

Fact Sheet 1: Donated wheelchairs in low-income countries

Donated wheelchairs may seem like the logical solution to the lack of wheelchairs in low-income countries. In reality, most of them break quickly, cannot be repaired, and can cause very serious health problems.

In order to provide long lasting mobility, a wheelchair must meet these four criteria:

1. **Adjustability:** The wheelchair must either be made to the measurements of the user or should be easily adjusted to fit the user. It must always come with a pressure relief cushion.
2. **Suitability:** The wheelchair must be able to navigate the terrain that the wheelchair user must push through.
3. **Durability:** The wheelchair must be well made, long lasting and easily repaired. Replacement parts should be easily available.
4. **Sustainability:** The wheelchair should be supplied in a way that provides wheelchairs to the community in the long term.



A child in an adult's wheelchair in Russia. This wheelchair may cause health problems such as pressure sores, contractures, and long term postural problems.

Problems with donated wheelchairs

Adjustability	Donated used wheelchairs can rarely be adjusted to fit the individual user and will usually be too small or too large, especially for children. An ill-fitting wheelchair, particularly when it is provided without a pressure relieving cushion, can cause extremely serious and potentially fatal health problems such as pressure sores, spinal curvature (scoliosis) and contractures.
Suitability	Most of these wheelchairs were designed for use in hospital or indoor settings in industrialised countries like the UK or the US. In low-income countries, which tend to have uneven or unpaved roads and sandy terrain, these wheelchairs will be difficult or impossible to use.
Durability	Donated chairs from industrialised countries tend to break easily in the rough conditions in most low-income countries. Repairs are extremely expensive because replacement parts are usually not available locally.
Sustainability	A large influx of donated wheelchairs can put local wheelchair producers out of business, eliminating the long-term source of wheelchairs for that community. There is also no follow-up or support for wheelchair users after the distribution.

For more information, visit Motivation's website at: <http://www.motivation.org.uk> or contact us on +44 (0)1275 464012.