



Barrier-free Transport

Overview of Developments in the European Union and Germany

Imprint

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Registered offices
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Address:

Tayuan Diplomatic Office Building 2-5
14 Liangmahe South Street, Chaoyang District
100600, Beijing, PR China
T +86-(0)10-8527 5589
F +86-(0)10-8527 5591

E transition-china@giz.de
I www.mobility.transition-china.org

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Responsible

Sebastian Ibold (GIZ), Alexander von Monschaw (GIZ)
E transition-china@giz.de
I www.mobility.transition-china.org

Author

Mia Hallmanns, Eric Thomas

Editor

Carolin Bernhard (GIZ), Gregor Bauer (GIZ)

Layout

Xin Hu (GIZ), Qingmo Zhou (GIZ)

Photo credits

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Introduction

Globally, around one billion people experience some form of disability and one fifth of the global total have substantially limited ability to participate independently in society.¹ Shifting the focus to Germany, there were approximately 7.9 million people as of late 2019 with severe disabilities, requiring extensive ongoing support in more than one major life activity.² According to the German Federal Statistical Office, almost 60% of those people were aged 65 and above, while less than 10% were between the age of 25 and 44 or even younger than 25 years.³

Due to increased life expectancy and a prolonged participation in public life, the total resources to meet the population's needs are growing, for instance in the realm of technology, public infrastructure, and public service provision. Hereby various challenges arise. These challenges begin with the mere integration of people into public life by allowing them a high degree of

self-determination. Enabling people's individual mobility thus represents a critical driver for improving their quality of life.

Indeed, commuting in daily life comes with a multitude of physical, digital or social barriers, irrespective of age or specific disabilities. From high curbs over high ticket prices to guidance systems in public spaces, these existing barriers complicate and impede people's mobility and limit their choices for their means of transport. Barrier-free mobility is an important key for inclusive future urban development and sustainable societies. Urban transport systems need to become more inclusive and accessible. Mobility opportunities, meaning being able to freely choose one's means of transport, are a key element of the personal, social, and professional development of every individual, particularly for people with disabilities or mobility constraints.

Many disabled persons without their own car rely on public transport. Accessible trains, subways, buses and

¹ World Health Organization (2020): Disability and health. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>.

² Federal Statistical Office (2020): Press release: 7.9 million severely disabled people living in Germany. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2020/06/PE20_230_227.html.

³ Federal Statistical Office (2020): Press release: 7.9 million severely disabled people living in Germany. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2020/06/PE20_230_227.html.

coaches, as well as tramcars are essential for their participation in public life. The goal of achieving a barrier-free transport system is also formulated in the **Agenda 2030**. Under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, a core target is to “provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.” The **Agenda 2030** also acts as a guiding framework for the projects implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Definition of Barrier-free Transport

A general European framework for a barrier-free society, in which every person has the equal right to participate, is set by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons](#)

[with Disabilities \(UN Disability Rights Convention\)](#), adopted by the General Assembly in New York on December 13, 2006. Germany was one of the first countries to sign the convention in 2007 and ratify it in 2009. Beyond this UN framework, there is however no coherent definition of “barrier-free” in Europe and every country sets its own standards in its transport infrastructure.⁴

In Germany, barrier-free transport is defined in the **Disability Discrimination Act (Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz; BGG)**, issued in 2002 by the German federal parliament.

It emphasizes that “barrier-free are buildings, special facilities, means of transport, technical subjects, information systems, acoustic and visual sources of information and communication devices and other objects of everyday use accessible to people with reduced mobility, easily available, without undue restrictions and fundamentally without assistance” (§ 4 BGG).⁵

Eliminating barriers for disabled people in the transport system, such as

⁴ PT Access (2008): Report on good Practice Examples of accessible Public Transport, 6-7. <https://www.eltis.org/sites/default/files/PTaccess - good practice 2009 6.pdf>.

⁵ Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (2002): Disability Discrimination Act. <https://www.gesetze-im-inter-net.de/bgg/BJNR146800002.html>.

unsuitable stairs, differences in height between floors, barriers in interchanges, space between the platform and vehicle, low frequency of accessible public transport modes, lack in accessible information on local transport options or limited use of mobile apps in barrier-free trip planning, is thus highly important. Correspondingly, the main objectives of accessible public transport systems tie to increased comfort and safety of all citizens whilst enabling them to move independently from one place to another.⁶

Status Quo of Barrier-free Transport Development in the European Union

Based on the **UN Disability Rights Convention**, the **European Accessibility Act** (EAA) is the foundation for EU member states' legislation, a directive that aims to improve the functioning of the internal

⁶ Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (2002): Disability Discrimination Act. <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgg/BJNR146800002.html>.

⁷ Acknowledgment: On European level, an "Act" by law has no binding force in European

market for accessible products and services by removing barriers created by divergent rules in member states from 2025 onwards.⁷ Businesses get a common set of guiding rules applicable within the EU that facilitate cross-border trade for companies providing accessible products and services.

For persons with disabilities, this means a greater range of accessible products and services, such as computers and operating systems, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, or services related to air, bus, rail, and waterborne passenger transport.

Status Quo of Barrier-free Transport Development in Germany

In Germany, barrier-free transport is a crucial quality factor in the realm of transport, especially public transport, and part of Germany's larger vision of making cities and rural areas more

nation states. For the implementation, the act must be transferred into national law. Therefore, on the ground the object of interest is the law on the national level, thus, the PBefG in Germany, not the EAA on the European level. (See: [Bundesfachstelle-Barrierefreit](#)).

sustainable and inclusive.⁸ In order to guarantee mobility opportunities especially for people with disabilities or mobility constraints, the transport sector was included in the **Disability Discrimination Act (BGG)**. Important financial support to develop and implement barrier-free transport infrastructure is given by the federal government to federal states and local authorities.⁹

Currently, Germany still faces numerous challenges linked to inaccessible infrastructures, navigation systems and services. Considering infrastructural accessibility, different standards for platform heights as stipulated by a German railway regulation in 1991 and the mismatch with different vehicle types still hinder level access at many train stations. Attempts to further standardise platform heights via the 2011 “Concept for Platform Heights”¹⁰ have shown some

progress towards more accessibility. Yet, according to data published in 2020 by the German Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI), on average 1/6 of German train stations is currently still not barrier-free and lacks critical infrastructures such as elevators, escalators and ramps, with stark differences between accessibility levels in different regions.¹¹

In terms of service affordability, the above average increase in ticket prices for public transport depicts another dimension of inaccessibility. The German Environment Agency (UBA) concluded that prices for public transport have risen twice as much as costs associated with owning a private car.¹² These conditions severely affect people with disabilities, since many rely on public transportation due to disabilities hindering them from using private cars. Particularly on the “last-mile,”¹³ passengers oftentimes

⁸ Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (2019): Well-connected by public transport. <https://www.bmvi.de/Shared-Docs/EN/Dossier/OEPNV/significance-of-local-public-transport.html>

⁹ Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (2019): Well-connected by public transport. <https://www.bmvi.de/Shared-Docs/EN/Dossier/OEPNV/significance-of-local-public-transport.html>

¹⁰ Kieffer, Eberhard, Jürgen Ernst and Christiane Jasper-Ottenhus. (2014). Das Bahnsteighöhenkonzept der DB AG. <https://www.deutschebahn.com/re-source/blob/1173544/52654276c4eebdd3e6d2>

[219423424773/ETR-05_2014-Bahnsteigh%C3%B6henkonzept-data.pdf](https://www.bmvi.de/Shared-Docs/EN/Dossier/OEPNV/significance-of-local-public-transport.html).

¹¹ Allianz Pro Schiene. (2020): Viele Bahnhöfe machen es Rollstuhlfahrern schwer. <https://www.allianz-pro-schiene.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/viele-bahnhoefe-machen-es-rollstuhlfahrern-schwer/5>.

¹² Federal Environment Agency 2020, 15.

¹³ The term “last mile” is commonly used in the realm of transport, where it describes the last stage of urban passenger travel or the last leg of supply chain delivery before the final destination. See Business Insider (21 January

use private vehicles, but equally benefit from a diversified range of active, including shared vehicle modes, which are largely inaccessible to people with special mobility needs. The inaccessibility of public transport is furthermore particularly prevalent in rural areas, where less frequent public transport services often coincide with lower population densities, albeit higher shares of elderly and other people with mobility constraints, who critically rely on such public transport offers.

Overview on Barrier-free Development Policies, Standards and Norms in Germany

The [Disability Discrimination Act \(BGG\)](#), aimed at eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities in Germany, entered into force on May 1, 2002. The transport sector is the main focus of the BGG (§

2021). <https://www.businessinsider.com/last-mile-delivery-shipping-explained>.

¹⁴ Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (n.d.): Well-connected by public

8 of the BGG concerns barrier-free transport provisions), establishing equal opportunities and barrier-free access to transport. On the basis of the BGG, various other laws were adopted including the [Municipal Transport Financing Act \(GVFG\)](#), the [Passenger Transportation Act \(PBefG\)](#), the [Railway Construction and Operating Regulations \(EBO\)](#), the [Air Traffic Act \(LuftVG\)](#), and the [Federal Highway Act \(FStrG\)](#).¹⁴ By 2022, the **Passenger Transportation Act (PBefG)**, for instance, will require barrier-free accessibility for all public transport. The goal is to make transport services accessible for all groups of society and especially consider people with special mobility needs.

Various guidelines, standards, and norms are guiding and regulating the provision of barrier-free transport infrastructure development and services in Germany, including:

- [Handbook Accessibility in Long Distance Bus Services](#), issued by the German Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI). The

transport. <https://www.bmvi.de/Shared-Docs/EN/Dossier/OEPNV/significance-of-local-public-transport.html>.

handbook provides an overview of the measures for long-distance bus services – including e.g. the requirement that from January 2020 all public buses must be barrier-free and equipped with at least two seats for wheelchair users. In addition, the handbook offers further recommendations on how to make long-distance bus services more inclusive.

- [Barrier-free Public Transport in Germany](#), issued by the BMVI and the Association of German Transport Companies (VCV). The document provides an overview on the efforts of German transport companies, public transport authorities, and policymakers to achieve accessibility in public transport, it identifies existing problems and presents adequate solutions and recommendations for vehicles, transport infrastructure, information, and service.

Overview on Relevant Associations and Governmental Agencies in Germany

In Germany, the discourse on barrier-free transport is facilitated by a variety

of associations and agencies, for instance initiatives by federal ministries, online platforms for knowledge exchange by transport and construction companies, or larger research projects on the topic. Specific initiatives include:

- [Barrier-free mobility](#)
With its contents, the online platform has the goal of expanding specialist knowledge about barrier-free planning and construction in public transport areas. The project is supported by various construction companies specialized in inclusive infrastructure, including manufacturers of tactile building bricks for pavements and platforms. It informs about relevant norms and standards as well as regulations on the construction of streets, street crossings, and bus and railway platforms.
- [German Association for the Blind and Visually Handicapped \(DBSV\)](#)
The DBSV develops minimum standards for barrier-free access to the built environment and public transport and takes the special needs of blind and visually impaired people into consideration. In doing so, the expert committee draws on the experience of those affected and those providing professional services. In addition, it also includes results from practical studies in its work. The Association prepares statements, participates in standardization projects, and works

together with manufacturers and developers.

- [Federal Office for Accessibility](#)
The Federal Office for Accessibility is part of the Initiative for Inclusive Social Space ([Initiative Sozialraum Inklusiv](#)) initiated by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Among others, it provides consultancy on the barrier-free design of services and infrastructures.
- [Transport Innovation for disabled People needs Satisfaction \(TRIPS\)](#)
TRIPS is a consortium with the goal of making “public transport more accessible for persons with disabilities, elderly voyagers and really everyone”. Consortium partners include, among others, UITP or the German Aerospace Center (DLR).
- [Mobile Inclusion Project TU Berlin](#)
The focus of the project is the economic aspect of barrier-free mobility by taking “mobility poverty” into consideration. While identifying urban districts with residents affected by transport disadvantage, its project maps can indicate potential or a need for transport planning interventions.
- [Federal Association of Self-help for the Physically Disabled \(BSK\)](#)
The BSK is an association of citizens with physical disabilities committed to reducing barriers for disabled persons

and improve their integration into society.

- [Federal Government Commissioner for the Interests of the Disabled](#)
This institution is responsible for the coordinating of efforts to implement standards and commitments made in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. These efforts include the cooperation with national and international associations in the civil society as well as the coordination of relevant activities such as the publication of studies and reports.

Financing of Barrier-free Transport Infrastructure in Germany

The funding of transport infrastructure in Germany comes from various sources: Tax revenue, accounting for about two thirds of the funding budget; revenue from the Heavy Goods Vehicle tolling scheme (user financing)¹⁵ which provides about one third; and additional funds from the European Union or through Public Private Partnerships.

¹⁵ Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) tolling was introduced to federal motorways in 2005 as a shift from using taxation revenue for federal trunk road construction to using fees from road users, hence ‘user financing.’ It has since been expanded and its specifications adjusted, for further details see Federal Ministry of Transport and

Digital Infrastructure (2018): The HGV tolling scheme. <https://www.bmvi.de/SharedDocs/EN/Articles/StV/Tolling-Scheme/hgv-tolling-scheme-2018.html>.

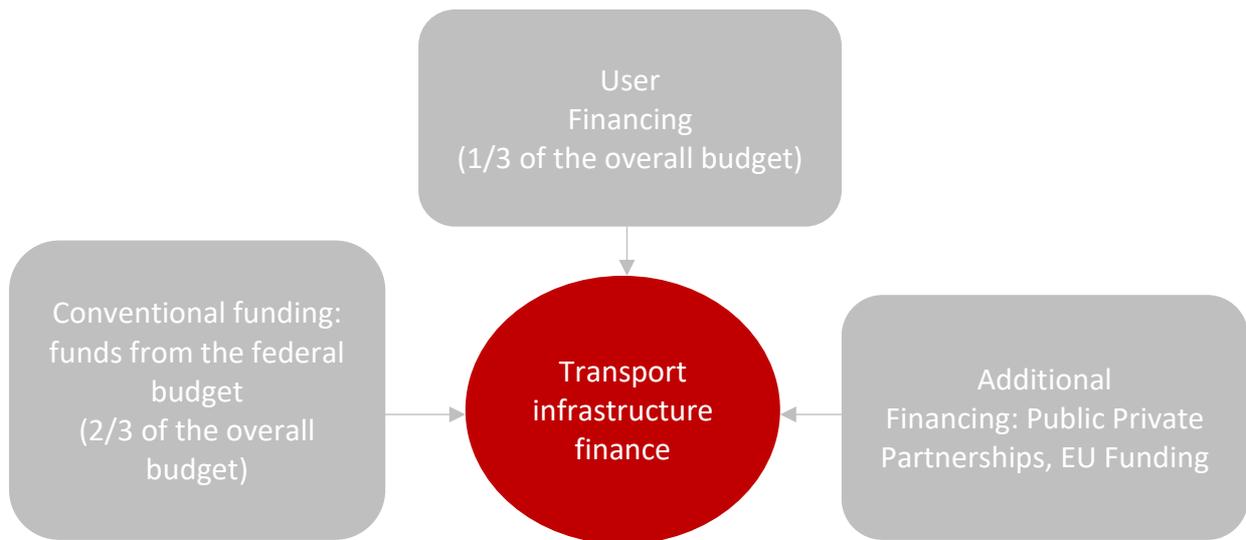


Figure based on "Sources of Transport Infrastructure Funding" BMVI.¹⁶

While experts still criticise severe underinvestment in public infrastructures, the total investment has continuously increased, amounting to 80 billion €, equivalent to 2.4 % of GDP in 2018.¹⁷ Amongst others, it is used to improve the quality of individual modes of transport – federal railways, federal trunk roads, and waterways. The Federal Government also provides municipalities with funds to improve local transport conditions. The municipality can then decide how to use the funds. Additionally, Public Private Partnerships (PPP) are also a common

way of making funding of transport infrastructure more effective.¹⁸

To present one example of ongoing funding measures, the BMVI plans to upgrade over 3,000 train stations in the upcoming years investing 5 billion euro until 2026. The plan includes finances for the barrier-free redesign of 111 smaller stations (330 million €; up to 1,000 passengers daily), 50 medium-sized stations (330 million €; 1.000-4,000 passengers daily), 50 large and medium-sized station buildings (142 million €; up to 50,000 passengers daily) and includes the adaption of platform

¹⁶ Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (n.d.): Finance (Finanzierung) <https://www.bmvi.de/DE/Themen/Mobilitaet/Infrastrukturplanung-Investitionen/Finanzierung/finanzierung.html>.

¹⁷ Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.(2020). Öffentliche Infrastruktur in Deutschland: Probleme und Reformbedarf. <https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikatio->

[nen/Ministerium/Veroeffentlichung-Wissenschaftlicher-Beirat/gutachten-oeffentliche-infrastruktur-in-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=12](https://www.bmvi.de/DE/Themen/Mobilitaet/Infrastrukturplanung-in-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=12).

¹⁸ Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (n.d.): Finance (Finanzierung) <https://www.bmvi.de/DE/Themen/Mobilitaet/Infrastrukturplanung-Investitionen/Finanzierung/finanzierung.html>.

height, ramps, elevators, guidance systems, signs, and information systems.

The German state-owned bank KfW also offers programmes for cities, public transport operators and construction companies to finance barrier-free infrastructure.¹⁹ The funding programmes include a comprehensive scope of measures, such as for the barrier-free redesign of public buildings, traffic layouts and for public space in general. For the transport sector in particular, the programmes focus on subway, railway and tram stations, overpasses and underpasses, as well as on digital assistance systems. For the public realm in general, the programmes include the lowering of sidewalks, guidance systems for blind people, barrier-free public sanitary

infrastructure and barrier-free playgrounds.²⁰

Best Practices in Germany by Transportation Mode

In public transport

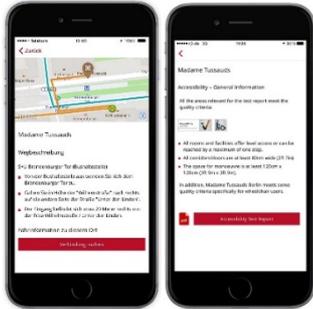
Specific laws, regulations and norms set the framework for the planning of public transport systems, and the design of stations and stops of trains, trams, buses, etc. aiming at providing equal and barrier-free transport offerings for people. As described above, a number of interest groups, research institutes, and both public and private stakeholders are engaged in related projects, from which several best practices can be highlighted:

¹⁹ Requirements for the funding programs can be accessed via: KfW (2015): IKK und IKU – Barrierefreie Stadt. [\[landsf%C3%B6rderung\\)/PDF-Dokumente/6000002503_M_233_234_Anlage_TMA.pdf\]\(https://www.kfw.de/PDF/Download-Center/F%C3%B6rderprogramme-\(Inlandsf%C3%B6rderung\)/PDF-Dokumente/6000002503_M_233_234_Anlage_TMA.pdf\).](https://www.kfw.de/PDF/Download-Center/F%C3%B6rderprogramme-(In-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

²⁰ KfW (2021): IKK – Barrierearme Stadt. <https://www.kfw.de/inlandsfoerderung/%C3%96ffentliche-Einrichtungen/Kommunen/Stadt-ohne-Barrieren/>.



(Source: wheelmap.org)



(Source: visitberlin.de)

Digital barrier-free travel assistance tools: Smartphone apps that assist trip planning and barrier-free routing

“Wheelmap”, an online, worldwide map for finding and marking wheelchair accessible places, developed by a German non-profit organisation. Anyone can find and add public places to the map and rate them according to a simple traffic light system.

The “accessBerlin” App includes options for mobility restricted or blind/partially blind users around the city of Berlin. The app includes maps, bus routes, as well as pictures and descriptions of barrier-free attractions, culture highlights and accommodation, shopping and maps.

Mobility Service Center of German Railways



(Source: Berliner Behindertenzzeitung)

Option to book assistance at stations and find a **journey companion for people with special mobility needs**. From 2015 to 2020, the number of passengers with special mobility needs has almost doubled, leading to more than 875000 requests for service provision at the DB Mobility Service Centres.²¹



(Source: German Railways website)

„DB Bahnhof live“ App

- App by German Railways allowing navigation on train stations and showing e.g. trains’ entrances for wheelchair users
- Showing elevators in stations



(Source: kurier.de)

Widespread use of buses with the ability to hydraulically lower themselves at the right (door) side to reduce the height difference between the platform and the bus floor

- In long distance buses
- Design manual, implementation guide and relevant norms etc. published by the BMVI in May 2017: **Handbook on barrier free long distance bus traffic**

Conclusion

Germany has already set a strong legal ground for accessible public transport via various anti-discrimination acts, guidelines and infrastructure norms. Whilst current initiatives showcase the potential of grassroots organisations in further improving accessibility to existing transportation modes, and new legislation together with the respective public funding of barrier-free infrastructures confirm the increased awareness of the issue in German politics, there are however still major challenges ahead to ensure mobility for all, as it written down in the PBefG.

A structural shift towards “disability mainstreaming”, meaning the design of barrier-free public (transport) infrastructures by default, must be

critically underpinned by strengthened discourse on the sustainability of people-centred traffic systems. Indeed, urban and rural transport planning can both foster the overall mobility of people irrespective of demographic or disability, whilst reducing climate impacts via more environmentally-friendly transport modes such as taking shared vehicles or smoothly navigating through barrier-free infrastructures via bicycle or by foot.

In this regard, international cooperation between Germany and other countries can open up new perspectives by offering a platform of exchange on common challenges, distinct policy approaches and innovative solutions for barrier-free mobility services.

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Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Sitz der Gesellschaft
Bonn und Eschborn

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Deutschland
T +49 228 44 60-0
F +49 228 44 60-17 66

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Deutschland
T +49 61 96 79-0
F +49 61 96 79-11 15

E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de