

Universal Design in Norway

Definition of Universal Design

Universal Design is a design concept that recognises, respects, values and attempts to accommodate the broadest possible spectrum of human ability in the design of all products, environments and information systems. It requires sensitivity to and knowledge about people of all ages and abilities. Sometimes referred to as “lifespan design” or “transgenerational design”, Universal Design encompasses and goes beyond the accessible, adaptable and barrier-free design concepts of the past. The Universal Design principle differentiates from the accessibility principle by not requiring specialised solutions for specific target groups. A universally designed solution provides an environment that applies to everyone: accessibility for all.

Background

According to the Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture, Norway’s version of the Universal Design concept stems from the United States of America’s Universal Design principles. As a part of the project “Studies to Further the Development of Universal Design”, the Centre for Universal Design at the North Carolina State University led the development of the Principles of Universal Design. These Principles were developed by an expert team of architects, product designers, engineers, and expert researchers, based on their experiences researching and practicing in the field. Also, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the rights of people with disabilities on 13th December, 2006, which entered in force in 2008. Norway ratified in 2013 adopting the UN’s Convention, the Convention principle sets out the legal obligations for ratified countries to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Implementing Universal Design in Norway

Currently in the Norwegian Government, the Universal Design concept has high visibility: It is a politically recognized and highly prioritised objective. Several action plans have been developed in order to become a universally designed society. The Parliament stated that the ultimate goal is to see that all kind of housing and buildings are accessible for all. The responsibility of implementing the Universal Design concept is divided amongst the following three Government bodies:

- The National Resource Centre for Participation and Accessibility under the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion
- Ministry of Climate and Environment
- Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation

Main Universal Design Milestones in Norway

1997-1998

The Universal Design principle was introduced as a planning concept in Norway in 1997. The Ministry of the Climate and Environment launched a development program to facilitate accessibility for people with disabilities into municipal planning process during the year of 1998.

2004

In November 2004, the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs presented the “*Government Action Plan for increased accessibility for persons with disabilities; a plan for Universal Design in key areas of society.*”

2005-2009

As an outcome of the new action plan, a pilot municipality initiative, referred to as *Measure BU 31*, was established. 16 pilot municipalities and a resource municipality participated in this pilot initiative. They

contributed to the work in translating national principles of Universal Design objectives into clearly defined actions, under the supervision of the Ministry of the Environment. The efforts of pilot municipalities have helped to clarify how the concept of Universal Design can be translated into tangible actions, and have confirmed that development initiatives of this type are a useful method for implementing national objectives at the municipal level. The initiative was concluded in 2009.

2008

The action plan, “*Government Action Plan for increased accessibility for persons with disabilities; a plan for Universal Design in key areas of society*” states that each municipality must constitute a local board for the Disabled, in order to secure user participation. The action plan also promotes support for the board for the Disabled’s work in enhancing the competence on Universal Design out to the municipalities. The boards’ are appointed to advise the City Councils on Universal Design issues and accessibility. In 2008, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion gathered information on how many of the municipalities have constituted a local board for Disabled. The report concluded that 87 percent of the municipalities had constituted a board for Disabled. Based on the findings in the report, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion implemented a new initiative measure to promote and ensure full coverage of boards for Disabled in all Norwegian municipalities.

2009

The Planning and Building Act was revised and the new Discrimination and Accessibility Act was launched on 1st January, 2009. A milestone was reached when the two Acts were approved, promoting Universal Design in local and regional activities.

2009-2013

The positive experience of the project Measure BU 31 led to a new action plan that had specific national goals for the municipal sector. “*The National development project of Universal Design in counties and municipalities program – K1 project*” was carried out during 2009 through 2013, where 88 municipalities and 17 regional county authorities participated in the project. The main purpose of the program was to emphasise that Universal Design has been included in the revised Planning and Building Act and the new Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act, as a strategy to help make society accessible to everyone and preventing discrimination. The City of Oslo joined the network in 2012.

2014- 2015

In October 2014, the “*Measure K1- Action plan for universal design*” has extended into the “*Measure K2 – Towards New Heights*”. The initiative is managed by the Planning Department under the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, the Norwegian State Housing Bank and the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs. This program is currently active, where simple initiatives are in focus. The participants are sharing cost effective and appropriate methods removing simple barriers. The main purpose of this project is to put an emphasis on simple strategies increasing accessibility to existing buildings and outdoor areas.

2014

As part of the follow up on the Government’s national action plan on universal design, the Oslo City Council adopted Oslo’s Common Principles for Universal Design on the 14th June of 2014. The principles constitutes a guideline for each department and agency requiring them to make their own individual plans for universal design, based on these principles. The City of Oslo aims to be universally designed by 2025. The Agency for Social and Welfare Services is responsible for coordinating the work with Universal Design across the Oslo municipality, enhancement of competence on Universal Design and facilitate guiding initiatives for public businesses. The Municipal Undertaking for Social Service Buildings ensures that Universal Design is incorporated in current building and renovations projects.

2015-2019

The imminent new action plan for the next period 2015 through 2019 is scheduled to be released during spring 2015, where welfare technology and Information Communication Technology (ICT) will be the main

focus. More current and updated information on the plans for universal design from 2015-2025 will be published as soon as they are made official in Norway.