

AT2030
Case Study: Executive
Summary

Inclusive Design and Accessibility of the Built Environment in Medellín, Colombia

Prepared by
GDI Hub

**Cluster 4 Capacity
& Participation**
Inclusive Infrastructure

Country
Colombia

Date
August 2023



Funded by



Led by



In partnership with





Suggested citation: Patrick, M., Muldowney, A., Arrubla Palacio, M., Aguirre, M. and McKinnon, I. (2023) Inclusive Design and Accessibility in Medellín, Colombia. AT2030 Inclusive Infrastructure Case Studies. Prepared by the Global Disability Innovation Hub and partners for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. DOI:



Summary: Becoming a More Inclusive City

Medellín is Colombia's second city, a city with a difficult past that has recently become known for its innovative approaches to urban development. Medellín showcases good practices of inclusive design, many of which are looked to from other cities and offer genuine opportunities for cities and local governments to be more collaborative. This forms part of a wider picture of inclusive urban innovation that is found in Medellín, delivered through an approach of social urbanism. However, it is important to note that continued improvement, maintenance and new innovation will always be needed to sustain an inclusive city – and energy, motivation and resources must be directed to this.

“It is not a question of saying that we have not achieved anything, but that we need to work continuously, because when processes slow down, it is like starting all over again and sometimes it is very difficult and tiring.”

There are nearly 80,000 registered persons with disabilities living in Medellín, who experience various physical, attitudinal, and environmental barriers to daily life. The city has demonstrated commitments to being inclusive, for example, through the creation of inclusive green spaces, designed in participatory ways. However, in terms of inclusive urban life, there is progress needed in areas such as inclusive recreational spaces and seamless accessibility through the transport system. The social urbanism projects have taken an innovative approach to including more peripheral parts of the city and informal settlements in city planning. However, these areas still lag behind in terms of accessibility.



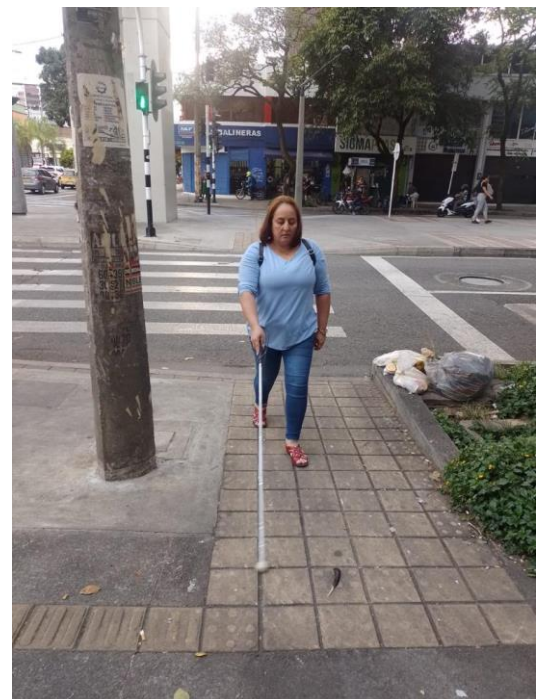
Inaccessibility is a particular issue in the peripheries of the city.



From a policy perspective, comprehensive legislative frameworks are in place and have been effective in Medellín. However, most policy sits at a national level and therefore is not always locally adapted to the specific contexts of cities, for example, Medellín's unique and challenging topography. The adaptation and implementation of the numerous frameworks is not consistent across infrastructure which can limit overall accessibility.

Ongoing political will towards inclusive cities is essential to continue to deliver inclusive infrastructure and this can be challenging with changing political leadership. More resource and budget would also demonstrate commitment in this area. One positive example of this is resourcing the city's Accessibility Committee (CAME) which has oversight over inclusive infrastructure in Medellín.

In infrastructure, there is clear progress in accessibility in some sectors. However, it is not yet well synchronised. For example, certain aspects of the public transport system (Metro) are more accessible than others and the connections between these systems are not always accessible or affordable. In social housing, projects are often not as inclusive as they could be for reasons such as a lack of elevators being provided in apartment blocks due to the initial and ongoing financial costs. Parks and green spaces have been given high priority in terms of inclusion in Medellín and there are a number of accessible parks that have applied inclusive design processes to arrive at an inclusive outcome. These green spaces stand as important examples that make inclusive design more visible in the city. However, it is equally important that the every-day spaces and services people need are made accessible too.



Participant using a white cane on tactile guidance paving in the city

For example, persons with disabilities expressed challenges that impact quality of life including; limited accessibility of recreational activities, lack of affordable inclusive



spaces (higher-income areas are generally more accessible), poor attitudes and awareness and a lack of continuity and maintenance of existing accessible environments.

Where spaces have been designed and implemented through participatory processes, the outcomes are more inclusive. Success stories of inclusive design practice are found in various public spaces in the city such as Parques del Río. However, the next step would be to improve the diversity of disabilities represented within these participatory processes. This is an opportunity to really celebrate the diversity of disability and also acknowledge social networks of persons with disabilities including friends, family and support providers.

With regard to Assistive Technology (AT) access and use, persons with disabilities spoke of the challenges in accessing AT, which often resort to legal proceedings. The process of acquiring AT is long, often taking more than 6-9 months. Using AT in Medellín is also not easy as the infrastructure does not always support AT use. Examples include transport modes not being inclusive for AT users and seasonal rainfall creating hazardous surfaces and limiting mobility for many. There are also disparities between people's aspirations for AT and what they are actually provided with which is often quite basic and generic. This also relates to the challenge that in certain circumstances the medical model of disability is still quite prevalent.



MATT Movilidad is a local AT entrepreneur

Medellín lives up to its name as a district of innovation. Its innovation hub, 'Ruta N' is an accessible building which makes a strong commitment to inclusion including a programme on disability innovation. Disabled social entrepreneurs and enterprises are also working in the city such as 'MATT Movilidad', an organisation producing

electric third wheels for manual wheelchairs with a unique business model that includes rental and tourist tours.

Medellin is on the path to inclusion. However, barriers exist, as do opportunities for improvements. Below we summarise, suggested key actions and recommendations that can make a positive step-change in the city. Access the full report of this research case study for a comprehensive overview of the state of accessibility and inclusion in Medellín.

Key Barriers

Barriers exist in the city and include physical barriers, socio-economic barriers and attitudinal barriers. Some of the key barriers highlighted through our research include:

- Lack of physical space in the city.
- Complex topography, particularly for low-income communities.
- Congestion and inconsistent accessibility throughout the day.
- Inaccessible recreation spaces.
- Lack of consistency in accessible infrastructure, such as between transport systems.
- Difficulty of adapting / retrofitting existing infrastructure and reticence of private owners/developers to do so.
- Access to AT, a flawed system.
- Specific allocation of funding and resources to do this well.
- Recognition of the diversity of disability and support for people with invisible or hidden disabilities.
- Communication barriers for a range of diverse disabilities.
- Attitudinal barriers.
- Implementation of policies and accountability for delivery.
- Materials and quality control, such as non-slip materials to account for steep hills and increased rainfall.
- An ever-shifting political landscape and therefore inconsistent political will.
- Ongoing maintenance and sustainability of existing inclusive infrastructure.
- A lack of vision and direction on inclusion to future-proof a growing and evolving city.

- Consistent poverty cycles for many residents, including many persons with disabilities.

Key Recommended Actions

This report sets out recommendations and actions that will support Medellín to build on the good work already done and address the current barriers and challenges to inclusion for its citizens. Below are some key, high-level recommendations. Please read the full report for a breakdown of recommended actions across policy and decision makers, industry and the local community in the conclusion.

Key recommended actions for Medellín include:

- Produce a new inclusive city strategy that brings together fragmented policies. This should be centred on the participation of persons with disabilities adapted to the local context and local resource-constraints, considering the periphery areas of Medellín and a wide range of visible and invisible disabilities.
- Provide disability equality and awareness training and inclusive design training across all levels, from key urban stakeholders, service providers down to young people in education. This will help raise awareness and break down attitudinal barriers.
- Address climate resilience and disaster response taking into consideration the cities unique topography and changing climate.
- Prioritise action across the key barriers reported including; first and last mile to transport hubs, wayfinding and information, equal access to education and healthcare.
- Ensure support for persons with disabilities who require assistance to acquire independence. Allow persons with disabilities to not feel completely dependent on personal networks including family and friends.
- Finance an inclusive built environment by ringfencing funding and resources to support implementation. Ensure projects are maintained once implemented and not discontinued over time, and if possible, that they do not depend solely on the political will of the leaders.
- Raise awareness around the co-benefits of inclusive infrastructure, for example, better health access and better livelihoods for everyone.
- Further develop building codes and accessibility standards in a way that ensures an inclusive design approach is implemented and inclusive outcomes delivered. These should consider user experiences and journeys in the city

ensuring people with a wide spectrum of disabilities are included. Review all existing guidance and consolidate these into one.

- Embed inclusive design in the implementation of all essential infrastructure and services. This must include improvements to the periphery and lower income areas.
- While essential services are a priority, don't underestimate the importance of access to recreation, sport, culture and public space. Consider the attitudinal as well as the physical barriers that exist in these spaces to ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Support targeted education and training programmes and interventions as required, developing them with persons with disabilities.
- When implementing upskilling projects ensure participants are financially supported, based on need.
- Let communities lead, facilitate and resource community-driven development.
- Champion the good inclusive work already taking place in Medellín so that others can see what best practice looks like and its benefits. Develop a fairer and simpler assistive technology distribution system without the need for legal proceedings and ensure the correct AT is getting to who needs it.

Creating an Enabling Environment

An enabling environment for persons with disabilities should integrate: a supportive legislative environment, an inclusive culture and mindset, participation in planning, design and decision-making, empower further positive cultural change, an accessible and inclusive built environment, straight forward access to good quality and affordable assistive technology and inclusive climate resilience. There is good progress across some of these factors in Medellín but for an inclusive city to maintain an enabling environment it is necessary to ensure robust, sustainable, disability-inclusive urban development processes are implemented.



A group of people playing tactile bingo

So what might an inclusive Medellín look like?

- Be known as the city of inclusive innovation.
- Provide inclusive mobility and transport that incorporates good wayfinding and ensures its facilities such as lifts are regularly maintained and operational, with helpful staff on-site who are properly trained in disability inclusion.
- All citizens have a positive awareness of disability and are open with a positive attitude towards disability and persons with disabilities.
- Accessible and affordable housing for all.
- Inclusive and accessible healthcare and education for all.
- Enjoyable urban life: recreation, culture, sport and safe inclusive public spaces where everyone feels welcome and free of judgement.
- Inclusive climate resilience, adaptation, and disaster preparedness.
- Thriving and connected communities.
- Equal access to opportunities and livelihoods.

What's next?

This report outlines the key findings from a four-month case study on the city of Medellín. As the sixth and final case study on inclusive design and the built environment in lower-and-middle-income countries, it will go on to inform global actions on inclusive design.



Acknowledgements

This report was written by Mikaela Patrick, Iain McKinnon and Annamae Muldowney of the Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub) under the AT2030 programme, directed by Vicki Austin with support from Maria Clara Arrubla Palacio and Maria Isabel Aguirre.

We'd like to thank our team at El Comité for their support on the project: Sonia Marina Gallardo, Juliana Cadavid, Jeison Marín, Carolina Estrada y Marlon Cano.

We'd like to thank all our stakeholders for their support, engagement and valuable contributions to the study, including: MATT Movilidad, Whee, BUA, Colombia Accesible, Corporación de Pequeñas Personas Latinas, Fundación MADI, Toro Posada Arquitectos, Universidad de Antioquia, Universidad EIA, Cámara de Comercio de Medellín para Antioquia, REDDIS, Ruta N, Alcaldía de Medellín, Metro de Medellín, Metroplus, Instituto Social de Vivienda y Hábitat - ISVIMED, Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano – EDU. Tecnoayudas, Universidad EAFIT, Universidad CES, Movilidad Diversa, Alianza MEI, and Hospital San Vicente Fundación.

We'd like to thank all of the participants in the research for their enthusiasm and honesty. It is our goal to amplify the voices of persons with disabilities in our research and we hope this report reflects your vision for a more inclusive and accessible Medellín.

We'd also like to thank the GDI Hub team who have supported the work, including; Dr. Vicki Austin, Naomi Thompson, Prof. Cathy Holloway and Louise Gebbett and finally, the members of our research advisory group who are; Luis Artieda, Prof. Richard Bibb, Rama Gheerawo, Chapal Khasnabis, Prof. Maria Kett, Sophie Morley and Julian Walker for their continued guidance and support.

This research has ethical approval from University College London (UCL) and local ethical approval was not required.

Global Disability Innovation Hub

www.disabilityinnovation.com

GDI Hub is a research and practice centre driving disability innovation for a fairer world. Our vision is of a world without barriers to participation and equitable opportunity for all. We believe disability innovation is part of a bigger movement for disability inclusion and social justice. GDI Hub works across 5 domains, research, innovation, programmes, teaching, and advocacy. We are solutions-focused experts in; Assistive & Accessible Technology; Inclusive Design; Inclusive Education Technology; Climate & Crisis Resilience and Cultural Participation. Based in East London and a legacy of London 2012 Paralympic Games, we deliver world-class research, ideas and inventions, creating new knowledge, solutions and products, and shaping policy through co-creation, participation and collaboration. An Academic Research Centre (ARC) and a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC) we are guided by an Advisory Board of disabled people. We are operational in 41 countries, with more than 70 partners and have reached 29 million people since launching in 2016.

El Comité

El Comité is a social organisation committed to transforming the lives of people with physical and cognitive disabilities and their families. They are specialists in the creation and implementation of rehabilitation and inclusion models to bring people to optimal levels of independence, autonomy and citizen participation. As leaders in the region, they work hand in hand with people with disabilities, families, strategic partners, actors with a social vocation and other opinion makers, in the construction of an inclusive society, with a culture based on the rights and duties approach. They believe in the abilities and unique talent of people with disabilities, trusting that their rehabilitation model is a tool that develops the potential of people with disabilities and facilitates their full participation in society.



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