

**AT2030**  
Case Study

# Inclusive Design and Accessibility of the Built Environment in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**Prepared by**  
GDI Hub

**Cluster 4 Capacity  
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## Summary: Becoming a more inclusive city

Ulaanbaatar city presents unique challenges and opportunities for accessible and inclusive design. The city is full of divisions between its more developed core city and the surrounding Ger areas. The Ger areas are unplanned settlements that have grown to become 70 percent of the city's population in the last 30 years. These parts of the city lack access to basic infrastructure, widening inequality, impacting health and wellbeing and presenting immense urban development challenges. The city's architecture and urban planning is blending its nomadic history, 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet influences and contemporary plans towards a thriving technological city. These wider forces influence the extent to which disability inclusion can be embedded in the built environment.



*Ulaanbaatar's Ger areas surround the city centre.*

Image source: Google Streetview

In 2016, Mongolia adopted the 'Law Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', seven years after ratifying the UNCRPD. The law marks an important step in making progress towards inclusion across all sectors. In the built environment, this is accompanied by accessibility standards that were first developed in 2009 and are currently being updated. However, the standards are not mandatory which creates a barrier to implementing and enforcing them. Current understanding on accessibility and inclusion is being driven by international influences and standards and is not fundamentally embedded in architectural training or urban development programme delivery.

Ulaanbaatar's Ger areas and unique geographical, climatic and cultural context require an approach to inclusive and accessible design and planning in the built environment that embeds local context and knowledge. Currently the design of

accessibility is centred on basic physical modifications such as ramps and accessible toilets, inclusive design has the potential to do much more. Inclusive design can be applied across the city's urban development and planning initiatives to integrate local perspectives and amplify the voices of people with disabilities, who have some of the best understanding of how the built environment is



*Participants felt stigma in the built environment*

inequitable. To ensure inclusion and equity are embedded in the built environment; urban planning, infrastructure and building projects should set a vision for inclusive design that can ensure consistent implementation.

An inclusive built environment creates access and opportunity, allows for participation and builds equity in society. It is the result of collaborate efforts across society to ensure that no one is left behind. There is appetite for making Ulaanbaatar more inclusive across policy, built environment industry and community stakeholders and a reasonable understanding of the wider benefits of inclusive design. Setting a comprehensive vision and action plan for a more inclusive Ulaanbaatar should be complemented by training and education in disability inclusion and inclusive design across stakeholders and the general public. These steps would allow the city's design and development to accommodate and celebrate diversity, improving the lives of everybody: including people with disabilities.

***“An inclusive and accessible Ulaanbaatar is somewhere that can be experienced by everybody in a fair and equal way. By creating safe and accessible environments for all members of the community the city can allow everyone to access and participate in the opportunities they would like.”***

Inclusive design should be understood as a mindset and methodology above technical standards, to allow responsive and adaptive design in a rapidly changing city. This adaptive mindset in design has the potential to engage more effectively with the city's rich history in nomadic ways of life, consider the different ways people want to live in a city and respond to sustainable development challenges including climate related stresses associated with the extreme climate.

## Key Barriers

- People with disabilities experience physical, social and economic barriers to accessing the built environment.
- The way the city is evolving leaves limited space for accessibility. Urban planning and coordinated efforts should make space to build in accessibility
- A lack of knowledge on the cost of inclusive design is a barrier for decision-makers. Good quality design should not cost more
- Laws and policies fall through on implementation. Mechanisms are needed to ensure implementation
- A lack of responsibility and accountability for inclusion in built environment and infrastructure projects means existing standards are not enforced
- A lack of good examples of local inclusive design solutions creates a barrier to motivating the general public and designers. Ulaanbaatar needs a vision for inclusive design.

## Recommended actions

- Find out what matters to people
- City stakeholders should establish a shared vision and ambition for an inclusive and accessible Ulaanbaatar
- Awareness raising and education is vital. It can teach stakeholders how inclusive design benefits everyone and help to create a culture of inclusion.
- Accessibility in the built environment is not just about technical standards. Inclusive design can be beautiful and aspirational. Inclusive design is good design.
- Ulaanbaatar's unique climate, culture and geography require an inclusive design strategy that responds to those contexts



- Embed inclusive design from the start of a project and budget for it, earlier integration is more effective
- Start somewhere. People need to discover for themselves how inclusive design can make the city a better place to live.

## Creating enabling environments

An enabling environment for people with disabilities should integrate: a supportive legislative environment, participation in design and decision-making, positive cultural change, an accessible and inclusive built environment and access to good quality and affordable assistive technology.

### So what might an inclusive Ulaanbaatar look like?

- Mandatory accessibility standards that account for a spectrum of abilities and different disabilities
- Accessible and welcoming public places and services that people can experience equally
- Access to good quality, affordable, assistive technology
- A culture of awareness, understanding and support for people with disabilities
- Equity of access, opportunity and participation for all



### What's next?

This case study outlines the key findings from four months of research on the city of Ulaanbaatar. As the first of six case studies on inclusive design and the built environment in lower-and-middle-income countries, it will be built on through the following case studies and go on to inform global actions on inclusive design.

The findings of this report will be shared with both international and local audiences and GDI Hub and partners plan to maintain remain active in Mongolia through supporting projects in country.

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