessibility clause in every call for proposals, and offer bonus points for inclusive design. This will gradually raise the floor of inclusion across sectors and generate a growing body of quality examples.

· Lead by example: make your organization, home, website, or store a model of inclusion. Publish your accessibility policy, measure your progress, and engage your community in co-creating further improvements. Recognition systems such as annual awards or certifications for accessibility excellence can celebrate early

adopters and encourage innovation. Public endorsements from government leaders, celebrities, or influencers can further amplify these achievements.

The world we create today must reflect the diversity, dignity, and potential of all its people. Inclusive design is not just good practice - it is a declaration of values. Let this be our moment to build bridges, not barriers. Let us act now, collectively, and with determination.

8. Appendices and Additional Resources

Contact Information for Project Partners

Collaboration between multiple partners has been fundamental in the successful development and execution of this project. Below is a list of key project stakeholders who have contributed their expertise and resources to ensure the advancement of accessible architecture and innovative solutions:

Lead Coordinating Organization:

MOVEO - Verein für soziale Nachhaltigkeit und Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen

- **Country:** Austria
- **Website:** www.moveointernational.com
- **Email:** info@moveointernational.com
- **Specialization:** Development of sustainable models for social and physical accessibility and inclusion across multiple sectors

Partner Organizations:

ASOCIATIA CED ROMANIA CENTRUL DE EXCELENTA PRIN DIVERSITATE

- **Country:** Romania
- **Website:** www.ced-romania.org.ro
- **Email:** office@ced-romania.org.ro
- **Specialization:** Accessibility audits of built environments, promoting accessible tourism and culture, and social inclusion projects

TURKIYE GENCLIK BIRLIGI DERNEGI (TGBD)

- **Country:** Türkiye
- **Website:** https://tgbder.org
- **Email:** info@tgbder.org
- **Specialization:** Youth development, social inclusion programs, and advocacy for disability rights, accessibility and inclusion in youth work

Each of these organizations brings a unique set of skills and experience that complement the overall goals of the Open Buildings project. For project-related inquiries, collaboration opportunities, or accessibility consultations, please reach out to any of the above contacts.

Additional Sources and Literature

For further reading on accessibility, universal design, and inclusive urban planning, we have compiled a comprehensive list of key resources, academic studies, and policy documents:

Books and Reports:

- **"Inclusive Design: Creating a User-Friendly Built Environment"** - John Clarkson, Roger Coleman, Simeon Keates
- **"Design Meets Disability"** - Graham Pullin
- **"Smart Cities and Accessibility"** - European Commission White Paper, 2022
- **"Universal Design Handbook"** - Wolfgang Preiser and Korydon Smith
- **"The Future of Public Transport: Accessible, Digital, and Inclusive"** - World Bank Report, 2021

International Standards and Guidelines:

- **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** - www.un.org/disabilities
- **European Accessibility Act (EAA)** - European Union Directive 2019/882
- **ISO 21542: Building Construction - Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment**
- **EN 17210: Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements**
- **ISO 21902: Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations**
- **EN 17161: Design for All - Accessibility following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users**
- **EN 301 549: Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services**
- **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1** - W3C Standard for digital accessibility

Useful Online Tools and Contacts:

- **Global Universal Design Database** - www.uddatabase.org
- **European Smart Accessibility Index** - www.esa-index.eu
- **Public Transport Accessibility Checker** - www.transitaccess.org
- **European Smart Cities Alliance (ESCA)** - www.smartcities-eu.org

- The National Institute for Research and Development in Construction, Urban Planning and Sustainable Territorial Development - URBAN-INCERC https://incd.ro/
- **Center for Assistive Technologies and Inclusive Solutions, Turkey** - www.catisturkey.org
- **World Enabled** - www.worldenabled.org (global urban inclusion policy)
- **G3ict**: The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs - www.g3ict.org
- **European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)** - www.accessibletourism.org
- **Access City Award** - https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1141 (European recognition for accessible cities)

These resources provide valuable insights and frameworks for those looking to deepen their understanding of accessibility and its practical applications.

QR Code to Online Tools and Digital Publication

To make this publication and its tools more accessible to a wider audience, a digital version is available online. The QR code below provides direct access to:

- The full digital version of this publication
- Case studies audits
- Link to the Audara APP

By scanning the QR code, users can instantly explore and download relevant materials, ensuring they have the resources they need to implement accessibility improvements in their own projects.

Final Note

The journey toward inclusive and accessible built environments is ongoing, and we invite stakeholders from various sectors to leverage the tools and knowledge shared in this publication. By utilizing the resources provided here, engaging with project partners, and contributing to the growing body of accessibility research, we can collectively create a world where everyone, regardless of their abilities, has equal access to public spaces, digital services, and the built environment.

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