

Braille and Tactile Signage

NCBI Position Statement

A tactile sign is defined as any sign containing information that can be obtained by touch. Braille, raised print, raised symbols and pictograms are all examples of tactile information. Braille is a tactile system of reading and writing and it is used worldwide by people who are blind or vision impaired.

Why is it Important?

Accessible signage enables people to read signs which is vital for accessing information, journey planning, navigation and most importantly ensuring safety. It is also a matter of equity, as Braille and tactile signs will give people who are blind or vision impaired access to the same information that sighted people have access to. Adding Braille and raised print to signage will provide access to the information for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Accessibility Standards

United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), 2006

Ireland has signed and ratified the Convention, and hence is bound by the obligations that it establishes.

Article 9 of the Convention states the obligations of State Parties to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Subsection 2d of Article 9 also specifies that:

2. State Parties shall also take appropriate measures:

d) To provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms.

International Standards Organization (ISO)

ISO 21542:2021- Building Construction – Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment

European Standard

IS:EN 17210:2021- Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment – Functional Requirements”. Section 6.6.2 on page 49 of this document states that:

“The following requirements and recommendations apply:

- a) Signs shall be easy to read and understand.
- b) Signs shall have raised tactile and Braille, where appropriate.”

Ireland: Official Languages Act 2003

Public bodies have specific duties under the Official Languages Act 2003 to ensure their signage is provided in Irish or bilingually. This then pertains to Updated Irish Braille.

It is recommended to arrange Braille in each language as a unified block rather than interspersing Braille in both languages.

Placing all Irish-language Braille before all English-language Braille will minimise confusion for users of either language while according with the requirements of the Official Languages Act 2003.

As a bilingual sign, a separate Braille locator should be included in line with the first line (or step) in each language along the left-hand edge of the sign.

This approach to the arrangement of bilingual Braille signs is consistent with Braille as seen in other bilingual jurisdictions, including Canada and New Zealand.

Best Practice Recommendations

- Signs should be accessible to all users of a building or facility, including people who are blind or vision impaired.
- Signs on panels in lifts, room numbers in hotels, doors, and openings to public areas such as toilets shall have raised tactile signage and include Braille.
- Braille should be located and designed consistently, including the use of Braille locators, and it should contain and convey the same information (including the same language) as the accompanying text.
- For settings where compliance with the Official Languages Act is a requirement, all Braille signs should include both Updated Irish Braille (UIB) and Unified English Braille (UEB).
- Use uncontracted (Grade 1) Braille for signs that have 10 words or less. Use contracted (Grade 2) Braille for signs with more than 10 words.
- Raised print characters should also be accompanied by uncontracted Braille. Also, Braille, print and pictograms should be included on the same sign, in order to avoid confusion.
- Braille dots should have a dome or rounded shape for easy recognition.
- Signs should not convey information solely through the use of colour and/or images. They should always include tactile information in the form of raised print and Braille.
- Ensure signs are clear and unambiguous. Keep messages short and simple.
- Audit Braille signs regularly and replace signs where Braille cells have become damaged or worn to ensure information is accurate.

Summary

People who are blind or vision impaired have a fundamental right to live independently and participate in all aspects of life, and it is the job of the State to protect this right, as outlined in Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Producing and maintaining suitably formatted Braille and other tactile signage is essential in order for people who are blind or vision impaired to have full access to the amenities of public buildings and facilities open to the public. Public signage must be manufactured with accessibility in mind, using Braille and other tactile systems to make the sign readable.

About NCBI

NCBI, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, provides support and services to over 55,000 people nationally. Offering technology solutions and innovative programmes to support people in education, the workplace, and wider society. NCBI advocates for a barrier free and accessible society for people who are blind or vision impaired.

NCBI's Possibility Lab is an innovative, solution-focused access and mobility consultancy offering bespoke training, design advice and fee-based access consultations to key stakeholders and businesses who share our vision for a barrier free and accessible society for people who are blind or vision impaired.

If you require any further guidance, please contact NCBI via hello@possibilitylab.ie

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