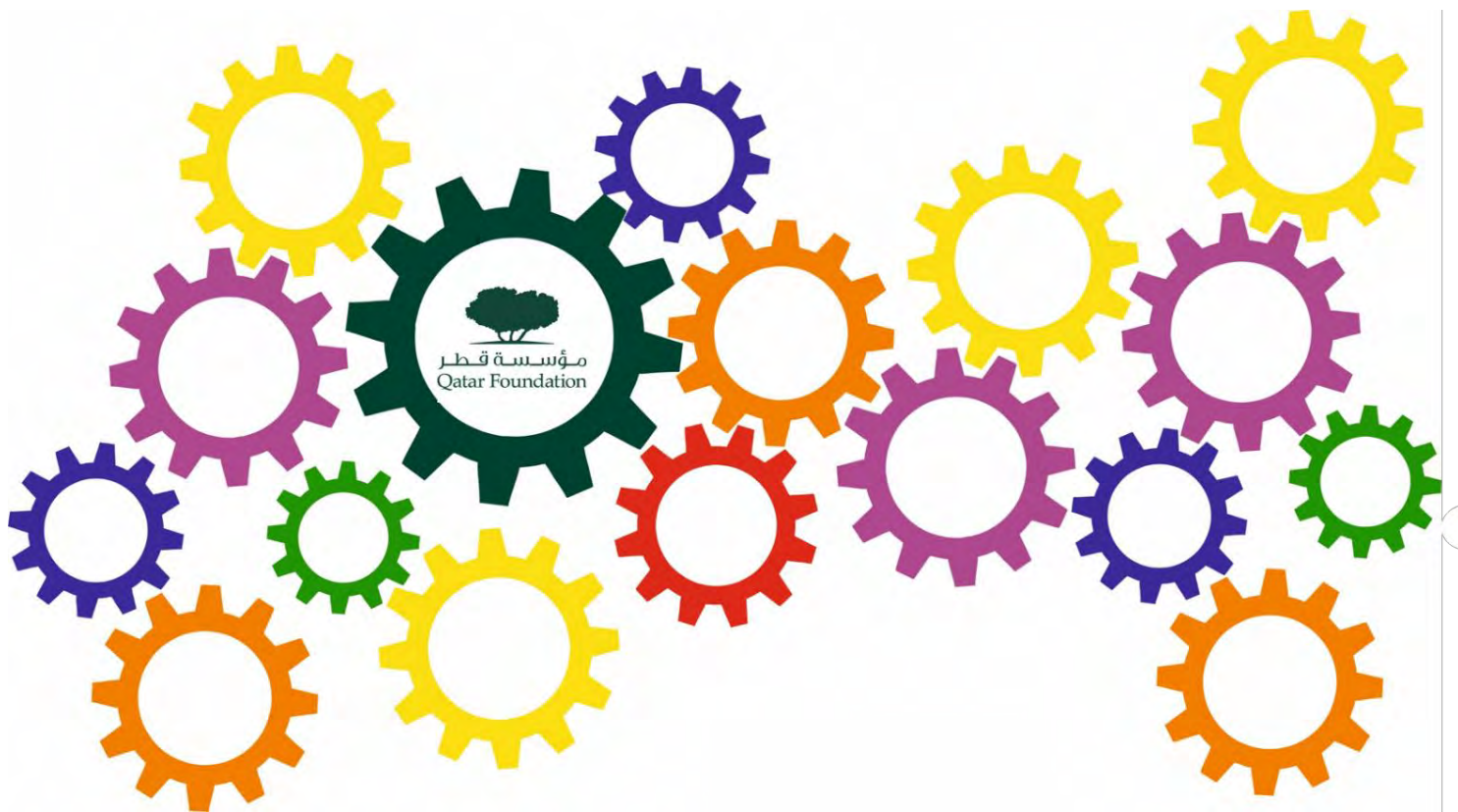


# ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY FOR QATAR BLUEPRINT



A CONTRIBUTION BY

جامعة حمد بن خليفة  
HAMAD BIN KHALIFA UNIVERSITY  
College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Translation & Interpreting Institute



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Qatar lives a period of rapid growth and development in preparation for upcoming world level events, it is given the opportunity to position itself at world level as a country that respects and caters for the needs of human diversity. Even if Qatar stands at international level in its national regulations, much is still to be done regarding the implementation of the basic principles of inclusion and accessibility in all spheres of life.

In abidance with the UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” framework, corporations and institutions are called upon to take the lead in the operationalization of the State laws and policies, guaranteeing that all person’s rights are respected in daily events. This is to be done by ensuring that all actions (services and products) respect the specificities and requirements of human diversity. Specific attention is, therefore, due to those at a disadvantage for their personal or contextual circumstances, as is the case of disability, age related needs, cultural and linguistic profiles, among others.

Qatar Foundation, in its commitment to education, research and community development, is in a primary position to lead the way in supporting Qatar’s effort to become a beacon of inclusivity in the Arab world. It is the College of Humanities and Social Sciences’ vision to support Qatar Foundation as it positions itself as a role model to all institutions in Qatar, so that they too may contribute towards making Qatar a truly inclusive nation that guides itself by principles of Non-discrimination, Awareness, Participation and Accessibility.

QF’s contribution to a more inclusive Qatar may be developed at the levels of ENACTMENT and of SUPPORT.

### *ENACTMENT*

1. Be a role model by implementing policies and adaptations that will make QF an example of good practices;
2. Develop educational programs/courses in topics related to human rights, diversity, inclusivity and accessibility;
3. Promote interdisciplinary R&D into innovative products, services and applications in diverse contexts;
4. Support community-based projects that raise awareness and contribute towards raising the profile of excluded groups or persons.

### *SUPPORT*

5. Work with governmental authorities towards enforcing and monitoring the implementation of laws and regulations;
6. Work with organizations/institutions towards the development of guidelines and processes that will support the implementation of such laws and regulations;
7. Provide consultation and mentorship to organizations/institutions wishing to implement accessibility measures;
8. Act as an “aggregator”, bringing together persons already working in the field to organize disperse information and coordinate efforts.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### *Qatar within the global take on inclusivity and accessibility*

Any approach to the topic of inclusion and accessibility finds its strongest roots in the international movements for/by persons with disabilities. However, in the present moment the general principles of inclusion and accessibility are to be extended to other domains, as are the requirements that come with cultural and linguistic diversity as well as those that derive of natural life circumstances, e.g. age-related issues or contextual disadvantage. It is, however, understood that any action that takes Persons with Disabilities (PwD) as their focus will benefit all persons, by taking into account that all persons have different abilities, preferences and requirements. By catering for the specific needs of a minority we are providing for better conditions for all.

On 9 July 2007, Qatar became the hundredth country to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Optional Protocol. In so doing, Qatar has committed to abide by what, on 3 May 2008, became a law for all signatory nations. Signing the Convention came naturally to a nation which has echoed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the Permanent Constitution of Qatar (2004), which devotes articles 34-58 to fundamental rights and principles, adopting the principle that rights are universal, interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. The nation's commitment to the respect for human rights was further reinforced in 2009, when Qatar ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

The existing legal frameworks have led to important structural improvements and is gradually leading to greater awareness and change in the social environment. Universal access, an expressed right in all the above mentioned laws and regulations, requires a holistic approach across all spheres of life. To ensure that people of all abilities are treated as citizens with "equal opportunities" (Permanent Constitution 2004, art. 19), special measures need to be taken to provide for those at a disadvantage "owing to loss of sensory, physical, psychological or intellectual capacities", as stated in the Qatar Persons with Special Needs Act n°2, of 2004. In an effort to implement measures to improve the circumstances of disabled people in Qatar, and in a clear translation of the Qatar National Vision, national strategies have come to incorporate disability issues as a core component. A Committee, comprising the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the Supreme Council for Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the Shafallah Centre and the Qatar Center for Persons with Special Needs, oversees the implementation of measures. This Committee ensures the application of the provisions of the Persons with Special Needs Act n°2 of 2004 in the fields of health, education, sports, culture, employment and housing.

The movement towards inclusion in Qatar has recently gained new impetus with the formal commitment to enact the *Doha Declaration*<sup>1</sup>, henceforth ‘a core reference point internationally for policy development about human rights and sustainable development in the context of disability.’ This Declaration was the landmark outcome of the Doha International Conference on Disability and Development, held on 7-8 December 2019, under the guidance and patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Founder of Qatar Foundation for Social Work and its affiliated civil society centers. This Declaration, that sets forth 11 recommendations to make Qatar (and other countries who may come to commit to it) actively adjusting itself to the needs of PwD, is an incentive to all those who are already on the ground working towards making Qatar a more welcoming and inclusive country. It must also be seen as added responsibility to those who serve the country and foster education, innovation and social justice, as is the case of Qatar Foundation. However, as mentioned above, inclusivity and accessibility issues do not pertain exclusively to Persons with Disabilities. The extension of the notion of equal rights, beyond the sphere of disability, is to be found in the UN (2011) ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework, which sets down the guiding principles on business and human rights. It states as its objective to enhance “standards and practices with regards to business and human rights so as to achieve tangible results for affected individuals and communities, and thereby also contributing to a socially sustainable globalization”. By “affected individuals”, it addresses “individuals from groups or populations that may be at heightened risk of becoming vulnerable or marginalized, and with due regard to the different risks that may be faced by women and men”.

By enacting these principles, Qatar will be acknowledging the value of human diversity and guaranteeing that the basic human rights are respected, thus honouring international and national laws and regulations.

### 3. CORE CONCEPTS

There are multiple understandings of notions such as human diversity, disability and impairment, barriers, participation and accessibility. For the purpose of this document the following understandings will be held:

- **Human diversity**

Range of human characteristics: People differ in ethnicity, gender, language, manners and culture, abilities, social roles, education, skills, income, and countless other domains.

- **Disability**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/Doha-Declaration-Disability2019.pdf>

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory **impairments**, which in interaction with various **barriers** hinder their full **participation** in society on an equal basis with others.” (CRPD, Art. 1)

Persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group.

- **Impairment**

An impairment is a problem with a body function or structure due to genetic factors, but also disease, illness or injury. Impairment may be present from birth (congenital) or acquired later in life. Impairment can cause a difference in the ability to undertake daily activities or functions, such as seeing, hearing, moving, remembering, concentrating, etc.

- **Barriers**

Any obstruction to participation in everyday life. Barriers may be attitudinal (negative attitudes and stereotyping); physical (structural – e.g. steps, heavy doors, ...); communicational (persons with difficulties in seeing, hearing, speaking, reading, writing and understanding); institutional (lack of legal frameworks); economic (low income); among others.

- **Participation**

The ability to lead a ‘normal’ life, to engage comfortably with the built environment and to participate in all spheres of social life.

- **Accessibility**

The foresight and removal of physical, communication, attitudinal and physical barriers. When barriers exist, the principle of ‘reasonable accommodation’ implies that they be removed to the possible extent to guarantee that PwD can exercise their basic rights. The removal of barriers will enable participation and compliance with the basic values of equity and social justice.

## **4. RATIONALE**

### *Why Qatar should be proactively implementing accessibility measures*

Qatar is a growing nation, leading the way in multiple domains, both at a regional and a global level. By taking inclusivity as one of its core values, it is positioning itself among the most progressive nations in respect for human diversity. Intrinsic to Islamic principles and values, respecting human diversity and promoting social justice and equity is in itself motive enough to pursue any action that will ultimately

improve the lives of those living or visiting the country and lead to national economic growth and international interest.

In short, social inclusion and (physical and human) environmental accessibility measures, in all spheres of life – education, health, work, entertainment, among others –, will enable greater participation by greater numbers of people, thus stimulating economy and progress.

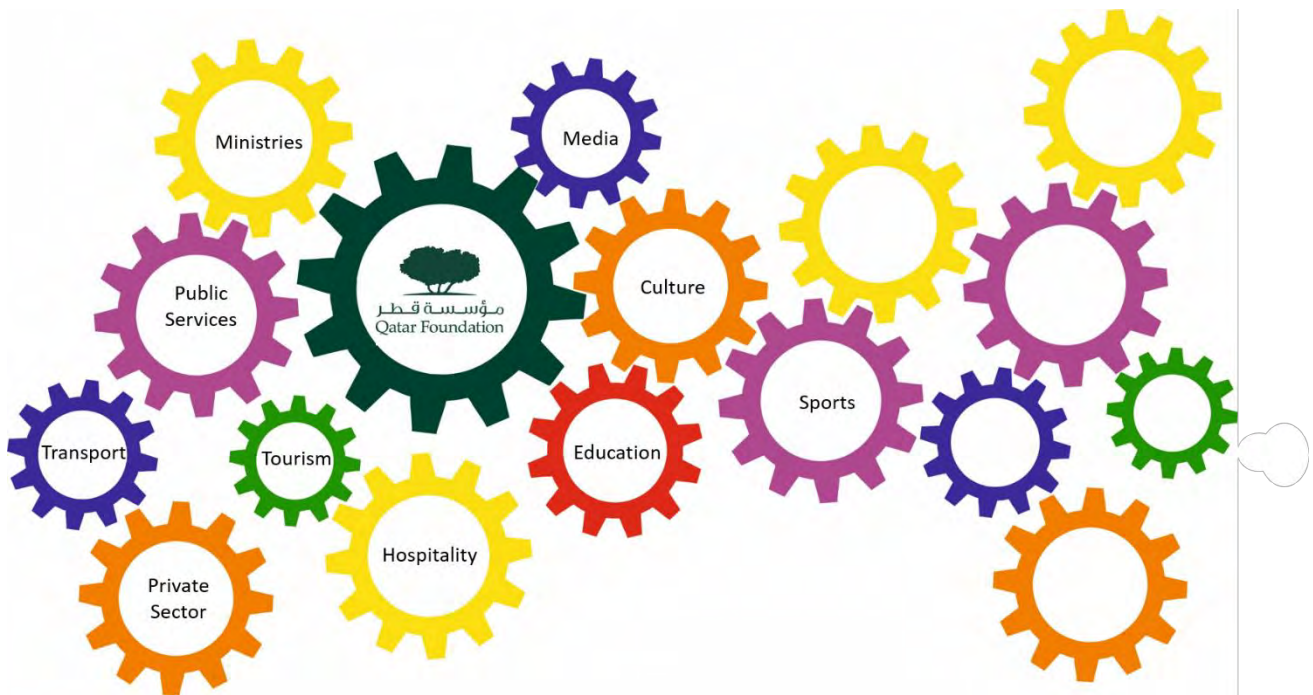
As Qatar prepares to welcome world-scale events, by promoting itself as an accessible country that respects and caters for human diversity, it is expanding its potential as a tourist destination with a difference, again enhancing revenue and gaining international recognition and acclaim.

### *Qatar Foundation's role in the national inclusivity movement*

It is in the spirit of the above-mentioned framework that Qatar Foundation can become a hub for change and development in the country.

While physical access is gradually taking shape in this modern country-in-construction, sensory and intellectual access to everyday communication is seldom addressed. In fact, all action is anchored in communication, the conduit that makes all experience and exchange meaningful. Communication, as it happens in the formal and informal circumstances of everyday life, is often not barrier-free, for linguistic or cultural reasons or for those that derive from impairment, as is the case of poor sight or hearing, learning or intellectual difficulties or simply environmental inadequacies. It is for this reason that this blueprint addresses all forms of accessibility as communication and looks at the problem as a whole while addressing issues that need to be solved at the core, if large-scale social change is to happen.

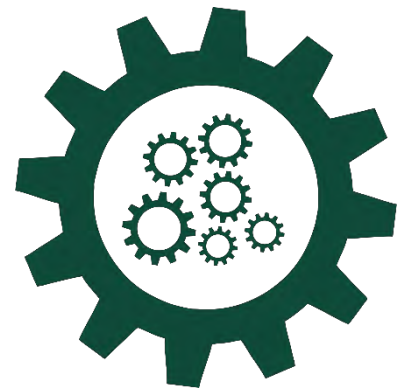
In the belief that big changes happen with small steps, and that envisaging a national strategy is beyond the capacity of single stakeholders, this blueprint offers a simple roadmap that brings together multiple stakeholders, and that may lead to sustainable and progressive change. It takes the action research approach to social change by calling for internal change before seeking external impact.



By accepting to enact change within the organization, Qatar Foundation will become a powerful ‘cog’ in the national system. It will lead by example and stimulate all the stakeholders it engages with, setting multiple projects in motion in collaboration with quite diverse partners that will develop continual repetitive cycles of ongoing **analysis/diagnosis, planning action, taking action, and evaluation.**

## 5. ENACTMENT

In its manifesto, QF commits to stimulating innovation, debate, discovery, curation, creation, thought and transformation to unlock human potential. There is no better way to do this than to lead by example. To become a role model and a case for reference in the issue of social justice and respect for diversity, QF should take action by looking inwards. A simple **roadmap** will determine the following steps at different levels: **diagnose current conditions and practices, create a long-term plan with short-term milestones and start acting on consistently monitored and evaluated small-scale projects/actions** that may come together towards a big-scale movement promoting inclusivity and accessibility.



All actions require that consistent and reiterative ‘**Diagnose – Plan – Act – Evaluate**’ cycles at diverse levels. A clear plan will determine which actions to prioritize, while evaluating the effort/impact ratio of each action. All recommendations for activities imply the involvement of PwD to abide by the dictate of ‘nothing about us without us’.

- *Policies and adaptations*

Given the diversity of structures QF buildings, unless there are clear policies and guidelines regarding overarching principles and direction, it will be difficult to have a holistic and systemic take on inclusion and accessibility. Addressing the issue at macro-level within the existing organizational complexity may be daunting. However, should there be a clear signal from the leadership that the goal is to make QF a role model, then multi-level actions may be taken that jointly become meaningful and of transformational power.

*Recommendations:*

1. Issue a call for action at the highest level, involving all leadership in QF (top-down action);
2. Involve highly motivated internal stakeholders in the drafting of a preliminary outline of achievable outcomes (long-term objective setting);
3. Invite leadership (e.g. Deans, Heads of Administrative/Service departments) to contribute to the QF roadmap by establishing priorities and internal medium and short-term plans for their unit(s);
4. Create a focus/working group to lead and coordinate inclusion and accessibility-based initiatives within and beyond QF;
5. Gradually incorporate regular inclusion/accessibility measures in all QF venues and services;
6. Hire and accept students with disabilities and implement the necessary adaptations to sure their participation in all aspects of the QF experience;
7. Support the implementation of a selection of feasible, high impact projects/actions;
8. Evaluate and showcase good practices;
9. Elaborate guidelines for easy replication of successful initiatives.

*Low effort/high impact actions:*

1. Elaborate and disseminate an institutional charter on inclusion or add a specific allusion to it in QFs values and vision;
2. Circulate a glossary of non-discriminatory language to used in all QF official documents and communication;
3. Reinforce positive messages about diversity, disability and accessibility in social media and other media presence;
4. Ensure all online presence follows WCAG guidelines at an AAA (human tested) level.

- *Educational programs/courses in topics related to human rights, diversity, inclusivity and accessibility*

Education is at the core of QF's mission. The future can best be shaped if education instils values and helps the younger generation to see an interest in implementing change. We have recently seen that pressing issues, such as climate change and the environment, have gained new importance when taken on as a 'cause' by the younger generations. It is therefore imperative that the topic of inclusion and accessibility be introduced to students, attending all educational levels.

*Recommendations:*

1. Suggesting to all QF-based educational institutions introduce topic within the existing curricula or by introducing topic-specific courses, workshops or other awareness-raising initiatives;

2. Hold awareness campaigns with staff, faculty/teachers, students, families and community at large;
3. Promote actions/activities that highlight the value of cultural diversity and ability that every disability entails;
4. Teach by example: implement inclusive language and develop accessibility solutions in highly visible contexts;
5. Involve students in the development of accessible experiences/actions in entertaining initiatives (e.g. accessible library sessions, accessible museum visits, ...).

Low effort/high impact actions:

1. Develop and pilot short MOOC courses to support educators who want to disseminate the basics of inclusive thinking;
2. Offer 3h awareness-raising workshops to educational institutions within QF (co-taught with PwD);
3. Introduce Qatari sign language classes for children and adults.

- *Interdisciplinary R&D into innovative products, services and applications in diverse contexts*

Research is necessarily at the heart of any initiative to be developed in this domain. The value of research relates directly to its impact and application. Understanding a phenomena and then finding solutions for existing problems is the best way to ensure that the outcomes are truly applicable and useful. In a similar guise, accessibility problems have led to the development of practical solutions that require the prototyping and the co-creation of innovative products that derive from co-creative collaboration between researchers and end-users.

Recommendations:

1. Support R&D that focuses on accessibility-related topics and the development of new products or new services within socially relevant contexts;
2. Set-up an innovation think-tank, with regular sessions to brainstorm new ideas and initiatives and disseminate ongoing and finalized projects;
3. Involve public and private institutions in R&D projects that have direct application to the partner contexts/venues (e.g. Hamad Airport, Qatar Airways, Tourism Authority, ...).

Low effort/High impact actions:

1. Carry out a QF-wide survey to diagnose current state-of-the-art regarding attitudes, physical and communication barriers;
2. Carry out focused accessibility projects within QF premises, engaging management, specialists, researchers and stakeholders (e.g. HBKU student center – Multaqa).

- *Support community-based projects that raise awareness and contribute towards raising the profile of excluded groups or persons.*

Raising awareness within and beyond the QF community will be the first step towards change. That will be best achieved by the development of community-based projects that will highlight the positive impact of diversity and the importance of inclusivity. If such projects are in themselves instances of positive inclusion, involving those considered most vulnerable and socially excluded, then change will come through example.

#### Recommendations:

1. Support diversity-related actions during/within regular festivities and activities;
2. Introduce accessibility conditions in all actions/activities;
3. Involve and support inclusion-related actions that are organized in collaboration with institutions related to disability (eg. The deaf and the Blind Cultural Centers; Shafallah; Audio Complex; ...)
4. Formally celebrate international days (Cultural Diversity 21 May; PwD 3 December; Autism month April; with high visibility/impact )

#### Low effort/High impact actions:

1. Use Siraj to showcase audiovisual translation for access (subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing audiences and audio description);
2. Promote regular accessibility-related actions in Library, Mathaf, and Oxygen park, ...;
3. Promote high-impact awareness actions (e.g. dinner in the dark at Chef's garden, accessible cinema cycle in the park).

## 6. SUPPORT

Qatar Foundation is particularly well equipped to support a national effort towards a MORE INCLUSIVE QATAR. Among its staff and researchers, it has unique expertise that is of great value to the preparation of the upcoming big-scale international events and to the implementation of solutions that will live beyond as valuable legacy.

Further to leading by example, QF can offer important services to public and private sectors. This can be done if Qatar Foundation formally approaches such potential partners offering its services and willingness to:

- *Work with governmental authorities towards enforcing and monitoring the implementation of laws and regulations;*
- *Work with organizations/institutions towards the development of guidelines and processes that will support the implementation of such laws and regulations;*
- *Provide consultation and mentorship to organizations/institutions wishing to implement accessibility measures;*
- *Act as an “aggregator”, bringing together persons already working in the field to organize disperse information and coordinate efforts.*



31 May 2019

[UPDATED 21 January 2020]