

Ri Global Guide on Accessibility in Enterprises

Friedrich Mehrhoff and Marlon Becker*

Centre of Expertise for Inclusive Organizations, USA

***Corresponding author:** Marlon Becker, Centre of Expertise for Inclusive Organizations, Rehabilitation International, United Nations Plaza New York New York 10017 USA

Received: 📅 July 01, 2022

Published: 📅 July 25, 2022

Introduction

The following guidelines are based on an international study of DGUV in 2019, which was commissioned for the German Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. These golden rules are dedicated to enterprises in the private and first labor market regardless of size and branch of the companies. They are divided into two sections. The first ten rules, explained in part II, are addressed to the stakeholders within enterprises, preferable the senior management. The following seven rules in part III are dedicated to stakeholders in the society, preferable the government and responsible ministries. In part IV the outlook includes future aspects and contact addresses. The guidelines are published by Rehabilitation International after a brought discussion at latest during the World Congress on Rehabilitation in September 2021 in Aarhus/Denmark. They are transferable also to the public sector, which is even more accessible than in the private enterprises in most jurisdiction in the world. In any case a progress in accessibility increases the chance of employing persons with disabilities in the first labor market around the world and contributes to the implementation of article 27 UN-CRPD.

Ten Golden Rules for Stakeholders within Private Companies

Integrate accessibility in the enterprise's diversity strategy: Most of the enterprises representing best practice examples in order to reduce barriers in working life integrate accessibility in a superordinate strategy, which comprises diverse social elements within a company. Three major approaches are relevant: Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Development Goals and Health and Safety. Regardless of age, sex, religion and nationality - these enterprises reflect an inclusive society from outside in an inside of their organization. Part of this diversity strategy contains the occupational inclusion of persons with disabilities. Such inclusive enterprises intend to retain employability by preventive oriented means of health and safety measures. And they point out their social and environmental responsibility of enterprises for the

society. Extending the requirements of accessibility as part of these approaches provides a synergetic effect. The personal and financial resources that are required in order to make a sustainable and comprehensive change within an enterprise can combined with progress in making working-places more accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities. FLEX (www.flex.com), an American enterprise in China, represents one of these kind of best practice companies in the world. They integrate a sheltered workshop, which in most countries are provided outside of enterprises, within their own company: Inclusiveness pure.

Convince the top management to consider inclusion as a business case: Regardless of bigger and smaller enterprises the support of the top management in companies is one of the key-factor when it comes to formulating a proper enterprise's structure in order to tackle accessibility in a holistic manner. The understanding of accessibility as part of a business case and not only as a charity approach encourages entrepreneurs/top managers to tap the potential of persons with disability in their role as employees, experts and customers. Retaining the employability and the satisfaction of skilled workers cause a return on investment in many countries. Costs for providing accessible working conditions for workers with special needs are efficient related to the outcomes, especially for these enterprises which are working with clients in the private services sector. Around 20 per cent of the population in each country, including elderly persons, is disabled and need the same accessible infrastructure than the workers. Lloyds Banks Group, an English Bank like other banks and insurance companies worldwide, represents one of the best practice examples by using a strategy of providing workplace accommodation using the expertise of an external service provider.

Collaborate with competent external service providers: Particularly small and medium enterprises might not be able to provide the expertise and manpower needed to approach a successful inclusion and accessibility progress in a holistic manner. Therefore, external service providers might be an option to get

the support for enterprises required. Based on their experiences and their resources, external service providers could assist mainly small and medium enterprises both in identifying barriers in the operational processes or the working environment and in solving their challenges. Especially some characteristics of disabilities need a specific support from outside like persons with psycho-social disorders/mental diseases, whose behavior seems strange for colleagues without knowing the symptoms and who need sheltered working conditions for being included in an accessible open labor market. Shekulotov, an enterprise using a comprehensive service concept for these disability group in Israel, represents a best practice example, which could be transferred in other enterprises/countries.

Create a position for a person in charge for accessibility:

Promoting accessibility in enterprises does not work out by initiating merely single initiatives or short-term campaigns. Making a profound improvement within enterprises requires the implementation of structures and the determination of responsibilities in order to mobilize personal and financial resources as well. Setting up a position on the top management level helps to include the matter of accessibility in the decision-making process from the very early beginning. If accessibility is included in any kind of the decision process in a company, it will avoid or reduce the need of reasonable adjustments in a single case in a later stage, what makes investments more efficient. Scandic, a hotel chain based in Sweden, appointed one expert in a high ranked position in order to care for accessibility and accommodate working surroundings in the hotel buildings for a long time. In all enterprises with more than five severe disabled workers at least one representative should be elected as member of the work councils, a participation tool in Germany. She/he is responsible for all disability-related issues at work including accessibility.

Initiate awareness-raising trainings for senior management and colleagues:

In-house events, where top managers get the chance to share best practices and existing experiences in a sheltered and interactive space, reduce stereotypes against persons with disabilities and illustrate the potential that comes along with persons with disabilities. The conviction of the top-management is important, but the understanding of the workforce is at least equally important, especially of colleagues who work directly with persons with disabilities. Misunderstandings, prejudices or uncertainties endanger the performance of the entire company and the goal of being inclusive. Personal experiences and open dialogues create an atmosphere where close collaborations are enhanced. Lots of service providers from outside, like using disabled persons as teachers, can raise and change an internal awareness of the productiveness of persons with disabilities by breaking down barriers. Capgemini, a French consulting firm in private businesses in Krakow/Poland, is one of them cooperating closely with the Krakow university.

Involve persons with disabilities in fundamental decision-making processes:

Nothing about us, without us! This global slogan started during the legislative process of CRPD. It is inevitable having the perspective of persons with disability included in all

decisions which provide services for workers with disabilities in a company. In order to improve accessibility within enterprises and to make decisions about the improvement of employment of persons with disabilities, the experience and expertise of the respective persons must be included. This kind of peer-approach also helps by educating colleagues to understand the needs and abilities of their disabled co-workers with respect to the previous golden rule 5. Fond-Deystvuv, a service provider in Russia, trains employees in various enterprises how to manage the communication for example with blind or deaf co-workers so successful, because the trainers themselves are blind or deaf. The American firm in China (Zhuhai), Flex (see above 1), employs a special team with knowledge in sign language as part of its own staff, who knows the needs of stakeholders within this enterprise.

Utilize technical innovations to create new forms of working

Technical innovations, especially electronic communication equipment, can open up new business fields for persons with disabilities, particularly for people, who can work from home using their accessible and familiar living conditions. Of course, technical innovations bring also risks to persons with disability and that is why the utilization of those innovations has to be deliberated well. Otherwise, technical innovations often are supposed to reduce structural barriers in buildings. Therefore, the needs of persons with any kind of limitation has to be considered in order to avoid the creation of new barriers. One of those best practice enterprises was found in Malaysia: Genashtim. It represents a firm, which systematically hire persons with disabilities and provides an inclusive communication among employees in order to avoid segregation and isolation for those, who work from home. By taking this challenge into account tele- and homeworking can easily increase the number of accessible working places and the rate of employed persons with mostly mobile limitations. This kind of digital working from home has been obvious for many persons around the world during corona-pandemic since 2020.

Re-design business processes with the help of consultants:

Analyzing and streamlining business processes within enterprises is usually not a common social consultancy. Traditionally experts from unemployment agencies are knocking at the door of a company to ask for hiring a person with disabilities. Since some years the Inclusive Unemployment Agency in Netherlands (UWV) started a paradigm-shift. Well trained experts open the door of enterprises, mostly in the health care sector like hospitals, to offer concrete methods to analyze the workflow. The goal: Breaking down barriers that arise from not suitable tasks by fitting to the personal needs. This might be an opportunity to relieve skilled workers from tasks that are not assigned to the original task description. Furthermore, employers' benefit from this new method of finding accessible workplaces as well since tasks are conducted in a more efficient way, whereby additional resources for skilled workers arise. The evaluated result: More unexpected workplaces can be delivered for persons with disabilities for increasing their employment rate with a high rate of acceptance by the staff.

Define accessibility by determining criteria and assess the status quo:

In order to break down barriers affecting persons with disability in the private sector, it is important to locate them in each of the companies with specific conditions. Therefore, it is helpful to define criteria that assist in identifying potential barriers and in determining the status quo in order to formulate goals and concrete measures based on it. Assessing the status quo facilitates the creation of a concrete action plan in accordance with the superordinate strategies mentioned above in golden rule. Without defining the status quo and the defining the concrete measures by using a project management no progress in accessibility at working-places in a company can be evaluated. The DGUV, a private umbrella organization of work accident insurers in Germany, as well as other enterprises in Germany provided and published such an action plan for making their engagement in accessibility transparent, measurable, and sustainable. An overview in German language.

Use experiences of other enterprises in a structured exchange:

Exchanging good measures and best practices worldwide is a great opportunity to benefit from existing experiences in a multi-professional way. Creating and promoting accessibility in enterprises is a cross-sectional task which demands the effort and the perspective of economy, politics and society. In order to face these challenges, it needs a common approach, which has to be in alignment with the interests of various stakeholders. Multi-professional events that allow and encourage open discussions providing a frame which attracts enterprises by speaking their language, is a format which needs to be initiated. Based on the experience made in the past, it is supportive to have an initiator or moderator, who is independent and covers the responsibility of the required organization. However, an association of enterprises could also be the actor and initiator of those events and ensure an exchange on a regular basis. My Ability in Austria, initiated by the Essl-Foundation, brings employers together nationally and collects inclusive projects provided by an bi-annual international award.

Golden rules for governments and civil societies to promote accessibility**Assure foresighted legislation for general accessibility:**

Accessible working environment in the private business is a human right and a condition for prosperous countries. Without accessibility in the working world, no real inclusive society and no anti-discriminating access to the employment of persons with disabilities will be realized. There are several legal options for making enterprises liable for accessibility, for example for realizing the European Accessibility Act in European countries. A first comparative legal study for selected jurisdictions has been designed by Dr. Delia Ferri (Ireland), available by the contact person of these guidelines (part IV). Anyway, a preventive, systematic and foresighted strategy to make enterprises more accessible should generally be preferred instead of investments in single cases based on the most frequent used legal term "reasonable accommodation". This backward-oriented step-by-step progress in accessible working places used by nearly all countries in the world, mostly supported

by social welfare/security institutions, must be overcome in the future. The change of jurisdiction and investing money in this kind of infrastructure is necessary for modern countries.

Lift enterprises in the focus of action as recipients of social welfare/security:

Enterprises act mostly in the shadow of social services, which are dedicated nearly always to individuals with disabilities. Enterprises should be lifted in the center of a federal and cross-ministry action plan conducted by the government in collaboration with social partners, like employers' associations and, if available, trade unions as well as service providers in social welfare. Regional and local administrations should start best-practice models for a consensus-based approach by searching for win-win-situations for enterprises and the population. Ministries must collaborate mutually, like the ministry of Social Affairs with the Ministry of Labor and Economics. Additional joint agreements among groups of employers and disabled persons deliver the soil for a fruitful awareness raising process. The responsibility of institutions for health and safety at working places accepted by enterprises mostly in any part of the world can be used as an opener for an advanced progress of accessibility in the working-life.

Encourage enterprises through incentives:

Do not let enterprises stay alone for investing in accessibility. Accessibility is a return on investment, especially in the private service business, where services must be accessible not only for the employees but also for the customers. Mostly 20 % of the costumers are older and disabled. In some jurisdiction enterprises, which do not fulfil the quota of employment of persons with disabilities, are punished by paying a sum of money in a kind of a state fund. This tool provides an approach aiming to increase the employment rate of persons with disability. Despite quota, there are still a lot of enterprises not employing the legal-based number of persons with disability worldwide. Therefore, encouraging enterprises through financial incentives like tax benefits and other state subsidies combined with an enterprise-ranked system like in U.S.A. can initiate a paradigm shift from punishment towards positive-based activities within enterprises. This approach underlines the value of accessibility as a business case.

Provide enterprise-centered experts in accessibility:

Most of the employers worldwide communicate the need of professional support and concrete contact persons accompanying the journey of being accessible and inclusive. Most employers face a lack of opportunities when it comes to creating and financing accessibility. Governments should care on the provision of qualified experts serving in or for the enterprises and establish a strategy of a closer consulting and managing accessible issues by using a concrete contact person for enterprises. This kind of one-stop-shop service helps to overcome a fragmented social welfare system and interfaces. A need of an additional tool for the employment of persons with disability is obvious: Efforts in qualifying them for the first labor market remain very important. Additionally, experts in accessibility or rehabilitation must fulfil the needs and speak the language of the enterprises. These experts/managers need skills not only in order to advertise persons with special abilities to

employers, but also to ask for chances of a re-design process within enterprises for breaking down barriers and creating new jobs for persons with disability. The universities must be convinced to offer and expand more competence centers in accessibility issues for enterprises.

Create systematical designed cooperation among enterprises:

Legal tools such as agreements or cooperation contracts between enterprises and foundations or external service providers assist in establishing and formalizing collaborations. The practice worldwide proved that external experiences and expertise coming from various actors involved in rehabilitation and participation is particularly valuable for enterprises and saves resources of enterprises as well. A national and regional platform of exchange of experiences for accessible enterprises can offer solutions for other enterprises. Sharing best practices and talking about good experiences in a multi-professional setting can raise awareness in terms of accessibility and inclusion. Getting showcased and demonstrated how competitors tackle issues and challenges in this context might be inspiring for other companies as well mostly within the same industrial branch. Learning from each other and talking to persons who face similar tasks is a great way to extend the own horizon and to build up new notions. Beside the conviction of the management, the understanding and awareness of the entire workforce is important as well.

Find methods towards an open-minded society by long-term campaigns:

Raising awareness and reducing prejudices are long-term aims that require broad-spread campaigns on different levels. Hence, it is crucial to establish structures and appoint experts dedicated to chase this goal. Initiating a paradigm shift in people's mind of a country is an action that would not work out over night by adopting one single initiative. In the opposite, it is a long-term process, where all actors affected need to be involved to include various views and built up a holistic plan, which must be paid by a multi-stakeholder concept, accompanied by a state-enterprise taskforce and be evaluated after a certain time-period - based on analyzing the situation of accessibility in the business sector in a country from the very beginning of a plan. By the way: Consulting firms in economic issues, like KPMG or other global players, should implement accessibility as a cross cutting topic in the consultation to their enterprise-clients. Training the top-management how important accessibility is for their economic success brings additional awareness in countries' campaigns.

Use the potential of worldwide experiences and ideas:

Implementing the article 32 UN-CRPD, which focus on the duty of international cooperation, means to offer a national platform of international experiences of accessible enterprises and government strategies. This platform must be established mainly by the state

and additionally by civil society organizations. All existing national events dealing with innovations within enterprises and congresses of social welfare and social service providers must be enriched by some examples of good practices in other countries. Best practice example: Germany started the international study (see part I), which began in 2018 and finished in 2019, with the goal of finding enterprises and strategies worldwide not as comparison, but in order to copy some appropriate results for enterprises located in Germany. These examples are value also for other enterprises in various countries regardless of different culture and jurisdiction.

Outlook

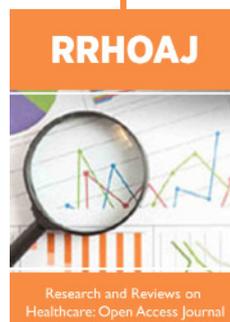
Might these golden rules contribute to some more enterprises and states to invest in accessibility not only in public transport or dwelling houses, but also in accessible worksites, where disabled and older persons find jobs easier than by facing lots of obstacles. Barrier-free working places realize an inclusive working life in an inclusive society. Not only employers are responsible for providing accessible working conditions. Inclusive work must be increased by state-based financial support and incentives. Enterprises and their architects should be aware that each building or workplace planned or renovated could easily designed accessible, which is also important for costumers, clients or patients. Accessibility is not only a social concern, but mainly an economic issue! Why Rehabilitation International engages in accessibility of working life in the private sector? First of all because rehabilitation means job-retention or occupational reintegration. If societies invest in preventive instruments of an inclusive working life in general, the money spent for adopting working conditions merely for one person with a disability becomes obsolete. A political strategy in a country or in a community focused on accessibility also in working life leads to a win-win-situation: Persons with disabilities earn their own life-needs, the enterprises get motivated employees and the social security institutions safe money for compensations. Not only one single method is suitable. Some societies need a strict liability for employers, others smart voluntariness for realizing accessibility- goals. Rehabilitation International offer a consultation for their members or other state-run institutions or top managers in enterprises who are willing to learn more about transforming some golden rules mentioned in these guidelines into practices of their business. If officials from the state or employers as well as of unions are interested in an accessible-oriented legislation and jurisdiction or in finding solutions for a global-player producing or serving in various countries, please contact the RI secretariat or directly the current chair of the RI Work and Employment Commission. If you want to learn more details from the best practice examples mentioned in the guidelines, please directly contact Marlon Becker.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

To Submit Your Article Click Here: [Submit Article](#)

DOI: [10.32474/RRHOAJ.2022.07.000270](https://doi.org/10.32474/RRHOAJ.2022.07.000270)



Research and Reviews on Healthcare: Open Access Journal

Assets of Publishing with us

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles