ABLE (Accessibility assessment for Built Environment) India - Framework for self evaluation and certification

As India is progressing to become one of the largest global economy, the idea of universality, non-discrimination, equity and inclusion becomes a non-negotiable aspect of urban development. Accessibility is a multi-layered, multi-dimensional and multi contextual aspect of the built environment. Key elements of an urban built environment, information systems, infrastructure development and their internal services play an active role in shaping one's accessibility experience. Universal Design is an important approach, philosophy and a guiding code that aims to provide a constructive and inclusive environment to respond to the needs of diverse populations including persons with disabilities, women, parents with infants and toddlers, elderly, children etc. This approach has been adopted in the new "Harmonized Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India, 2021" which through the prescribed design standards, suggests ways of making built environments accessible and usable by all.

Since the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD Act)**, 2016; the narrative of disability inclusion shifted from the social model to a rights-based model. It complements India's obligation to the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007; to which India is also a signatory. The convention proclaims that disability results from an interaction of impairments with attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders full and active participation in society on an equal basis. Likewise, the RPwD Act focuses on empowering persons with disabilities and providing them with equal opportunities (Article 21). The act focuses on the significance of building seamlessly accessible environments to facilitate the independent movement of persons with disabilities. Articles 40 & 41 reiterate the need to lay down the robust standards of accessibility for the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including appropriate technologies and systems, and other facilities and services provided to the public. The RPwD act encourages existing infrastructure and building premises to be accessible for persons with disabilities. Article 44 focuses on the mandatory observance of accessibility norms.

In this regard, assessment and evaluation of accessibility features become integral to the holistic approach of making universally accessible built environments. The overall purpose of the framework is to assess the building design, evaluate the level of accessibility of the built infrastructure, identify the gaps in provisions and encourage best practices. To promote better compliance with accessibility, "**ABLE (Accessibility assessment for Built Environment) India - Framework for self evaluation and certification**" is being developed by the Ministry of Housing of Urban Affairs. The framework acts as an assessment tool to **measure and rate a building's accessibility compliance/performance by the building architects and engineers**. Just like the rating system for environmental sustainability, the framework also aims to evaluate accessibility compliance in the entire building planning cycle as well as its operation and maintenance phase results over its full life.

About the Committee

In this regard, a committee was formulated by the Ministry of Housing and Urban affairs, on recommendations of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the purpose of development of a set of guidelines and provisions for self Certification of accessible building and placement of Plaques from a thorough review of the current guidelines, specifications and practices on accessibility certification. The committee consists of officials from active stakeholders and domain experts working for universal accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities and interacted periodically for a period of four months to formulate the framework.

Process adopted

The following systematic process was adopted for the development of ABLE- INDIA

- Systematic review of the existing checklists and popular rating systems of other domains including GRIHA etc
- Identification of elements of the built environment critical for accessibility evaluation of public building
- Focused discussions and deliberations of the experts through virtual and in-person meetings and interactions
- Formulation of a scientific methodology for scoring and grading - Identification of a lighter scale to capture the perception of accessibility. The DELPHI survey was conducted to identify the weightage of each element.
- Development of draft framework

Comments and suggestions from the beneficiaries, organizations, professionals and city officials are invited on the draft framework. In the final stage, ground truthing by individuals will be taken up to ensure objectivity of the framework.

ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

Applicability

- The present framework is developed for public buildings.

Scoring System & Calculation

- Each parameter is to be marked on a (likert) scale of 1,3,5 marks on a likert scale based on the level/perception of accessibility. The objective questions will be marked for 5 marks.
- The elements which are not provided due to different design and building functions can be marked "Not Applicable" and will be exempted from the calculations. Although their absence should not hamper the accessibility in the building.
- Each element is also categorized as mandatory and optional. The mandatory element should have at least 3 marks for every mandatory parameter and score at least 75% of its total marks (based on applicable parameters) to be certified.
- The acquired score of each element will be multiplied by its weightage to get the final score of the parameter.

Rating System

A *grade Building*	**90%** or more of applicable parameters

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B *grade Building*	**80%** or more of applicable parameters
C *grade Building*	**70%** or more of applicable parameters
D *grade Building*	**60%** or more of applicable parameters

“A” Grade buildings will be eligible for placement of a plaque for accessibility.

Eligibility for Certification

1. ***Competent Authority for Self-assessment and certification***
    - Engineer with a B .Tech or equivalent degree in civil engineering/ structural engineering or aligned building service engineering from a reputed college.
    - Architect with a B. Arch degree with valid COA registration

Validity of the certification

The certificate is valid for 5 years after which periodic audits should be conducted every 2 years.

The framework is available on-

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1OcixQ6lRJ_uxl2Fzu8iCUU-hDSj0RTZn?usp=sharing

Disclaimer

- *This evolving framework for Accessibility assessment is an outcome of an on-going endeavor of initiating accessibility reviews in the urban built environment of India. It is expected to continue its evolution and refinement with the changing scope of accessibility.*
- *The present framework is applicable only to public buildings (including govt/private offices)*
- *This is a copyrighted document. The framework is an initiative of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the authorship of which lies with the committee members.*

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