

# NEW ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES TO USE UNIVERSAL DESIGN APPROACH

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The guidelines include ramps, grab rails and facilities for persons with disabilities .K. Gopinathan

The Centre will soon notify the latest version of guidelines and standards for accessibility, based on which a certificate course for students as well as government and private sector construction professionals is in the works, according to persons involved with the process.

The draft, “Harmonised guidelines and standards for universal accessibility, 2021,” prepared by a team of the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee (IIT-Roorkee) and the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry’s think tank National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), were first published by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) in December 2021. A revised version of the guidelines was submitted to the CPWD by the team last week and was likely to be published online within a week, according to the sources. After that, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry will be sent the guidelines for notification, they said.

Hitesh Vaidya, Director of the NIUA, said the guidelines would be incorporated into building bylaws as well. He said a certificate course on the guidelines was in the works. The course could be made mandatory for those working in various public projects and would be open to students, he said.

“Accessibility is not an option, it is a necessity and should be mandatory to transcend all forms for age, ability and gender. As such, it is imperative that the built environment is inherently accessible to all. The harmonised guidelines provide a conduit for the government and private construction agencies to incorporate measures for universal accessibility during all stages of construction,” Mr. Vaidya said.

He added that a committee had been formed by the Ministry to come up with standards. “The framework prepared by the committee will help with the implementation of the guidelines in all new and retrofitting construction work. The guidelines will be shared with the State governments and city administrations,” he said.

The guidelines, which will succeed the 2016 version once notified, go from a barrier-free approach to a universal design approach. Professor Gaurav Raheja, who headed the IIT, Roorkee team, said the aim of the guidelines was also to hand-hold stakeholders through the process and be educational. The guidelines had been made more reader-friendly, and had both the minimum standards required and recommendations for best practices, he said.

Apart from standards for ramps, grab rails and facilities for persons with disabilities (PwD), the guidelines also included maintenance.

Professor Raheja said while rules regarding accessibility features in government buildings have been in place, the implementing agencies would encounter the problem of items such as swing bars and Braille plates not being listed on the Delhi Schedule of Rates (DSR), the CPWD’s list of building materials and their rates. As a result, the items would be considered “special items”, leading to variation in quality and prices, he added.

The revised guidelines, however, recommend that these items be listed in the DSR, which would

make it easier for officials to procure items of a particular standard and price. Accessibility had been included in masterplans, not just site plans, he said.

He added that the guidelines sought to build “citizen connect”.

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