

Report Outline

Accessibility and Social Inclusion: Youth Perspectives on Public Infrastructure in Athens

This report examines the work of high school students in Athens, Greece, who explored the issue of accessibility in public infrastructure through the Student SIDINL Newsletters initiative. The students focused on how inadequate infrastructure impacts the daily lives of individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups. By conducting on-site assessments, interviews, and surveys, they documented systemic barriers and proposed actionable recommendations to improve accessibility and foster social inclusion.

Public infrastructure in Athens has long been criticized for its lack of accessibility, particularly for individuals with physical disabilities and the elderly. While the city has made some strides in recent years, including accessibility upgrades in central tourist areas, much of its infrastructure remains unsuitable for vulnerable groups. Inadequate accessibility impacts more than just mobility; it isolates individuals from social, cultural, and economic participation, exacerbating feelings of exclusion. The Student SIDINL Newsletter program enabled young researchers to delve into these issues, combining direct engagement with affected populations and analytical reviews of public infrastructure. Their work serves as both a documentation of existing challenges and a call to action for creating a more inclusive urban environment.

The students conducted research in three key areas of Athens: Omonia, Koukaki, and Monastiraki. These neighborhoods were chosen for their blend of residential spaces, commercial districts, and historical landmarks, offering a comprehensive perspective on accessibility challenges. The students evaluated public transportation systems, including buses, trams, and metro stations, and pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, crossings, and ramps. They also collaborated with disability advocacy groups to gain insights into systemic challenges and interviewed residents with mobility impairments about their daily experiences. Surveys distributed to over 500 residents across these neighborhoods captured public perceptions of infrastructure quality. The findings were published in a Student SIDINL Newsletter that featured data visualizations, personal stories, and photo essays documenting specific instances of inaccessible infrastructure. The research process also empowered students to apply participatory research methods, fostering critical skills in problem-solving and advocacy.

The findings revealed significant barriers in Athens' public infrastructure. Many metro stations lacked functional elevators or escalators, forcing individuals with mobility impairments to avoid certain areas entirely. Sidewalks in residential neighborhoods were often narrow, uneven, or blocked by parked vehicles, making them impassable for wheelchair users or parents with strollers. Public buses, while technically equipped with ramps, frequently had non-functioning mechanisms, leaving individuals stranded. Interviews with residents highlighted the emotional toll of these challenges, with many describing feelings of exclusion from cultural, social, and economic opportunities. Survey data revealed that 68% of respondents believed Athens' infrastructure was "poor" or "very poor" in accommodating individuals with disabilities. These systemic issues underscored the urgent need for infrastructural improvements and policy enforcement.

The Student SIDINL Newsletter catalyzed local discussions and inspired community initiatives. The students presented their findings at a public event hosted at a community center in Koukaki, attended by over 150 residents, local officials, and representatives from NGOs advocating for disability rights. This event resulted in the formation of a neighborhood committee dedicated to monitoring and reporting accessibility issues to the municipality. The students also launched a digital campaign, "Accessible Athens," featuring video testimonials from residents and an interactive map highlighting inaccessible areas. The campaign reached over 25,000 people on social media and attracted media attention, with a local news outlet publishing a feature on

the students' work. Additionally, their findings prompted a municipal pilot program to install temporary accessibility ramps in Monastiraki, with plans for permanent infrastructure upgrades pending further funding.

This report concludes that youth-led initiatives, such as those supported by the Student SIDINL Newsletter program, are essential for addressing social issues tied to public infrastructure. The Athens students demonstrated how grassroots research, and advocacy can drive public awareness and policy responses to long-standing accessibility challenges. Recommendations include expanding public education campaigns to raise awareness about accessibility issues, allocating municipal funds to systematically upgrade public infrastructure, and involving youth in monitoring and reporting accessibility standards in urban planning processes.