

LivingAll Project

Presentation by Lynn Watson and Paul Gamble of Habinteg (UK)

Barriers to accessing housing for disabled people

The LivingAll research project included interviews with 700 disabled people across seven countries to ask them about the barriers they experienced in their daily life. These barriers fall under the following categories: Architectural; Legislative; Technological; Economic; Information; Bureaucratic; Attitudinal. Presented here are the key findings on the subject of Housing.

Satisfaction with housing

The level of satisfaction that disabled people felt about their housing was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest satisfaction and 5 being the highest. The breakdown from all seven countries shows that respondents in Austria expressed the greatest satisfaction with their housing, while those in Spain were least satisfied (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Satisfaction with housing

Austria	4.22
UK	3.42
Belgium	3.26
Slovenia	3.08
Norway	2.83
Italy	2.54
Spain	2.41

Barriers to accessing housing

The highest level of barriers relating to housing across Europe related to: architectural (39%), bureaucratic (11%) and technological (9%) issues. People with physical disabilities and sensory impairments experienced the highest levels of barriers in housing overall.

In the UK, the key barriers related to housing were: architectural barriers at 39%, affecting all groups more or less equally; 'other' barriers (not specified) at 14% and highest for those with learning or mental health difficulties; and bureaucratic barriers at 11%, also affecting all groups. Many similar barriers were reported by respondents in the other countries.

- A key issue appeared to be the significant national shortage of affordable accessible housing for rent or sale.
- People with sensory disabilities reported difficulties in finding privately rented housing if they owned a guide dog, as most landlords do not allow pets in their rented properties.
- Other participants explained that they had problems accessing social housing, particularly if they are single men with no children or dependents.

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- People with mental and learning disabilities reported many difficulties in finding suitable accommodation.

Another specific example from the UK was difficulty in moving between geographical areas:

The current process for transferring services from one local authority area to another is that if a disabled person moves home to a different area, then the person generally needs to be re-assessed to continue to have assistance with care and support services. In practice:

- There is no guarantee that the re-assessment will result in the same level of provision as provided by the previous local authority.
- As a consequence, disabled people fear losing their benefits and support if moving to another area.
- Each local authority has its own criteria for assessing levels of need and not all have the same schemes and benefits available. This is often due to restrictions on their support and care resources and funding.

One UK interviewee stated that it was impossible to imagine free movement in Europe as there were so many problems in moving even a short distance to a different area.

Examples of the barriers experienced by research participants **across all seven countries** were:

Architectural and legislative

- Poor access to property
- Narrow lifts, lack of tactile guides, bad lighting
- Inaccessible kitchens, bathrooms and WCs
- Adapted housing still physically inaccessible
- Adapted housing without visual/acoustic aids
- Incorrect plans and design, despite legislation
- Limited supply – no housing choice

Technological and economic barriers

- Lack of sensory technology in lifts/entrances
- Technology inaccessible or difficult to use
- Inadequate maintenance
- Limited financial support to adapt homes
- Lack of affordable homes in central locations

Information and bureaucratic barriers

- Lack of information on:
 - Financial support aids and adaptations
 - Housing rights

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- From landlords
- Housing shortage resulting in long (or endless) waits for suitable accommodation.

Attitudinal barriers

- Discrimination by private landlords
- Exclusion of guide/assistance dogs
- Difficulties in dealing with housing officials
- Difficulties in accessing ordinary housing
- Neighbour resentment of public money being spent on adaptations

Recommendations for the eradication of barriers

Recommendations to come out of the survey included:

Design

1. Legislation for accessible design standards
2. Enforcement of legal standards
3. User involvement in housing planning and design
4. Financial support for home adaptations
5. Incentives for developers and landlords to provide inclusive housing

Support and services

1. Personal budgets for daily living assistance
2. Orientation services when moving/settling in
3. Information/advice on housing options and rights
4. Advice and support on adaptations and technology
5. Help in dealing with issues of security or isolation
6. Services that allow geographical mobility

Good Practice in house design

A key recommendation to come from the LivingAll research project is that:

"Existing structures should be improved within a specific time limit and all new structures should meet accessible design standards...in order to facilitate the production of Lifetime Homes."

Lifetime Homes

The UK Lifetime Homes Standard can be applied to ordinary housing and consists of a set of 16 specific design features. Because it focuses on inclusive design, the Lifetime Homes Standard can benefit all types of household and rarely requires greater space standards. The features can be incorporated at minimal extra cost and allow the dwelling to be adapted as the needs of the tenant(s) change. This results in cost savings over time. Lifetime Homes are easy for wheelchair users to visit as the ground floor is fully accessible, including WC.

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The design criteria include:

- Easy access into the home and within the home
- Accessible toilet and bathing facilities
- Turning and circulation space for wheelchairs
- Provision for minor adaptations, such as handrails
- Access to controls such as switches and sockets
- Windows are positioned lower and easy to operate
- Design incorporates potential for future adaptation, for example installing a lift or shower

Adoption of Lifetime Homes (UK)

London adopted the Lifetime Homes Standard in 2004 and the Greater London Authority (GLA) commissioned a study to assess how effectively existing London policies regarding use of the standard have been implemented, and how consistently they are being interpreted across the capital. This report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/publications/2008/08/lifetime-homes.jsp>.

In 2008, the UK Government announced that all new public funded homes in England must be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard by 2011. Wales and Northern Ireland also currently build to the standard. The standard is voluntary for the private housing sector but strong incentives and regulation may follow. The government is currently investigating the feasibility of this. There are similar standards in some other EU countries.

Challenges and ongoing work around Lifetime Homes

There are a number of **challenges**, however, to fully implementing Lifetime Homes across England. These include:

- Implementation issues, such as a lack of understanding of the technical aspects of Lifetime Homes design and concerns from developers about incurring extra costs
- Need for technical support and guidance to central and local government and the building industry

In order to increase the take up of the Lifetime Homes Standard, the following **actions** are needed:

- Policy commitment on a national and local level – including commitment to stronger regulation and monitoring of how the standard is implemented
- Public investment in building Lifetime Homes
- Resources to deliver training and technical guidance
- Training for professionals, such as architects and developers, on the technical aspects of Lifetime Homes design
- Monitoring of existing, current and planned Lifetime Homes development
- Continuing to make the case for Lifetime Homes
- Implementing consistent design standards across Europe