



Accessibility Guide

Improving public transport services through awareness of staff about persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility



The “Accessibility Guide” is produced in 2016 by:



The International Association of Public Transport (UITP)

UITP is the advocate of sustainable urban mobility and the only worldwide network to bring together all public transport stakeholders and all sustainable transport modes. UITP has been promoting a public transport that is accessible to all for many years, e.g. through the 2001 UITP position paper on “Access to public transport” promoting low-floor technology, accessible infrastructure and easy to understand information systems, and through the 2006 ECMT-UITP Brochure “Improving access to public transport”.

www.uitp.org



IRU

IRU is the world's road transport organisation, promoting economic growth, prosperity and safety through the sustainable mobility of people and goods. Founded in 1948, IRU has members and activities in more than 100 countries. Upholding the right of people to get around is a fundamental human right that is decreed in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights as 'freedom of movement'. This is why IRU works to connect people with adequate and inclusive transport and supports bus, coach and taxi operators in their industry.

www.iru.org



The European Disability Forum (EDF)

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a platform which brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families and one of its areas of action, amongst others such as human rights or social policy, is transport accessibility and mobility.

www.edf-feph.org

Content

1. Introduction	5
2. General advice for dealing with persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility	6
3. Disability-specific advice	8
3.1 Persons with mobility impairments	8
3.2 Persons who are blind or partially sighted	10
3.3 Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing	12
3.4 Persons with speech impairments	14
3.5 Persons with cognitive disabilities (e.g. intellectual disabilities, brain injury, or autism)	15
3.6 Persons with psychosocial disabilities	17

1. Introduction

In 2011, there were 80 million persons with disabilities in the European Union (EU), representing about 15% of the EU population¹. Combined with the trends in demographic change and the rising amount of older people, this means that many people have reduced mobility when traveling at some point in their lives.

According to EU Regulation No 181/2011 concerning the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport, disability awareness training for drivers will be compulsory by 2018. The objective of this document, developed jointly by UITP, IRU and EDF, is therefore to provide practical advice and to raise awareness on the needs of passengers with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility, in particular in the context of local public transport.

Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which has been ratified by the EU itself as well as 27 out of its 28 Member States, makes it obligatory for its states parties to make transport accessible to persons with disabilities so that they can participate in society “on an equal basis with others”².

The guide is targeted at the staff of local public transport operators who sometimes or regularly interact with persons with reduced mobility (PRMs) and persons with disabilities. It can enhance customer service for these people by giving practical advice on how to identify and appropriately address them as passengers.

Acknowledging that the rules can be different in each company or region, in case of conflicting guidelines, the established company instructions shall apply.



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A high-quality customer service and courtesy is good for all passengers – not only for those with disabilities.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics_-_prevalence_and_demographics#Main_statistical_findings

² United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Art. 9.1.

2. General advice for dealing with persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility

Be aware and ready to act, offer assistance, but do not insist on it

Just like everybody, persons with disabilities wish to maintain their dignity and independence.

Ask the passenger, rather than jumping to conclusions

No passenger is exactly like any other, and from first glance, you cannot tell what knowledge or abilities anyone might have. Persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility are a very heterogeneous group. Passengers with the same impairment may need different types of assistance during their trip. Ultimately, persons with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Refrain from taking decisions on their behalf, but simply ask if you can help and how.

Put people first and not their disability

The language we use reflects on our thoughts and the way we see other people. When speaking about persons with disabilities, it is important to keep in mind they are persons with a family, a job, hobbies, talents and dreams and they are not defined by their impairments. Therefore, focus on the individual and not on their particular limitation also in your use of language. Do not say "the disabled", "the blind", "the wheelchair", etc., but refer to "the person with disability", "the person who is blind", "the person using a wheelchair" and so on.



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Try to be empathic and put yourself in your passengers' shoes

A person is not disabled because of his or her impairment, but because of the way in which society is organised. This includes the way stations and vehicles are designed, the way timetables are displayed, etc.

Be patient

Persons with disabilities or persons with reduced mobility may need longer to board or leave a vehicle, especially if a ramp is needed for a person with a wheelchair or mobility aide. If you are the driver, this may put pressure on you, in particular if your vehicle is already behind schedule for other reasons. Remember that it is not the person's fault if the boarding takes longer and that every person has a right to mobility – so just accept the situation, let the person take the necessary time to board and continue your journey.

Always speak directly to passengers with disabilities

Do not address their accompanying person, interpreter or personal assistant unless you are directed to do so by the passenger. Speak clearly and try to keep conversations private, rather than shouting over a long distance. If you are asked to repeat what you said, do so calmly and

pleasantly. Make eye contact and take sunglasses off; if you wear them, the passenger is not able to see your eyes and may perceive you as threatening.

It can be useful to carry a pen and paper with you

When you encounter persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, it will come in handy to be able to communicate in writing. Also, written communication can make things easier when talking to persons who are not familiar with the place or the local language.

Be especially attentive towards gestures and facial expressions

If your body language is not in line with what you are saying verbally, people with cognitive disabilities may be confused by these mixed messages. So, use clear gestures and signals: for example, nod to acknowledge the wish of a person. Align your gestures and facial expressions to your verbal expressions – otherwise, even if you communicate politely, your facial expression, tone of your voice, gestures, etc. may still convey your impatience or bad mood.

For drivers: drive carefully

Try to avoid rapid turns, breaking or accelerating. Start only when all the passengers are seated and people using wheelchairs have reached a safe position. Most passengers have difficulty standing or holding on to their seats in such cases – people with disabilities or with reduced mobility even more so. When driving a bus, drive closely to the kerb in order to reduce the gap between bus and kerb and enable people with reduced mobility to enter and exit the vehicle more easily. This will also benefit other passengers with luggage or prams.

Be mindful in unforeseen events

Even persons with reduced mobility and persons with disabilities, who under normal circumstances have no trouble using public transport services, will struggle in case of unforeseen events and emergencies. When the bus cannot stop at the bus stop because it is blocked by cars, when the automatic audio announcements in the bus do not work or when the ramp is defective – this is also when persons with reduced mobility and persons with disabilities encounter most problems.

Respect the personal space of persons with disabilities or reduced mobility

Always ask before you touch or bend over a person or touch their equipment (e.g. their wheelchair, guide dog, crutches, etc.).

Take special care of older people

Many older people have one or several of the impairments mentioned in the next chapter.



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3. Disability-specific advice

3.1 Persons with mobility impairments

How to recognise those passengers?

- Persons using wheelchairs or other kinds of mobility equipment like crutches, canes, walking frames, etc.
- Persons with artificial or missing limbs.
- Person of short/tall stature.
- Many mobility impairments are not visible (e.g. heart disorders, diabetes), but still make it difficult for a passenger to get on/off a vehicle.

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- Persons using a wheelchair and persons of short stature have a lower line of sight, so they might not be able to read all the information or reach ticket counters, stop buttons, etc.
- Persons using a wheelchair or other mobility aides may need more time to move around the vehicle.
- Persons with mobility impairments are especially hindered by uneven floors and barriers, like steps.
- Persons using a cane or crutches need their arms to balance themselves.

What problem may the person encounter?

What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- If the bus does not pull up close enough to the bus stop, it may be difficult for the person to board because of the gap.
- If there are obstacles that prevent the ramp from being deployed, the passenger may not be able to board safely.

- It might be difficult to see when approaching the bus stop if a passenger needs the ramp to be deployed, especially at a busy bus stop.
- Persons with mobility impairments may need to enter the vehicle in the back where the ramp is located, then move to the ticket machine, then move again to validate their ticket. This may take some time.
- Persons using a wheelchair are seated quite low and may have problems obtaining a ticket from a machine or counter. They may generally have problems to use equipment sometimes not adjusted to their height.



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- Signs and schedules may hang too high for them to see.
- Other passengers might block the space designated to persons using wheelchairs.
- They may have problems keeping their balance or hold tight when the bus is moving.

- Persons in wheelchairs may be sat with their backs turned against the direction of travel and the screen and might not be able to see when their stop comes up.



*"I have a mobility impairment, so I usually use my canes to walk and sometimes a wheelchair. I regularly travel by public transport and what I noticed is that it would help if staff were more aware of disability issues. The bus drivers often stop too far away from the pavement or they don't stop at all! I know the rules are different in each country, but in France, the drivers are not allowed to leave their seat so they can also not assist, but it would be nice if there was a more 'human' approach. Little things help and they reflect an inclusive society."
(Serge Mabally, France)*

How to assist?

- Make sure at the beginning of your shift that the ramp is working correctly and that you are familiar with its operation. Notify your manager about any technical problems so they can be fixed.
- If you see a passenger with mobility equipment who wants to board by using the ramp, do not ignore them. Everybody has the right to travel. It may take a few more minutes but using the ramp correctly will ensure health and safety as well as passenger satisfaction.



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- If necessary, ask the other passengers to make space for the mobility equipment.
- Make sure the passenger has boarded safely and that the mobility equipment is stowed correctly before continuing the journey. Do not remove a cane or crutches, but ask the owner to remove them if they are standing in the way (offer help, if needed).
- If you see that the passenger is encountering difficulties, offer help or ask other passengers to help. Do not handle their mobility equipment without consent, it may be fragile and incorrect handling could also compromise your own health and safety. Do not invade the person's personal space by leaning over the wheelchair or grabbing their cane or crutches without asking for permission.

3.2 Persons who are blind or partially sighted



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How to recognise those passengers?

- Some persons who are blind or partially sighted use white canes.
- A red and white cane often indicates that the person is deaf-blind.
- Some people might wear dark glasses.
- Others might be accompanied by a personal assistant or a guide dog with a distinctive harness.
- But not all blind or partially sighted persons have any of these characteristics!

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- Visual disabilities vary widely. One person may have a total loss of vision, while another may have difficulty seeing only under certain conditions or have a limited field of vision.
- Perception depends on both the individual's eyesight and the conditions in the surrounding environment, for example the amount of light or level of contrast.
- Persons who are blind or partially sighted and using a cane may need their arms to balance.

What problem may the person encounter? What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- Persons who are blind or partially sighted rely on information given in a form that is accessible to them (i.e. audio, large print, braille, electronic format, etc.).
- They may not be aware of the approaching vehicle and thus not able to signal for it to stop or to find the correct door. They may also not see which line it is.
- Persons who are blind or partially sighted who are accompanied by a guide dog will need to identify a seat that has room underneath or close by for the dog.
- If there is a priority seat designated for persons with disabilities, they may need help identifying the seat and being guided there.
- When moving through the vehicle, all objects situated in the space can be dangerous barriers.
- If the audio announcement does not work or it is very noisy, persons who are blind or partially sighted cannot identify their stop, which may cause them to be anxious and disoriented.



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*"I'm blind and I regularly use buses. The main difficulty for me is to know which bus is approaching the stop, since I cannot see the number. It would help me if the bus driver told me the bus number when he stops because I can never tell if I'm flagging down the correct bus. In general, it would help if the buses themselves became more accessible with audio announcements, for example."
(Ovidiu Tuduruță, Romania)*

How to assist?

- When stopping the vehicle, ensure that the door does not open right in front of a lamppost, pole, sign, or any other kind of obstacle. Otherwise the person might walk into it.
 - In order to start talking to a person who is blind or partially sighted, lightly touch the passenger's arm and introduce yourself. This way, he/she will understand that you are addressing them.
 - If the person is accompanied by a personal assistant, make sure you are addressing the person him/herself, not the personal assistant.
 - Ask the passenger what type of assistance is needed and how you can best provide it. Do not assume that your help is needed or not needed.
 - If the passenger has a guide dog, do not pet or feed the guide dog as this can distract the dog as it is 'working'.
 - Speak clearly and inform the passenger of the service he/she enquired about or of the fare he/she needs to pay.
- When giving verbal directions to a passenger who is blind or partially sighted, your instructions should be simple and specific. For example, say "turn right", "turn left" or "turn towards the back of the bench", rather than "over there" or "that way".
 - When a passenger gives you money, allow time for them to identify the correct coins/bills. Count the change out loud and make sure the passenger receives it.
 - If you do anything, like giving out the ticket or the change, it is a good idea to comment on each particular step you are performing (for example: "I will give you back 250, this is 50 (the person takes it) and this is the remaining 200 bill".)
 - If you are aware of any passenger who is blind or partially sighted in your bus, make sure that he/she is informed about any delays or any deviations from the route that he or she might have expected the bus to take.
 - If the automatic audio announcements of the stops do not work, announce the stop over the microphone.
 - In case you were asked to inform the passenger of his/her stop, do so in plenty of time.
 - Allow plenty of time for disembarking, depending on the distance to the door, the amount of luggage the passenger has, and the person's need for assistance. Be aware that the passenger cannot see landmarks en-route.

3.3 Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing



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How to recognise those passengers?

- Chances are you won't notice a person who is deaf or hearing impaired unless you see the person using sign language or wearing a hearing aid.

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- There are various types of hearing impairments ranging from slight hearing impairments that can be corrected by hearing aids to complete deafness. There are also persons who are deaf-blind, i.e. they have both a hearing impairment and a visual impairment (but do not necessarily have to be completely deaf and blind). Some people use implants that allow them to hear well. For some people, also those with hearing aids, loud environmental sounds may be amplified.
- Many persons who are born deaf rely primarily on sign language for communication; it's their mother tongue. There is not one single sign language that all deaf people use – there are different national sign languages, just like French, German, English, etc.
- Lip-reading can help persons that are deaf or hard of hearing but not all persons use this technique.

- Some persons who are deaf or hearing impaired speak clearly while others' speech might sound different.
- Passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be able to perceive the audio announcements and rely on visual displays or the provision of written information to identify upcoming stops.



"I am hard of hearing and take the bus and sometimes the train to work every day. Visual information is crucial for me. If the timetable changes or there are disruptions, I often miss that important bit of information because it is only delivered via loudspeakers and not in writing. It would be helpful for me to have a display with upcoming stops in the bus, for example. If that system is broken and I need to ask the driver, it is important for me that he looks at me and switches on the light so that I can see his face to lip-read."
(Marcel Bobeldijk, Netherlands)

What problem may the person encounter? What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- When the passenger buys a ticket or asks a question, he/she might not be able to hear your reply clearly, which can lead to misunderstanding.
- If there are no dynamic displays indicating the next stop, it can be difficult for the passenger to identify the correct stop, especially if they are not familiar with the city or if the bus is on diversion.
- In case of a diversion or another unforeseen situation, a deaf passenger might not be able to hear your announcements.

How to assist?

- The keyword is communication: follow the passenger's cues to find out if he/she prefers speaking, sign language, gesturing, or writing.
- In case your vehicle is not fitted with a dynamic display announcing the next stop or it does not work properly, signal to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing enough in advance when his/her stop is coming up.
- In case of unforeseen circumstances, make sure that all passengers on board have understood the announcements. If necessary, address them directly to inform them about changes.
- Position yourself to be seen, facing a light source if possible. Face the person, make eye contact and make sure that the person sees your mouth (chewing gum, eating, smoking, or covering your mouth with your hand make it more difficult).
- Speak clearly, slowly, and be specific. Speak out loud, but don't shout – shouting distorts both the sound of words and the lip movement.
- Be aware that the noise of the environment may distort the understanding of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. If needed and possible, get closer or find a quieter space.
- The person who is deaf or hard of hearing may ask you to repeat what you just said. Be patient and do it.
- If you have problems understanding the speech of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, let them know.
- Be aware that many words have the same lip movement. For example, "15" and "50" cannot be distinguished when lip-reading.
- If you have the impression that the communication does not work, be prepared to write your sentences down.

3.4 Persons with speech impairments

How to recognise those passengers?

- Unless you talk to this person, you will probably not recognise it.
- Be careful not to draw quick conclusions: just because somebody has trouble expressing him/herself, this does not mean he/she has any other (intellectual) disabilities.

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- Persons with speech impairments, e.g. somebody who stutters, may feel anxious about communicating and human interaction, especially when under pressure (crowded vehicle, long queue, unfamiliar place, etc.).

What problem may the person encounter? What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- Persons with speech impairments may have difficulties asking for information, buying a ticket and, in case of problems, using the intercom and emergency calls.

How to assist?

- When communicating, give the person your full attention, as you would to somebody who does not speak your language.
- Be patient. Do not interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Speech impairments often get worse when the person is put under pressure.
- If you have trouble understanding a person with a speech impairment, ask him/her to repeat. Ask yes/no questions. If, after trying to clarify, you still do not understand, ask the person to write the question down.
- If you are not sure whether you understood the situation correctly, repeat for verification.



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3.5 Persons with cognitive disabilities (e.g. intellectual disabilities, brain injury, or autism)

How to recognise those passengers?

- Even though some disabilities such as Down's Syndrome are well-known, you will probably not recognise persons with intellectual disabilities in most cases. Intellectual disabilities come in many different forms so do not draw any conclusions from the way somebody looks.
- Passengers with a brain injury may have loss of muscle control or poor impulse control, but this is not necessarily visible. They may also have poor directional orientation and use an assistance dog although seemingly not mobility impaired.
- It may not be obvious if a person is on the autism spectrum. Autism affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. The main symptoms of autism are deficits in social communication and social interaction as well as restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities.

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- The person may have a hard time processing information or expressing himself/herself.
- They may have difficulties orienting themselves.
- They may have difficulties understanding and following instructions.



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- Persons with dyslexia can have problems reading written information.
- Persons with an auditory processing disorder may not be able to process verbal information.
- Persons with autism often experience sensory difficulties, such as increased or reduced sensitivity to light, sound, colour, smell, taste or touch.
- Persons with autism may have difficulty understanding figurative language and idioms.

What problem may the person encounter? What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- The person may find it difficult to ask for information or help, or he/she might be confused by the information and multiple stimuli in a given situation.
- The person may have difficulties reading and identifying the correct stop to get off.
- The person may find it difficult to count the correct amount of money for the fare and/or the change. The person may get stressed in a seemingly "normal" situation, so their behaviour might seem erratic and strange.
- The person might be confused when addressed and he/she may have problems communicating.
- Persons with autism may be uncomfortable with eye contact and direct communication. They may avoid your gaze while listening to you.
- They may also be uncomfortable in crowded places and in situations that are unfamiliar, both of which can be the case on public transport.

- Their tone of voice, body language and facial expressions may not match the content of their communication.
- Some persons with autism are unaware of dangers, such as approaching vehicles.
- In situations of extreme distress, they may shut down and stop responding to outside stimuli.
- In case of an epileptic seizure, the person may be in danger of getting hurt by falling or choking when unconscious.



“Many persons with autism perceive everything with sharper senses: smells, sounds, vision... Therefore it can be very stressful for us to use public transport. For me, it is important that everything is structured and that things are the same so that I know what to expect. For example, the bus should be on time and stop always at the same place so that I can plan ahead. It is also important that the driver is aware of what autism is and how people with autism can behave so that they know how to react if somebody has a ‘meltdown’.”
 (Erika Becerra, Italy)

How to assist?

- Be patient and give the person your full attention, but never assume that he/she is “stupid” and does not understand you.
- If the person seems to have difficulties understanding information or instructions, repeat clearly and slowly what you said, using simple language if necessary.
- If the person asks for it, do not hesitate to write simple instructions down for them. He/she may also ask you for information that is clearly written somewhere.
- Use simple words or use gestures to underline what you are saying, e.g. by pointing at objects to clarify.
- If the person asks for it, indicate clearly the stop where he/she plans to get off. Sometimes they carry a self-made map or other information with them that points out their destination.
- Bear in mind that you cannot expect persons with autism to pick up on non-verbal communication, so be direct if necessary. Also be concrete and specific, e.g. do not use figurative language.
- In case of conflicts between a person with a cognitive disability and other passengers, try to de-escalate the situation and intervene calmly.
- Be patient and give the person space to calm down.
- Should a conflict escalate, give priority to the person with the disability. Should it nevertheless be necessary to ask a person with a cognitive disability to leave the bus, try to ensure that the person is safe and knows how to orient him/herself or is accompanied.
- In case of a seizure, follow your company instructions and inform emergency services. In the meantime, depending on your situation, you can provide first aid or ask others to do so and make sure the person is safe.

3.6 Persons with psychosocial disabilities

How to recognise those passengers?

- Psychosocial disabilities, or mental ill-health, as it more commonly known, are invisible.
- Mental ill-health can affect anyone and covers a wide spectrum.

How does the person perceive his/her surroundings?

- Some people experiencing mental ill health may sometimes experience difficulties coping with daily life and the tasks and interactions it brings.
- Public transport can be a source of stress for some people, as it may trigger feelings of panic, distress, claustrophobia or being overwhelmed.
- Some persons experiencing mental ill health may feel more comfortable travelling with a friend, family member or assistant for emotional support.

What problem may the person encounter?

What may they worry about? What can go wrong?

- Public transport can trigger stress in some people for many different reasons: it can, for example, feel overwhelming coping with the unknowns of a journey. People can also

feel claustrophobic in a crowded environment. Furthermore, it may trigger memories of difficult life events which may feel overwhelming.

- The person may use a variety of coping strategies to manage their feelings of distress or overwhelm, and these coping strategies may look or seem unusual to you.

How to assist?

- Use respectful language and avoid labels like 'mentally ill', or pejorative or stigmatising terms like 'crazy'.
- If the person is distressed, respond to him/her in a calm and polite way – try to see the person and not just the problem.
- If a person mentions that he/she has a psychosocial disability or is experiencing mental ill-health, take it seriously and treat the person with respect. It may be difficult for them to open up about it.
- Offer assistance if the person seems confused, overwhelmed or distressed.
- Answer calmly any questions the person might have; the information may be important to reassure him/her.



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