Annex 1 – Template Laws and Regulations (completed for Belgium)

1) Legislative framework in Belgium

Firstly, there is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been in force in Belgium since 1 August 2009. In our research, Article 9 on accessibility is particularly important. This article requires countries that have ratified the convention to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in life. Accessibility of the built environment is an integral part of this.

The Belgian Constitution also states in Article 11 that every Belgian must be able to enjoy the rights and freedoms granted to Belgians, without discrimination. On 30 March 2021, the new Article 22 came into force. It states that every person with a disability has the right to full inclusion in society. This includes the right to reasonable accommodation.

However important these constitutional articles may be, they rarely lead to the necessary accessibility adjustments in the field. This requires more refined regulations, such as the Flemish urban development regulation with concrete accessibility criteria. However, an evaluation study conducted by the Flemish accessibility agency Inter in 2019 shows that in only 9 of the 147 permit applications was the regulation correctly applied, and none were fully implemented in terms of accessibility. So there is still work to be done.

2) Recruitment and high-quality follow-up of experts by experience

Below are some concrete tips for recruiting experts by experience and then following them up in a high-quality manner.

- Use online platforms such as social media, forums and professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn) to reach potential members. In addition, participate in relevant trade fairs and meetings to meet and recruit potential members in person.

- Collaborate with other organisations and associations to gain access to a pool of qualified candidates. This collaboration helps us find members with specific skills and experience that are essential to our projects.

- Aim for a diverse group of members with different backgrounds, skills and perspectives in order to obtain a wide range of feedback. In the case of test teams, diversity in terms of disabilities is very important (auditory, visual, physical, intellectual and autism).

- Select members with the relevant expertise and appropriate motivation. The list of skills for experienced experts can help with this.

- Make clear agreements.
    - How often will they be involved?
    - Will only transport costs be reimbursed or will a volunteer allowance be paid (and how much)?
    - What exactly is expected of the experience experts during the screening process and afterwards?
    - What is the role of the staff member, experience expert, expert, etc.? And when do we involve whom?

- Provide tailored training, education and support, as well as the necessary individual follow-up interviews.

- Finally, the entire organisation must be aware of the importance of using experience experts to make society more accessible, including at the administrative level. This must be translated into concrete objectives and actions at the policy level.

3) Methodiek

Background

There are two design approaches: universal design and inclusive design. The main difference between the two is that Universal Design is based on the idea that everyone should be able to use services and facilities, while Inclusive Design believes that this is impossible. Adaptations will always include or exclude certain people. The main thing is to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from an adaptation. Both approaches can also be linked to the seven basic principles, also known as the seven Bs:

- Awareness
- Accessibility
- Reliability
- Availability
- Affordability
- Comprehensibility
- Usability

The accessibility chain refers to the coherence between each component in terms of functions, spaces, detailed finishing, etc., and the combination of all these elements. These must ensure that a minimum basic quality is guaranteed. If one of the components in a building or environment is not accessible, then you interrupt the accessibility chain.

Description of the Dito participation tool

With Dito, we have translated the above principles into a concrete tool for testing offices for accessibility. Our team of six experts has a variety of disabilities and therefore takes as many possible barriers into account as possible. These are the following five disabilities: physical, intellectual, visual, auditory and autism. The following four pillars are included in the screening:

- Office environment
- Publicly accessible service area
- Office space for employees
- Evacuation/fire safety

The following four questions and accompanying example questions serve as a guideline:

- Is the office easily accessible? Is the nearest bus stop accessible? Can you easily cross the street as a blind person or wheelchair user?
- Is the office easily accessible? Can everyone get in and out easily? Even if you cannot use stairs.
- Are all facilities in the office usable? Can wheelchair users or visually impaired people easily use the coffee machine or printer? Are the toilets accessible?
- Is all information legible and understandable for everyone? Are pictograms used to display information in an accessible way? Do the counters use induction loops for the hearing impaired?

What exactly does this screening involve? We visit the site and examine the bottlenecks point by point. We start with the surroundings, then move on to the public service area and finish with the office space. The above questions serve as a guideline and are further refined in a checklist (see separate appendix) that serves as a framework during the screening. We then discuss the bottlenecks together and formulate recommendations.

Afterwards, we collect all the input in a report and discuss it with the responsible facility manager. He/she will indicate what can and cannot be included in the renovation and why. Dito's participation tool is a good start for testing the accessibility of the built environment, but it still lacks professional substantiation. How do we reach the right profile of experts by experience? What criteria should we use during the screening process? How do we ensure high-quality follow-up of the experts by experience?

Good examples

Everyone everywhere: criteria for restaurants and cafés

The Flemish accessibility agency Inter has developed a checklist to evaluate the accessibility of restaurants and cafés. This information is then added to the website www.iedereenoveral.be. This allows users to see which restaurants and cafés are accessible and to what extent in each city/municipality. They are awarded a medal for this. Gold: can be used independently. Silver: usable with assistance. Bronze: attention to accessibility. None: does not meet requirements.

The checklist provides a fairly comprehensive picture of the accessibility of the restaurant or café in question. However, the checklist is rather technical in nature and does not allow for the input of an expert with practical experience. This is because it is completed by the manager of the restaurant or café. As a result, interesting feedback may be lost.

Brochure 'City without barriers Ghent'

The sounding board group of the city of Ghent consists of a group of experts who advise the city of Ghent on the accessibility of public buildings and public spaces. Together with the accessibility officer, they developed a brochure with accessibility tips and good examples. It also includes a list of criteria and photos that an accessible public building must meet. This list is supplemented with concrete good and bad examples and photos and can therefore serve as inspiration for the development of a checklist. The following elements are included: entrance doors, entrance hall and reception desk, lifts, sanitary facilities and signage.

Checklist

Example from Dito's participation tool:

Corridors:
- Contrast floor
- Flat surface
- Thresholds
- Loose or protruding obstacles
- Blind guidance

Findings:

Possible improvements:

Example from the Everyone Everywhere checklist:

Accessibility of consumption area

Is at least part of the consumption area accessible without thresholds (less than 2 cm) or with a (movable) ramp or lift? *
Yes
No, you enter the consumption area via a step or staircase.

What is the height of the (first) step? ..... cm
How wide is the narrowest passage on the route? * ..... cm

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