

Checklist for Assessment of Polling Station Accessibility



An auditor in Zimbabwe inspects a building entrance and measures the size of a ramp that would be needed to make the polling station accessible.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Accessible polling stations are an important part of ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to participate in elections on an equal basis as others. However, many polling stations are located in areas that are difficult for persons with disabilities to reach, or have an inaccessible structure that makes it challenging for persons with disabilities to enter the polling room and vote. Conducting an accessibility assessment of polling stations beforehand is a good opportunity to examine and improve the physical environment for all voters. In many countries, schools are used as polling stations so improvements to their infrastructure will have the added benefit of making the school accessible to children and teachers with disabilities.

The *Checklist for Assessment of Polling Station Accessibility* is a helpful tool for election management bodies and civil society organizations to determine the level of accessibility of potential polling stations before Election Day. It is based on international standards of accessibility, including the guidelines established by the Americans with Disabilities Act from the United States. Below are some general instructions for its use.

When to use the checklist

Ideally, assessments of polling stations will be conducted well in advance of Election Day, usually five or six months beforehand. This provides enough time for election management officials to develop solutions for polling stations that are found to be inaccessible.

How to use the checklist

There are five sections in this checklist:

- Polling station location
- Building entrance
- Getting to the polling room
- Polling room
- Restrooms

Each section has a short list of questions that are intended to determine whether that feature of a polling station is accessible. A “yes” answer to a question means that a feature is accessible; a “no” answer means that the feature is not accessible. This checklist is designed so that the more “yes” answers there are, the more accessible a polling station is (and vice versa).

Organizing an audit team

Usually, the polling stations with a larger number of registered voters with disabilities (or that are more likely to have voters with disabilities) are the ones that are audited first. Disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) are in a good position to advise on which polling stations will have more voters with disabilities, depending on where their membership lives.

For an effective audit team, the following stakeholders should be included:

- **An election official from the election management body**

The election official will assist the audit team in determining which buildings will be used as polling sites. Participating in the audit will also help the official learn about barriers encountered by voters with disabilities.

- **Persons with disabilities**

It is critical to ensure that persons with disabilities – who know their own needs best! – are active in the audit team. A DPO can be a great resource and partner.

- **National disability government agencies**

There may be a government organization that supports and protects disability rights on a national level. For example, there is a National Council for Disability in Uganda. If they are available in your country, it would be good to have at least one representative on the audit team.

- **Ministry of Education and school principals** (if applicable)

In many countries, polling stations are held at schools. If this is true for your country, it will be important to have a representative from the national Department of Education to support any changes to school buildings that are used as polling stations.

- **National department that manages infrastructure**
(e.g. Department of Public Works and Highways)

Having a representative from a government agency that is responsible for building and maintaining infrastructure (like roads and sidewalks) is important if they are the only ones allowed to make changes to government buildings in your country. They can ensure that recommended changes are implemented. Negotiating a partnership between the election management body, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Transportation to co-finance any adaptations to polling centers will help spread the costs.

Steps for conducting an accessibility audit

1. Determine who will be on the audit team. Collect and organize their contact information.
2. Meet with the Election Officer to determine which polling stations will receive an audit.
3. Gather the necessary materials needed to conduct an audit:
 - a. At least one three (3) meter tape measure
 - b. A clipboard for each auditor
 - c. A pen for each auditor
 - d. A printed copy of the checklist for each auditor
 - e. A camera
4. Contact members of the audit team to coordinate a time and date to conduct an audit.
 - a. Ensure the time and date is acceptable to the person or organization in charge of the polling station (e.g. a school principal if the polling station is held in a school).
 - b. If needed, make sure someone is available to unlock the doors so the team can enter the building.
5. Prior to the audit, host an orientation meeting with the audit team.
 - a. Explain why the audit is important, and who it will benefit.
 - b. Explain the steps of the audit (see step #6 below).
 - c. Provide good and bad examples of accessibility at polling stations for each audit category (e.g. polling station location, building entrance, polling room, and restroom).
6. On the day of the audit, meet at the polling station.
 - a. Give each auditor a pen, a printed copy of the checklist, and a clipboard. There should be at least one tape measure and a camera that can be shared by the team.
 - b. If a camera is available, take photographs of **both** good and bad examples of accessibility at every location (outside the building, at the doorway, inside the hallway, inside the polling room, and inside the restroom).
 - c. Begin the audit outside of the building. Inspect the roads, how far away the polling station is from others, and any sidewalks there might be.
 - d. Approach the building, and examine the building entrance.
 - e. Enter the building, and go to the polling room. Look at the hallways, if any, that the voters will have to go through.

- f. Enter the polling room, and examine the space.
 - g. Finally, see if there is a restroom nearby that will be available for voters to use. If yes, then check to see if it is accessible.
- 7. Collect all of the audit results. Read and analyze the answers. Write a brief report (about 5 pages) on your findings. Include photographs in your report.
- 8. Share the results with the audit team. Follow up with the election management body and/or the education or infrastructure ministries to ensure that the necessary improvements are made.

Checklist for Assessment of Polling Station Accessibility

Name of Auditor	
Name of City or Village	
Address of Polling Station	
Date	

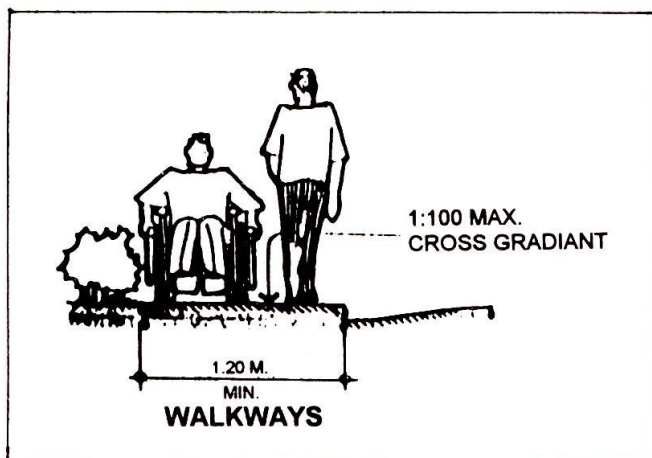
No.	Checklist Items	Yes	No	Notes
A	Polling station location	Yes	No	Notes
1	Are there flat roads next to the polling station?			
2	Is the polling station located inside a village, town, or city?			
3	Are there other polling stations nearby that voters can also visit?			
4	Is there a manageable number of people registered to vote at this polling station, so that it will not be too crowded on Election Day?			
5	If there is a sidewalk leading to the polling station entrance, is there a ramp so that people with disabilities can move from the road to the sidewalk?			



In many places, if ramps do exist, it is not uncommon for them to be too small or steep. This ramp in Guatemala (photo at left) is a good example of a ramp that is not steep and that is **90 cm** wide for easy access by people using wheelchairs.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

5B	If there is a sidewalk leading to the polling station entrance, is the sidewalk wide enough that a person using a wheelchair could easily get to the polling station?			
----	---	--	--	--



As the illustration to the left shows, an ideal sidewalk should be about **1.20 meters** wide. This leaves enough room for a person using a wheelchair to easily maneuver and turn around if needed.

Source: United Architects of the Philippines

B	Building entrance	Yes	No	Notes
6	Is there a sign with a universal symbol of accessibility showing where people with disabilities can enter the building?			



There are a number of international accessibility icons. To the left is one example. Icons can help people with disabilities identify accessible routes to enter buildings.

Source: Sara Hendren and Brian Glenney

7	If there are stairs to enter the building, is there also a ramp?			
---	--	--	--	--

7A	Is the ramp strong enough to hold a person using a wheelchair?			
7B	Is the ramp wide enough so that a person using a wheelchair could move up the ramp?			
7C	Is the ramp low to the ground, and not very steep?			



This is an example of a ramp that is accessible: it is low to the ground, and is not very steep. In general, **for every 30 cm that the ramp is on the ground, the ramp should rise by 2.5 cm**. This is a gentle slope that ensures that people with disabilities will not tip over or fall.

Source: United Architects of the Philippines

8	Is the door of the entrance kept open?			
9	Is the ground of the doorway flat?			



This doorway in Egypt would be difficult for a person with a disability to use. The ground is not flat, so people using wheelchairs would not be able to enter, and the gaps in the door mean it would be easy for someone to trip and fall.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

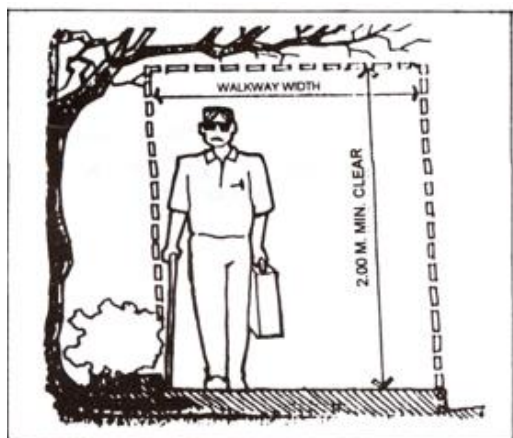
10	When the door is open, is it wide enough for a person using a wheelchair to get through?			
C	Getting to the polling room	Yes	No	Notes
11	If there are there stairs in the building that voters must use to get to the polling room, is there also a ramp?			



There were no ramps available in this polling station in Kosovo, so this person was unable to access the station without assistance. A ramp ensures that all voters are able to access the polling room independently and on an equal basis as others.

Source: HandiKos and Democracy in Action (Kosovo)

12	If there is a hallway, is it cleared of obstacles both on the ground and above on the ceiling so that people with disabilities can get to the polling room?			
----	---	--	--	--



Besides ensuring that the hallway is at least **90 cm** wide, there should also be an overhead clearance of **2 meters** so that persons who are blind or have low vision do not accidentally walk into objects like signs or low-hanging lights.

Source: United Architects of the Philippines

13	Is the polling room on the ground floor?			
13A	If the polling room is not on the ground floor, is there an elevator or lift available?			
D	Polling room	Yes	No	Notes
14	To enter the room, is there a door that is kept open?			
15	Is the door wide enough for a person using a wheelchair to enter?			
16	Is the ground of the doorway flat?			
17	Inside the room, is there enough light to be able to see ballots and papers clearly?			



Polling rooms that are well-lit (such as this room from Guatemala, at left) are important for people with low vision to be able to read ballots and for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to see peoples' faces so that they are better able to understand speech.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

18	Is there a wide, clear path for voters with disabilities to move around easily?			
----	---	--	--	--



In this spacious polling station with wide, clear and flat floors, there is plenty of room for voters to freely move around as needed.

Source: Voter Education Network for the People (JPPR), Indonesia

18A	Is the ground flat, with no holes?			
18B	Can chairs and tables be moved out of the way, if needed?			
19	Is there space on the walls to put signs or posters that explain the voting process?			
20	Is there room to have at least one table and one ballot box that is easy to reach for people using a wheelchair?			



This ballot box in Nepal is placed at the correct height (**75 cm**) and has been placed on the ground to ensure easy access by all voters.

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

E	Restrooms	Yes	No	Notes
21	Is there a restroom near the polling room?			
22	Is the door to the restroom wide enough for a person using a wheelchair to get through?			
23	Is the ground in the doorway flat?			
24	Is there a toilet that has handrails for people with disabilities to use if they need to?			