

THE STATISTICAL BARRIER TO ACCESSIBILITY

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Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this policy paper is to discuss the way in which statistics on the numbers of disabled people are gathered in both developed and developing countries around the world and the impact this has at both political and practical levels on the policies and practices to promote mobility.

Issue

A study for the World Bank in 2007 (“Measuring Disability Prevalence”, Mont D) drew attention to the wide variations across the world in the way that statistics on disability are gathered. These range from medical/condition based through to functional and “activity limitation” based questions. The result of these different approaches is a significant difference in the level of disability recorded. Estimates range from 20 per cent of the population in Australia to less than 1 per cent in Kenya.

The difference that can be made by changing the nature of the questions asked is illustrated in Brazil. A change of approach in the National Census from asking about a specific set of medical conditions to asking about difficulty in carrying out various activities led to an increase in the estimate of the prevalence of disability from 0.9 per cent to 14.5 per cent. This has had a profound effect on Government policies.

These discrepancies have a major impact on the level of political interest that is given to the subject of disability. In the field of transport and mobility they also have a major impact on understanding at practical and technical levels of the barriers that need to be removed to enable disabled people to live independently.

Focus

The paper will discuss the impact that the classification of statistics on disability makes to our understanding of the issues that need to be addressed at both political and practical

levels and will consider the information that is needed to ensure that accessibility to the built environment and to public transport is given the priority and the focus that it needs in both developed and developing countries.

The paper will also consider the correlation between the available statistical base in a country and the level of importance that the Government gives to disability and accessibility issues. This can be measured in terms of legislation, funding, policy commitment and implementation of good practice.

Finally, the paper will suggest ways in which developing a proper understanding of the prevalence of disability can bring about a shift from a medical categorisation of disability to one based on enabling disabled people to become economically and socially active by removing barriers to mobility.

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