

Wayfinding

NCBI Position Statement

Wayfinding encompasses all of the ways in which people orientate themselves in physical space and navigate from place to place. Wayfinding elements, such as landmarks and clues, inform people of where they are along their route. They can be buildings, street furniture, street art, signage or other striking features in the landscape.

Why is it Important?

Features such as road-walkway colour contrast, the general quality and availability of signage, and the consistency of lighting in public spaces are important in informing wayfinding. There are many safety issues that can stem from creating public pedestrian spaces (such as walkways and crossings) without first considering the various accessibility needs of blind or vision impaired pedestrians. Failing to create effective accessible wayfinding measures will reduce the potential for safe independent movement for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Use of materials with no discernible colour (or tactile) contrast when creating roads and pedestrian walkways makes it difficult for pedestrians to differentiate between the safe walkway and the roadway. Often, contrast is not discernible at night, or when the pavement is wet from rain. This lack of contrast poses a safety issue for pedestrians who are blind or vision impaired.

Providing too little accessible navigational signage can be inconvenient or even dangerous for people who are blind or vision impaired, but an overcrowded area with excessive signage will clutter the environment,

presenting unnecessary obstacles. This becomes an especially pressing issue if there isn't proper warning signage for potential safety issues, such as construction areas.

Lighting around walkways and in other public areas is an essential wayfinding measure. A lack of lighting or ineffective lights makes it harder for pedestrians to see. Excessive lighting can produce a glare, which has a similar debilitating effect. Uneven lighting can produce shadows and dark spots which are difficult to navigate through with low vision.

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. Section 1 and Subsection 1a of Article 9 also specify that:

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

- a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces.

European Standard on Wayfinding, Orientation and Navigation

Found in the "Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment – Functional Requirements" document, also known as I.S. EN 17210:2021

Section 6.1.2 on page 39 of this document states that:

“The built environment shall be designed, constructed and managed to facilitate wayfinding, orientation and navigation. Appropriate measures may include some or all of the following:

- Good lighting conditions with additional information at decision points such as accessible routes, entrances, staircases, lifts, etc.
- Clear information, provided in a range of formats using the senses sight, hearing, touch and, where appropriate, smell, to be accessible to people with sensory impairments using the principle of multiple senses.
- Use of visual contrast.
- Appropriate provision of wayfinding signages.
- Avoiding surfaces which might make orientation more difficult.
- Architectural and urban design features to differentiate spaces.

International Standard for Building Construction – Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment, also known as ISO/DIS 21542

Section 5.3.2 on page 18 of the document states that

“Orientation can be facilitated by differences in acoustics, surface material, light and colour.”

Best Practice Recommendations

This position statement does not attempt to list all the technical details of regulations but does highlight in practical terms those issues which need to be addressed in considering best practice duties.

- Use of distinctive, colour-contrasting materials for walkways and roads.
- Ensuring that adequate visual colour contrast between walkways and roadways is achieved in all lighting and weather conditions, including but not limited to rainy or otherwise inclement weather, variations in daylighting, or whether it is day or night time.
- Pedestrian areas must not use excessive signage and any safety and/or navigational accessible signage should always be the first priority.

- Installing and consistently maintaining appropriate lighting on paths, pedestrian crossings and other public pedestrian areas.
- Ensuring that lighting adequately covers pedestrian areas without creating any kind of visually disruptive glare or cause areas of shadow.
- All walkways are constructed with non-slip materials that have distinctly different colouring and texture from the adjacent road.
- Design for two or more senses to afford independent wayfinding for people with sensory loss. When considering visual aesthetics, designers should also consider acoustic, tactile and olfactory treatments to enhance wayfinding for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Summary

People who are blind or vision impaired have the inherent right to be safe when accessing walkways and roads and travelling through the public realm. In order to achieve this, we need to ensure the safety and accessibility of the environment by appropriate lighting, signage, colour contrast and placement of street furniture and utilities.

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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