



Module 3 - Tipsheet

Inclusive Language

“Person with a disability”, “person with special needs”, or “the handicapped/disabled”? There are numerous verbalisations when it comes to the topic of disability. We help you to choose the right words.

Formulations like “special needs” or “special abilities” should be **avoided**, since needs or abilities of people with disabilities are not “special” but **normal or just as diverse** as those of people without disabilities. So why should needs or abilities of people with disabilities be special? Declaring something quite normal as “special” excludes the persons concerned.

Many people avoid the word disability and look for paraphrases, but this is not necessary. It is advisable to use the term person or people in front of disability (**human first**) because the wording “**person with a disability**” describes only one characteristic of many. “The disabled” or “the handicapped”, on the other hand, describes the whole person with a single characteristic.

Glossary

In this glossary, some terms around the topic of disability will be explained. These terms should also point out an inclusive language as well as correct and incorrect formulations.

Accessibility/Barrier-free: All public goods, services and information should be accessible and without barriers. There are different types of barriers such as structural, barriers in transport and in the field of communications and information technology.

Braille: Is a tactile writing system used by people with visual impairments. It is traditionally written with embossed paper, but braille users can also read computer screens using refreshable braille displays.

Deaf: Being deaf is a neutral term. Terms like “deaf-mute” or “deaf and dumb” is considered as inappropriate by deaf people, as they can very well speak in sign language.

Disability: According to Article 1 of the “UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” people with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.

Handicap: It is often used as a synonym for disability but is considered as inadequate by people with disabilities.

Human right-based Model: In the last years, the social model has transcended into a human-rights based transformative model of disability. This does not pertain alone to the social environment, but to all people – regardless of the presence of disability or not – at the center of all claims.

Inclusion: Inclusion means that all people are seen and respected as full and equal members of society. The term is often mistakenly used as a synonym for integration, which in fact means that people must first be integrated and adapt to their environment.

Learning disability: This means that a person has learning problems or difficulty understanding abstract things quickly. The term mental handicapped or retarded is often used, but should be avoided, as it is very undifferentiated. People with learning disabilities show abilities in many other “mental” areas, intellectual interests as well as professional and social skills. To label the whole mind as handicapped or retarded is not correct.

Medical model of disability: This model views impairments as an individual, medical problem and shapes perceptions in health care, politics and society. Thus, impairments are seen as "deficits" to be "rehabilitated". This approach is considered obsolete.

Person with disability: This is the preferred formulation. Formulations like special needs or abilities are to be avoided, since needs or abilities of people with disabilities are not “special” but normal or just as diverse as those of people without disabilities. The phrase “the disabled” or “the handicapped” should also be avoided, as in this case a single characteristic describes the person. The formulation “person with disability”, on the other hand, describes only one characteristic of many and is therefore more suitable.

Sign Language: Sign Languages are independent and natural languages. They have their own grammar and syntax, which differs from spoken languages. Like all other languages, sign language has national languages as well as dialects and sociolects.

Social model of disability: In contrast to the medical model of disability, in which the disability is seen as an individual destiny, the social model of disability focuses on the society. People are getting disabled by barriers in society (e.g. through prejudices, stairs, missing subtitles, etc.), not by their impairment or difference. Disability is therefore not an individual but a social problem. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers people with disability more independence.

WCAG: The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are an international standard for barrier-free design of websites.