

Ensuring public access to information (target 16.10)

This section will focus on ensuring public access to information for persons with disabilities (target 16.10). Public access to information can be defined as seeking, receiving and imparting information held by public bodies. Information can be transmitted in various ways, in digital or hard formats.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the right to seek and receive information. In line with this right, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: (i) have access to information (Article 9); and (ii) can exercise the right of freedom to seek and receive information on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice (Article 21).

Another important legal landmark is the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities (2013), which addresses the barriers that persons with visual impairments face in accessing published works by introducing limitations and exceptions to copyright rules in order to permit reproduction, distribution and the availability of published works in formats designed to be accessible to persons with visual impairments or print disabilities, and by permitting the exchange of these works across borders by organizations that serve these persons.

This section presents data and evidence depicting the current situation and trends in access to public information for persons with disabilities, discusses current practices and concludes with recommendations to achieve this target by 2030 for persons with disabilities.

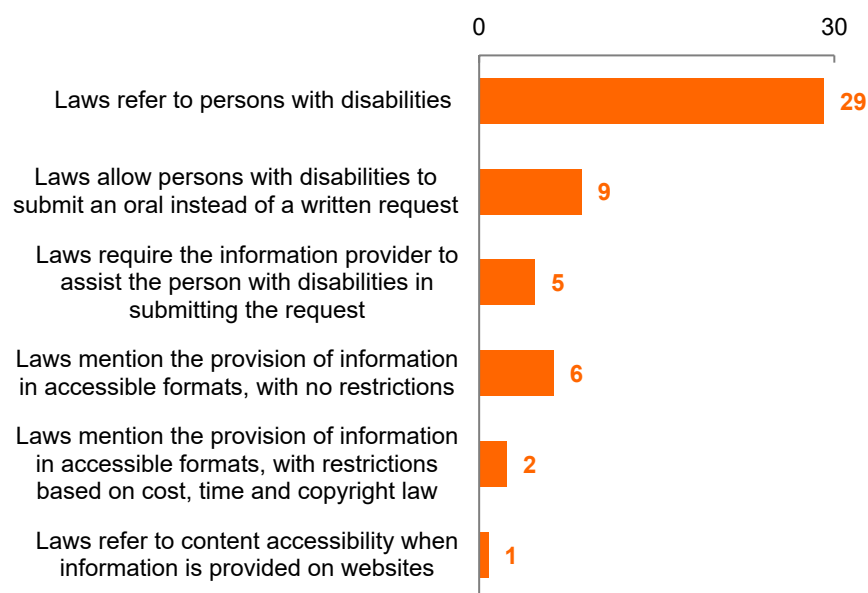
Current situation and progress so far

For many persons with disabilities, accessing public information is a path full of obstacles, with many countries lacking legal requirements for information to be shared in formats and languages that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

SDG indicator 16.10.2 monitors the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory or policy guarantees for public access to information. These guarantees are often regulated by national laws on access to information, but the rights of persons with disabilities are absent in most of these laws and, when reference is made to persons with disabilities and accessibility, the scope is limited. Among 127 countries with laws on access to information, only 29 per cent of countries refer to persons with disabilities and their rights in these laws (Figure 227). With regard to making a request for access to information, only 9 per cent of countries allow applicants with disabilities to submit an oral request where a written request would normally be required. Additionally, only 5 per cent of countries require the information provider to assist the persons with disabilities in submitting the request when their disability prevents them from doing so in a manner prescribed by the law. In terms of the provision of information in accessible formats, only 6 per cent of countries mention the provision of information to persons with disabilities in an accessible format, and another 2 per cent of countries mention this provision but allow

for restrictions in the provision of accessible formats based on cost, time and copyright laws. Only 1 per cent of countries refers to content accessibility for persons with disabilities when information is provided on websites.

Figure 227. Percentage of countries that include provisions for persons with disabilities and for accessibility in their laws on access to information, in 127 countries, in 2020.



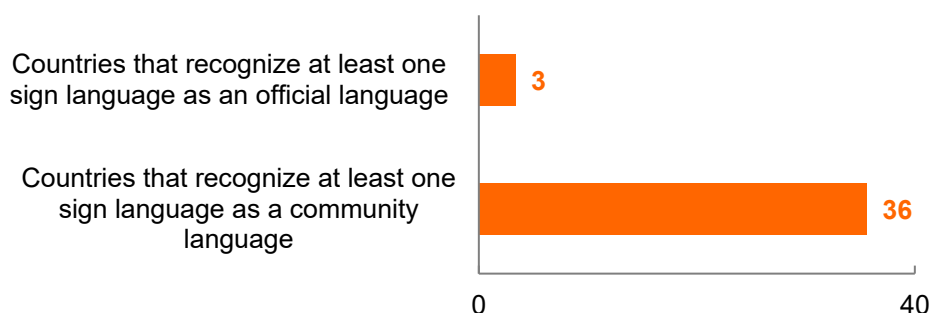
Source: UNESCO (2023).⁵⁷⁶

Public information presented in national government online portals is largely not accessible: 63 per cent of online national governmental portals worldwide do not comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (see the chapter on target 9.c and the chapter on targets 16.6 and 16.7). Africa has the largest percentage of countries with governmental websites that are not accessible for persons with disabilities (87 per cent) and Europe the lowest (30 per cent). Moreover, lack of access to ICT can also be a barrier to access public information for persons with disabilities, as public information is increasingly shared digitally. Many ICTs are not affordable and not accessible for persons with disabilities (see the chapter on target 9.c).

To ensure equal access to public information, information needs to be presented in languages used by persons with disabilities. Yet, in many countries, public information is typically not made available in sign languages. Among 90 countries, only 3 per cent recognize at least one sign language as an official language; and only 36 per cent recognize at least one sign language as a community language (Figure 228).

Barriers to persons with disabilities persist in public services that are often used to access public information. For example, a survey of 131 public libraries in 15 countries worldwide, indicated that only 49 per cent of libraries have a local policy on accessibility for persons with disabilities, only 15 per cent have a budget for accessibility, and only 10 per cent have all their staff trained on accessibility (with 37 per cent indicating that no staff has been trained on accessibility).⁵⁶² Accessible features are more prevalent, with 85 per cent of the libraries having features to make them accessible to persons with physical disabilities, but only 53 per cent for persons with sensory disabilities and 57 per cent for persons with cognitive disabilities. Overall, 59 per cent of these libraries cooperate with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, and many libraries provide dedicated services for persons with disabilities to access information, including for blind persons and persons with visual impairments (42 per cent of libraries), for persons with disabilities who are homebound (40 per cent of libraries), for persons with mobility impairments (37 per cent of libraries), for persons with print disabilities (34 per cent of libraries), for deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments (27 per cent of libraries), for persons with autism (25 per cent of libraries), for persons who have difficulty holding a book (15 per cent of libraries), for persons with mental or psychosocial disabilities (15 per cent of libraries) and for the deafblind (9 per cent of libraries).

Figure 228. Percentage of countries that recognize sign languages as community languages and as official languages, in 90 countries, in 2023.

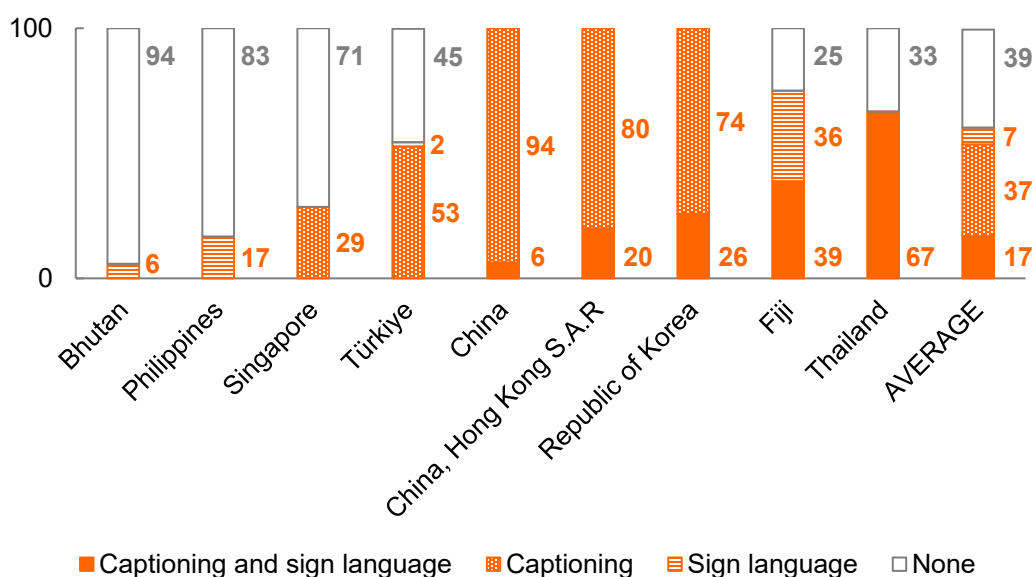


Source: *UNESCO World Atlas of Languages*.⁵⁷⁷

Many national public TV channels also lack features to make them accessible to persons with disabilities. In nine countries or areas in Asia and the Pacific, on average, only 17 per cent of newscasts on national public TV channels include both captioning and sign language, 37 per cent include captioning only, 7 per cent include sign language only and 39 per cent do not include any of these accessibility features (Figure 229). The availability of these accessibility services in news programmes on national public TV vary from country to country. In Bhutan, only 6 per cent of newscasts include accessibility features, and the only feature available is sign language. In Thailand 67 per cent of newscasts include both captioning and sign language. In China, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) and in the Republic of Korea, all newscasts include captioning.

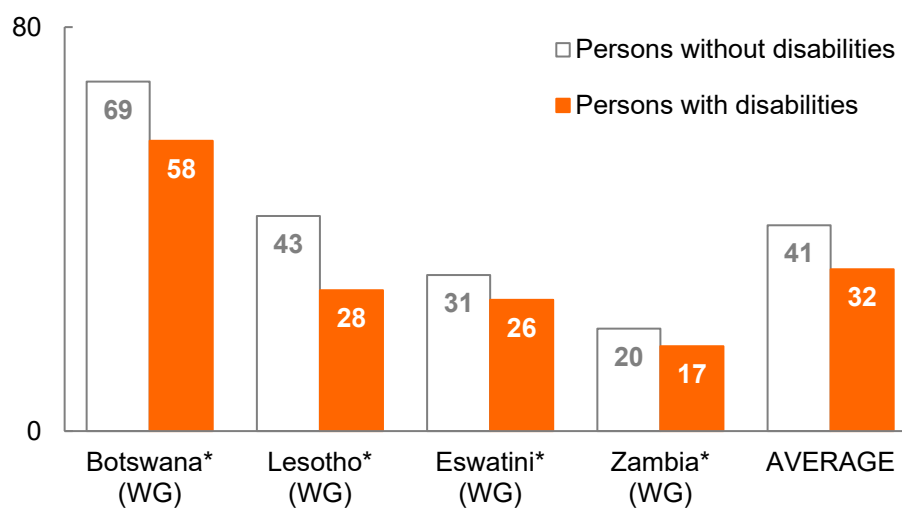
Moreover, persons with disabilities tend to have less access to sources of information that can act as alternatives or complements to public information. In particular, since persons with disabilities tend to have fewer financial resources and are less likely to be employed than others (see the chapters on Goal 1 and Goal 8), access to information may not be affordable to them, resulting in lower access. For instance, in four countries in Africa, on average, only 32 per cent of persons with disabilities can afford a newspaper compared to 41 per cent of persons without disabilities (Figure 230). In all four countries a lower percentage of persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities can afford a newspaper, with the widest gap observed in Lesotho (15 percentage points). Differences between men and women with disabilities in these countries are negligible (Figure 231), but marked differences exist between persons with disabilities living in rural versus urban areas, with a higher percentage of persons with disabilities in urban areas (50 per cent on average) than in rural areas (34 per cent on average) being able to afford a newspaper (Figure 232).

Figure 229. Percentage of duration of news programmes of national public TV channels that contain captioning and sign language, in 9 countries or areas in Asia and the Pacific, in 2022 or latest year available.



*Note: S.A.R. refers to Special Administrative Region.
Source: ESCAP.¹⁴*

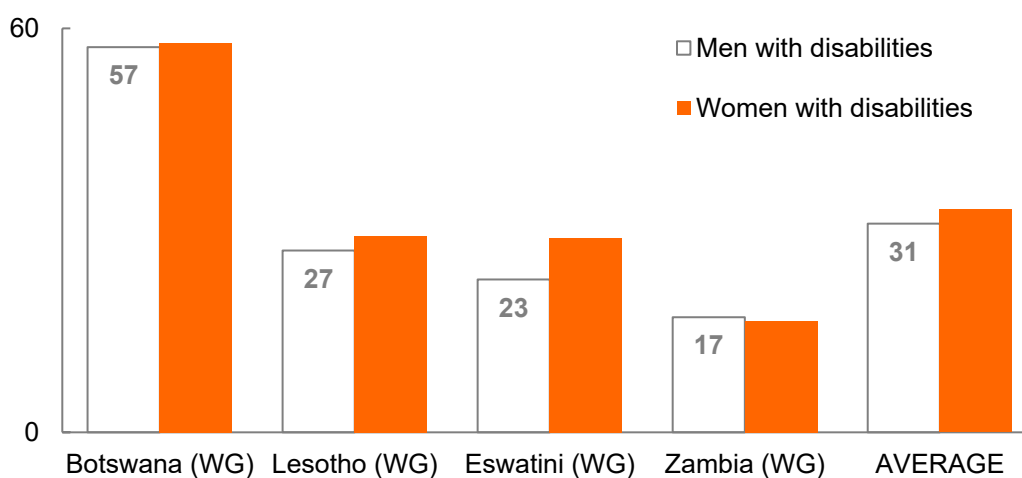
Figure 230. Percentage of persons who can afford a newspaper, by disability status, in 4 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.



Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning. An asterisk () indicates that the difference between persons with and without disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5 per cent.*

Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF⁹).

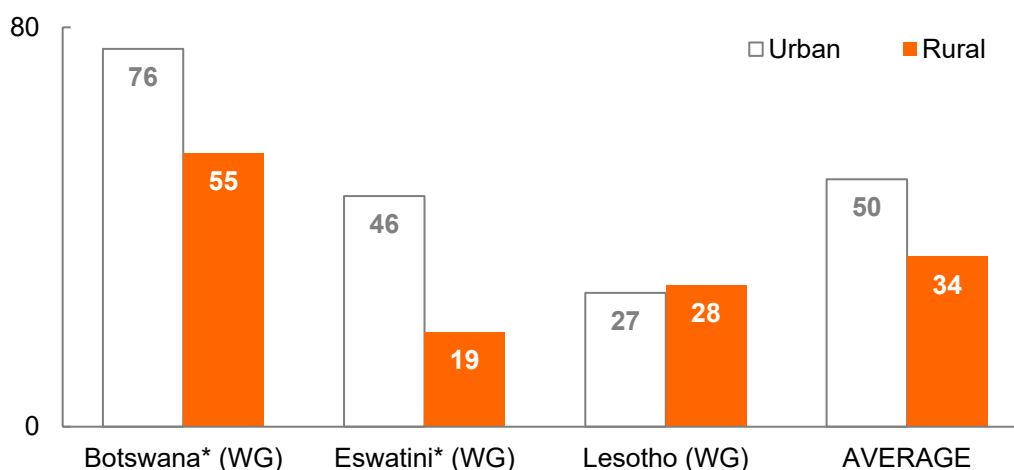
Figure 231. Percentage of persons with disabilities who can afford a newspaper, by sex, in 4 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.



Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning. An asterisk () indicates that the difference between men and women with disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5 per cent.*

Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF⁹).

Figure 232. Percentage of persons with disabilities who can afford a newspaper, by area of residence, in 3 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.



Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning. An asterisk () indicates that the difference between persons with disabilities in rural and urban areas is statistically significant at the level of 5 per cent.*
Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF⁹).

Summary of findings and the way forward

Persons with disabilities face a number of barriers to pursuing equal access to public information. National laws on access to public information do not always include the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities and lack accessibility provisions: only 6 per cent of countries mention the provision of public information in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, with no restrictions; and only 1 per cent of countries refer to content accessibility for persons with disabilities when the information is provided online. Moreover, public information is not always available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, such as easy-to-understand and sign language. One barrier to a wider use of sign language in the provision of public information is the lower number of countries that recognize sign languages as official languages: only 3 per cent of countries recognize at least one sign language as an official language.

Accessibility policies and features are also lacking in public bodies that typically provide public information. For instance, only 49 per cent of public libraries worldwide have a policy on accessibility for persons with disabilities and only 15 per cent have a budget for accessibility; in Asia and the Pacific, only 17 per cent of newscasts on national public TV channels include both captioning and sign language.

One barrier to persons with disabilities to access information in general is the lack of financial resources. For example, in some countries in Africa, less than 30 per cent of persons with disabilities can afford a newspaper, with persons with disabilities in rural areas being less likely to be able to afford a newspaper.

To enhance access to public information for persons with disabilities, these issues need to be addressed, namely by the following recommended actions:

1. Adopt or revise current laws on access to information to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities. Countries should take steps towards an inclusive and comprehensive legislative framework containing minimum mandatory accessibility standards that ensure access to public information for all persons with disabilities, without discrimination on any grounds including but not limited to type of disability, geographical location, financial means and language capabilities.

2. Raise awareness and conduct trainings on the rights of persons with disabilities among staff involved in access to public information. Train public employees on disability and accessibility to improve access and accessibility of information. Training modules should discuss accessibility standards and available tools and methods that could be utilized for enhancing the accessibility of the information. Involved persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the design and implementation of awareness-raising campaigns and trainings.

3. Allocate adequate human and financial resources to ensure accessibility of public information. Develop an accessibility budget for public bodies involved in access to public information and hire the necessary human resources to make access to public information fully accessible to all persons with disabilities.

4. Monitor and evaluate access and accessibility of public information to persons with disabilities. Conduct periodic surveys and collect feedback from persons with disabilities to understand and overcome the obstacles they face in accessing public information.