

Accessible EU Report.

Accessibility of the Built Environment in the European Union

Working together to build a more accessible European Union for persons with
disabilities

Consortium composed by:



0. Executive summary

The purpose of this document is to provide background information related to EU policies, legislation and standards that aim to ensure accessibility of the built environment for all citizens. Accessibility is recognised as an enabling factor for freedom of movement and the full social and economic integration of persons with disabilities. Following the adoption of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the EU and all the Member States, accessibility is also recognised as a right that shall be guaranteed by laws and statutes.

The report sets out the key EU policies contained in legislative acts, followed by relevant European accessibility standards, their scope and areas of application. These policies and regulations support decision makers, planners, architects, designers, engineers and procurement officers in their work to ensure accessibility, safety and usability of everything in the built environment. However, these instruments are not sufficient, on their own and additional measures are needed in the form of awareness raising, education and training of professionals and all stakeholders.

As a response to the shortfall in certain areas of accessibility, the AccessibleEU Resource Centre has been launched to improve accessibility of the Built Environment, ICTs, Transport, Standards and Legislation, with a number of coordinated actions. While the built environment is addressed as a separate target, there is a strong relationship between all five areas.

AccessibleEU will develop actions addressing EU built environment policies, monitoring of implementation and compliance with legislation and standards, improving access to relevant knowledge and skills by professionals, identifying and sharing good practices and carrying out studies.

Accessibility is also identified as a key factor for the achievement of EU policies on sustainable development, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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1. Introduction

In EU Member States, **accessibility in the built environment** is seen as an essential and fundamental right for all members of society. Providing accessible places and spaces enables people to enjoy the everyday activities and opportunities taking place or being offered there and enables them to participate safely, independently, conveniently, with confidence, and with dignity. On the other hand, where accessibility is poor, many persons - and especially, persons with disabilities - encounter significant barriers in terms of accessing environments, buildings (and the services they contain), and in the general usability of the built environment.

While the majority of access barriers are, understandably, found in older buildings and environments, even new buildings and facilities continue to be built in a manner which do not address the access requirements of all users. Both public and privately funded projects, like schools and museums, as well as private houses and offices are found to fail on - sometimes basic – accessibility requirements.

1.1. Access barriers affect all of us – and some more than others

Barriers in the built environment, for example in transport terminals, schools, banks, hospitals and clinics, offices, shops, cultural, sports and tourism facilities, are reducing and even hindering persons with disabilities in accessing these places and the services they provide. This is common in all EU Member States, effectively discriminating against the rights of 87 million persons with disabilities, reducing the freedoms of approximately 90.5 million citizens aged 65 and older as well as families with small children and European consumers in general. ([European Commission Disability Strategy 2021](#), [Eurostat, 2020](#)).

It is important to note that accessibility is essential for 20% of the population – those with disabilities, helpful for 40% including seniors and families with small children, and comfortable and safe for 100%. ([Design for All Foundation](#)).

Universal Design, Design-for-All and Inclusive Design are similar approaches to the design of the built environment that have been practiced for over 20 years in the Europe, North America, and more recently in Brazil, Australia, Singapore and, increasingly in other countries. These approaches were developed in recognition that standards-based technical solutions often failed to accommodate the diverse range of access needs among persons of all ages and abilities. Earlier building regulations generally lacked consideration of accessibility and where accessibility was included, “minimal compliance” was not sufficient to address the needs of all users. Building clients would commonly instruct financial officers, architects and designers to do only what was necessary according to the regulations. Thus, accessibility was widely seen as a burden and as an “obligation” to be fulfilled to avoid legal consequences. This held back designers from understanding the advantages of accessible buildings, driving down the quality, safety and usability of the built environment for many users.

With the significant push from equality legislation, with the adoption of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), policy makers and standardisers have moved on in the past decade, recognising the importance of including the requirements of all persons with disabilities and other potential users when planning and designing buildings and physical infrastructure. There is now greater awareness of **the diversity of users** and an appreciation of their **varied lived experiences** such that the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities (related to mobility, body stature, sensory impairments, long-term health conditions, cognition, neurodiversity) and persons in different stages of life, have influenced recent EU and international accessibility standards. (CEN-CENELEC, 2017).

1.2. A new approach to standards

An innovative approach to Standards, considering the access needs of the widest range of users, can be found, for example, in European Standard EN 17210:2021 “Accessibility and usability of the built environment – Functional requirements”, in these two citations:

“The functional requirements and recommendations in this document are formulated with qualitative terms and describe the objectives which have to be reached, based on the diversity that a wide range of users presents (goals for protection) and can be used as criteria for awarding public contracts (in support of the Public Procurement Directives) as well as for other purposes, i.e. for accessibility legislation.”

and

“The functional accessibility and usability requirements in the standard are based on the widest range of user needs and target groups. These requirements support the diversity of all persons and a life-course perspective, i.e. persons with physical impairments, persons with sensory impairments, persons with allergies, persons with learning difficulties/cognitive impairments and persons with mental-ill-health, persons with age-related conditions, but also persons in different stages of life, as children, adults and older persons.”

The use of European (EN) and International (ISO) Standards is generally voluntary, both for member States and for economic operators.

For a technical standard to become a **harmonised European standard** or **norm** (sometimes referred to as a 'HEN'), with legal force under European law, two conditions apply:

- The standard is developed by one or more of the three European Standards Organisations under a mandate from the European

Commission. These organisations, also known as European Standards Organisations (ESOs), are: [ETSI](#), [CEN](#) and [CENELEC](#)).

- A reference to the specific version of the standard must be published in the Official Journal of the EU.

For example, the standard developed jointly by the three ESOs to support the Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) is '[EN 301 549 - Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services](#)'.

Only 2 versions of standard EN 301 549 have been harmonised to date:

1. [version EN 301 549 v2.1.2](#), harmonised in December 2018.
2. the [latest version EN 301 549 v3.2.1](#), which became the sole relevant standard on 12 February 2022.

A period of overlap is provided for, so that Member States have time to adapt to the latest version.

How well the recent EU legislation and standards for the built environment will influence building and construction practices in the near and long-term depends not only on the wording of legal and regulatory texts but also on the awareness and readiness of tens of thousands of policy makers, planners, architects, builders and other practitioners to adopt new methods and engage with stakeholders, (especially building clients and users), to develop the accessible buildings that are required in Europe.

1.3. An accessible built environment contributes to sustainability

It is important to recognise that accessibility contributes greatly to sustainable development, when inclusive or universal design approaches are applied.

Making environments that suit the widest range of users from the start makes

later adaptations (such as adding ramps or widening doors) unnecessary, saving materials, time and money – to name just one example.

The [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for the year 2030 set out a framework of 17 goals, each with specific targets.

Ensuring an accessible and inclusive built environment that can be used equitably and independently by all people can make a contribution to several of the UN sustainable development goals. These include:

- No. 3. Good Health and Well-being
- No. 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- No. 10. Reduced Inequalities
- No. 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities

The European Union has made **sustainable development** a high-level political priority and supports the implementation of the UN SDGs in the EU institutions and in the Member States. This is clearly stated in the [EU and the United Nations - common goals for a sustainable future](#) (website).

1.4. Accessibility as part of design education: when will it become mandatory?

Education is a vital element when considering how to achieve accessible environments and buildings in Europe. It is unfortunate that “accessibility” is not a mandatory subject in the normal curricula and education for architects, planners and related professionals. A study was conducted by the Austrian “Design for All” association to investigate the extent to which accessibility, Design for All and/or Universal Design formed a part of the educational curricula in different Architecture Schools and in universities, mainly located within Austria ([Design for All Austria, 2010. “Barrierefreies Bauen: Ausbildung und Beratung in Österreich. Analyse und Ausblick”](#) - available in German).

At the end of the study report there is a short chapter on international approaches to "Design Teaching". It was found that there is a lack of knowledge among design professionals, which presents an obstacle to achieving an accessible environment. The study concludes:

"The practice of only teaching 'what the building legislation says' leads to less understanding of the benefits of "Design for All" for all users. Universal Design and/or Design for All must not be treated as a specialised subject, nor should "Designing for persons with disabilities" – they should be integrated in mandatory basic level courses."

Design for All Austria, (2010, op.cit.)

1.5. Building control: compliance with accessibility regulations and standards

Around Europe, there is a patchwork of rules and regulations governing building control, which affects the degree and nature of accessibility assessment and the overall quality and usability of buildings. During the past 25 years there has been a tendency in some countries to reduce building control measures by public authorities and in conformity assessment. "Self-declaration" of conformity has replaced public or 3rd party control. This can lead to unsatisfactory implementation of accessibility requirements in the market place.

Access consultants (as a new professional category) could support better guidance on design standards, and support conformity assessment. In the United Kingdom there is , increasing use of Access Auditors – some of them holding a national certificate which testifies to their knowledge of construction and design standards. The Technical Chamber of Greece has begun training accessibility auditors, within the framework of the national action plan for the rights of persons with disabilities. These auditors will assess the accessibility of public buildings against the national accessibility legislation.

Access Statements prepared by trained access auditors can be another tool to show the level of accessibility in the built environment, where services and products are delivered (RIBA, 2023).

2. European Regulations related to the Built Environment

2.1. European Accessibility Act (EAA)

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) was adopted by the European Union in 2019. It is officially known as *Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services*. The Directive supports Member States in their efforts to fulfil their national commitments, as well as their obligations under the UN CRPD regarding accessibility in a harmonised manner.

The EAA aims to improve the accessibility of products and services in order to promote the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. The EAA mainly covers a wide range of products and services, with specific accessibility requirements and standards that need to be met by the manufacturers and providers of ICT/digital products and services in areas such as public transportation, electronic communication, banking services, e-books, e-commerce, and more. The Act also addresses the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications. However, the EAA does not apply to buildings and the built environment, as such. It includes an Annex III with indicative requirements for buildings where digital services are provided, as listed below.

Box 1. EAA Annex III**Accessibility requirements for the purpose of Article 4(4) concerning the built environment where the services under the scope of this directive are provided.**

In order to maximise the foreseeable use in an independent manner by persons with disabilities of the built environment in which a service is provided and which is under the responsibility of the service provider, as referred to in Article 4(4), the accessibility of areas intended for public access shall include the following aspects:

- (a) use of related outdoor areas and facilities;
- (b) approaches to buildings; use of entrances; use of paths in horizontal circulation;
- (d) use of paths in vertical circulation; use of rooms by the public;
- (f) use of equipment and facilities used in the provision of the service
- (g) use of toilets and sanitary facilities;
- (h) use of exits, evacuation routes and concepts for emergency planning
- (i) communication and orientation via more than one sensory channel;
- (j) use of facilities and buildings for their foreseeable purpose;
- (k) protection from hazards in the environment indoors and outdoors.

It should be noted that this Annex text is provided as guidance only and does not have the status of a European Regulation or Standard. This Annex is indicative of the desire that governments across the European Union should use these 11 points to develop and enforce regulations and policies that require new buildings and public spaces to be accessible to persons with disabilities. So far this intention – or wish - is not fulfilled through a unified and transparent assessment method across Europe, although it is likely that Member States do have mechanisms in place to identify at least some of these performance criteria.

The European Disability Forum and other European associations have noted, with disappointment, the failure of the EAA to regulate accessibility of the built environment in the EU Member States.

See: [AccessibleEU report on Legislation \(2023\)](#)

Member States had until June 2022 to transpose the provisions of the Act into their national legislation and ensure compliance with the accessibility requirements outlined in the directive. It is noted that only a small number of countries had transposed the regulation by the deadline.

2.2. Directive 2014/24/EU - Public Procurement

The [Directive 2014/24/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement includes provisions for accessibility in public procurement processes. It requires that accessibility criteria be taken into account when public authorities purchase goods, services, or works related to the built environment. The directive encourages the inclusion of accessibility requirements in public procurement contracts.

The [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1058 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund](#) sets out the scope and aims of the two Cohesion Policy Funds, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. These funding instruments help the EU Member States to reach their goals for investments in jobs, growth and European territorial cooperation. Accessibility is specifically mentioned as one of the “horizontal principles for projects and measures that are funded under this regulation. Clause 5 of the Regulation states that:

“Horizontal principles as set out in Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and in Article 10 TFEU, including the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as set out in Article 5 TEU, should be respected in the

implementation of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, taking into account the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Member States should also respect the obligations set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), as well as the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in 2017, and ensure accessibility in line with Article 9 of the UNCRPD, and in accordance with the Union law harmonising accessibility requirements for products and services. In that context, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, in synergy with the ESF+, should be implemented in a way that promotes the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care and should pursue their objectives with a view to contributing to the creation of quality jobs, eradication of poverty and promoting social inclusion. Member States and the Commission should aim at eliminating inequalities and at promoting equality between men and women and integrating the gender perspective, as well as at combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Neither fund should support actions that contribute to any form of segregation or exclusion, and, when financing infrastructure, both should ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.”

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, (op.cit.).

3. European Standards related to the built environment

There are several European (EN) standards and ISO Standards adopted by EU Member States which, together with EU Member States’ national standards and guidelines, provide a framework for promoting accessibility and usability of the built environment. They cover a range of topics including functional requirements based on the diversity of users’ various access needs, specific

technical requirements for the design and performance of public spaces and buildings in general, accessibility requirements for specific building types and test methods.

Standards on the design of an accessible and inclusive environment can be used by:

- Local government officers in planning, access, design, conservation, and building control
- Their private sector counterparts
- Architects
- Interior designers
- Landscape designers.

The standards are also relevant to the work of other practitioners, educators and service providers in the public and private sectors.

See also: AccessibleEU, “Report on Standards” (2023).

European standards related to accessibility and usability of the built environment are listed in the following Box.

Box: European Built Environment Standards*

[EN 81-20:2020](#) Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Lifts for the transport of persons and goods - Part 20: Passenger and goods passenger lifts

[EN 81-70:2021](#) Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and goods passenger lift - Part 70: Accessibility to lifts for persons including persons with disability.

[EN 81-72:2020](#) Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and goods passenger lifts - Part 72: Firefighters lifts.

[EN 17210:2021](#) Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements.

[TR 17621](#) Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Technical performance criteria and specifications

[TR 17622](#) Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Conformity Assessment.

[EN 12182:2012](#) Accessibility and mobility in the built environment - Means of communication for and orientation of persons with visual and hearing impairments. (This standard is now withdrawn).

[EN 17161:2019](#) 'Design for All - Accessibility' following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users.

[ISO/IEC Guide 71:2014](#) Guide for addressing accessibility in standards.

[ISO/TR 22411:2021](#) Ergonomics data for use in the application of ISO/IEC Guide 71:2014.

[ISO 21902:2021](#) Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations.

*** Links to Standards and Technical Reports shown in this box are directed to the British Standards Institute's Knowledge Base, which is both comprehensive and simple to use.**

The content of each of these Standards and Technical Reports is briefly summarised, below:

EN 81-20:2020 Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Lifts for the transport of persons and goods - Part 20: Passenger and goods passenger lifts. Specifies the safety rules for construction, installation, use and maintenance of lifts for passengers and goods.

EN 81-70:2021 Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and goods passenger lift - Part 70: Accessibility to lifts for persons including persons with disability. This document specifies the minimum requirements for the safe and independent access and use of lifts by persons, including persons with disabilities. It covers

the needs of persons with disabilities according to Annex A. Guidance on solutions for increased accessibility and usability is given in Annex D.

EN 81-72:2020 Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and goods passenger lifts - Part 72: Firefighters' lifts. Specifies the additional or deviating requirements to EN 81-20:2020 for new passenger and goods passenger lifts which can be used for firefighting and evacuation purposes under firefighters' control.

EN 17210:2021 Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Functional requirements. This standard was mandated by the European Commission under M/420, that defines functional requirements for accessibility and usability of the built environment. It covers a range of topics such as:

- car parks,
- access routes,
- circulation spaces,
- stairs,
- doors and windows,
- lifts,
- lighting and indoor climate,

among others. It also gives requirements and recommendations for specific building types including:

- Housing, Overnight accommodation,
- Culture, Leisure and Sport venues,
- Administrative, Service and Employment buildings,
- Conference venues,
- Healthcare, Banks, Hospitals,
- Education buildings,
- Courts and Religious buildings.

The EN 1720:2021 is supported by two Technical Reports, also produced under the M/420 mandate, as follows:

TR 17621 Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Technical performance criteria and specifications. This document has been developed to support EN 17210, (above), providing examples of a way or ways in which the functional requirements in EN 17210 could be fulfilled. It shows how technical performance criteria and specifications for an accessible and usable built environment can be achieved, following the Design for All/Universal design principles. The document specifies what is necessary to align with these principles which will facilitate equitable and safe use for a wide range of users. The technical performance criteria and specifications are applicable across the full spectrum of the built environment and can be used as criteria for awarding public contracts (in support of the Public Procurement Directives). These technical performance criteria and specifications are specifically applicable to the design, construction, refurbishment or adaptation, and maintenance of public or public-use environments including external areas.

NOTE: The examples shown in the Technical Report are not binding.

Alternatively, national standards and regulations may determine the technical performance criteria and specifications to fulfil the functional requirements of EN 17210.

TR 17622 Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Conformity Assessment. This document provides criteria to assess conformity of the built environment with the functional requirements and recommendations as described in EN 17210 (above), regardless of whether self-declaration, second-party attestation or third-party certification is requested. This document provides guidance on how and when accessibility and usability of the built environment have to be considered throughout all stages of the building process, including feasibility studies, design, construction, completion and post occupancy. It is also applicable for refurbishment or adaptation of existing buildings.

EN 12182:2012 Accessibility and mobility in the built environment - Means of communication for and orientation of persons with visual and hearing impairments. This standard covers topic such as signage, alarms, and tactile

information. It should be noted that, although this standard is available for purchase, it is no longer “current” and has been withdrawn.

[EN 17161:2019](#) 'Design for All - Accessibility' following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users.

This standard specifies requirements that enable an organisation to design, develop and provide products, goods and services so that they can be accessed, understood and used by the widest range of users, including persons with disabilities. The document specifies requirements and recommendations that enables an organisation to address a wide range of users by identifying diverse needs, characteristics, capabilities, and preferences, by directly or indirectly involving users, and by using knowledge about accessibility in its procedures and processes. It specifies requirements that can enable an organisation to meet applicable statutory and regulatory requirements as related to the accessibility of its products, goods and services.

Planning is ongoing at EU level for the development of a new European Harmonised Standard with technical specifications on accessibility of the built environment, in support of the European Accessibility Act.

ISO 21542:2021 Accessibility and usability of the built environment - Public buildings – Requirements. This document provides essential requirements and necessary recommendations for the realisation of a safe, inclusive, age-friendly and sustainable built environment that is accessible and usable by all. The purpose of this document is to describe how a building should be designed, constructed, managed and maintained in order to enable people to: approach and enter the building; use the building's facilities, services and information networks; egress from the building under normal conditions; and evacuate the building during an emergency. The intention of this document is to meet the needs of the broadest majority of people. This goal is achieved by agreement on minimum standards of provision that are generally accepted to accommodate human diversity and variation, in age, ability, and behaviour, common in every society. It also provides guidance on good building

management practice and procedures that are essential to maintain original as-built or as-adapted performance during the life cycle of the building and, in the event of a fire or other emergency incidents, to ensure that the intended safety strategy is successfully initiated and executed.

ISO/IEC Guide 71:2014 and the guidance document, ISO/TR 22411:2021 on ergonomic data, augment and assist in understanding the requirements of the ISO 21542 Standard.

ISO 21902:2021 Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations. This document establishes

requirements and provides guidelines for “accessible tourism for all” with the aim of ensuring equal access and enjoyment of tourism by the widest range of people of all ages and abilities. It provides information on the key aspects of policy making, strategy, infrastructure, products and services and is addressed to all stakeholders involved in the tourism supply chain, whether from the public or private sector. It applies at local, regional, national and international levels. The standard refers to the ISO 21542 Standard for matters related to built environment infrastructure. For specific building uses, such as accommodation, cultural, leisure and sport use, administrative, service and employment buildings, and outdoor and urban areas and transport facilities, the basic functional accessibility requirements are supplemented by key requirements and recommendations supported by other related standards or guidance documents. Potential users of the standard include, but are not limited to, public administrations, accommodation services, catering and restaurant services, transport, tour operators and travel agencies, MICE and leisure activities, as well as service providers from other economic sectors related to tourism, travel and destination management, including their contractors and suppliers. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has published a series of “User Guides” which accompany the ISO standard, giving a summary of the actions that can be taken by stakeholders in various tourism and transport sub-sectors. (UNWTO, 2022, 2023).

At present, further ISO guidance documents addressing a) accessibility of environments for children with disabilities and b) accessibility of cultural heritage buildings and monuments, are under preparation.

3.1. Certification of compliance with accessibility regulations and standards and recognition of “Good Practices”

In European countries there are various certification methods and recognised certifications that are used to ensure compliance with accessibility standards in the built environment, based on EU, national or regional legislation and practice. Legal enforcement of certification does not always apply, although accessibility requirements contained in prevailing national or regional Building Regulations shall normally be assessed and certified as fulfilled when a new or renovated building is taken into use.

Compliance may be variously assessed by self-declarations, conformity assessments or third-party verification processes, depending on legal requirements of the jurisdiction, at local, regional, national or EU level.

Recognition of good practices on accessibility may be based on definitions or criteria that are set up in order to justify grants or subventions, or to give recognition or awards for “good practice” or as a marketing tool, the latter especially in the case of tourist destinations.

Some of the commonly used methods and certifications include:

- 1. National and Regional Accessibility Certification Schemes:** Many EU member states have developed their own national or regional accessibility certification schemes or labels. These schemes often involve the evaluation of accessibility features in buildings and infrastructure based on specific national requirements and guidelines.

- Examples include "Accessible Built Environment Label" in France and "German Accessibility Certificate" in Germany.
2. Accessibility Information Schemes (AIS) for tourist destinations, tourism buildings and facilities are in operation in many EU countries and internationally. See <https://pantou.org/accessibility-info> Similar to (1), above, these usually use characteristic labels and provide detailed accessibility information on websites or in "Access Guides" as a means of communicating - and marketing - accessibility characteristics of a venue to potential visitors with disabilities or others with specific access requirements.
 3. European Accessibility Act (EAA) Compliance: The European Accessibility Act (EAA) establishes minimum accessibility requirements for a range of products and services, including the built environment (in Annex III, as referred to above). Compliance with the EAA involves demonstrating adherence to the specified accessibility criteria, which can be assessed through self-declarations, conformity assessments, or third-party verification processes.
 4. EU Accessible City Award: Recognises cities and municipalities that prioritise and implement accessibility measures in urban areas.
 5. Accessible Tourism Destination Certification: Certifies destinations that provide accessible tourism facilities and services. (Can be found in France, Spain and Portugal under various schemes).
 6. BREEAM In-Use: BREEAM (UK Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) is a widely recognised sustainability certification scheme. While it primarily assesses environmental sustainability, BREEAM In-Use also includes criteria related to accessibility and usability, contributing to the overall accessibility assessment of a building.

It is important to note that the adoption and use of specific certification methods and recognition schemes varies considerably across EU member states and a complete overview of these has, so far, not been undertaken. Each country may have its own preferred schemes or certifications, as well as national regulations and requirements for assessing and certifying accessibility in the built environment.

3.2. Design Guidelines on accessibility of the Built Environment

A large number of design guidelines on accessibility of the built environment have been produced and published by public authorities, private organisations and non-profit associations and foundations in many EU Member States and third countries.

These guidelines have the purpose of providing guidance and advice on design solutions and options, often illustrating approaches which can lead to the design of better environments for all, while fulfilling the demands of accessibility legislation and regulations.

AccessibleEU aims to collect the references of the best of these guidance documents and will list them in the Online Library of the AccessibleEU Resource Centre.

4. Some developments in accessibility legislation and standards outside the EU

4.1. United Nations

4.1.1. UNCRPD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), with its Optional Protocol, was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2006. It came into force as an international legal instrument on 3 May 2008. Full information can be found on the UN website:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>.

The principles of accessibility and usability for all are supported by Preamble Paragraph (g), and Articles 9, 10, 11, 12 and 19 of the CRPD.

In particular, **Article 9 Accessibility** states:

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States 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;

- b. Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.”

Article 9 goes on to require States Parties to take appropriate measures to: develop minimum standards and guidelines for accessibility; to ensure that private entities offer accessible facilities and services to the public; to provide training for stakeholders; to provide public signage in Braille and in easy-to-read and understand formats; and to provide assistance to persons with disabilities to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public, among other requirements.

These principles of accessibility and usability are reinforced by actions and initiatives of the United Nations and some of its constituent bodies.

4.1.2. UN Sustainable Development Framework Agenda

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 recognise the importance of the built environment in promoting inclusion, accessibility, and independence for persons with disabilities. Several goals and targets within the SDGs directly or indirectly address the effect of the built environment on persons with disabilities, including the following:

1. Goal 4: Quality Education: Target 4.5 emphasises the importance of ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. The built environment plays a role in creating inclusive educational facilities that accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities.
2. Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: Target 9.1 emphasises the need to develop reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including transportation systems, to support economic development and

- human well-being. Accessible infrastructure plays a vital role in enabling the inclusion and mobility of persons with disabilities.
3. Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities: This goal highlights the importance of reducing inequalities within and among countries. It includes targets that address social, economic, and political inclusion, promoting equal access to social protection, basic services, and infrastructure, which are crucial for ensuring the inclusion and independence of persons with disabilities.
 4. Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities: This goal aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Target 11.7 specifically focuses on providing universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces, making them resilient and sustainable for all, including persons with disabilities.
 5. Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals: This goal focuses on strengthening global partnerships to achieve sustainable development. Collaboration between governments, organisations, and stakeholders is crucial for developing inclusive policies, implementing accessibility standards, and creating environments that empower persons with disabilities.

The goals and targets of the SDGs emphasise the need for inclusive and accessible infrastructure, services, and environments that promote the inclusion and independence of persons with disabilities. By addressing issues related to accessibility, inclusive design, and equal access to infrastructure and services, the SDGs can contribute to creating a more inclusive and sustainable world for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Protection of persons with disabilities during severe natural events, e.g. earthquakes, floods, landslides, typhoons and tsunamis, is dealt with under the [Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction \(2015 - 2030\)](#), which forms part of the UN Sustainable Development Framework Agenda.

4.1.3. World Health Organisation

The [World Health Organization's 2016-2020 Global Strategy & Action Plan on Ageing & Health](#) and the [WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing Plan of Action 2021-2030](#) address measures to promote active ageing, including the development of age-friendly environments through the application of Universal Design.

4.2. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA became legally binding on July 26, 1990. ADA is a landmark civil rights legislation in the United States that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and ensures equal opportunities and access to public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and tele-communications. Since its enactment, the ADA has had a significant impact on improving the lives of individuals with disabilities and in promoting accessibility and inclusion across various sectors of society. For over 30 years, the ADA has served as a model for other countries in developing their own disability rights and accessibility legislation. Many countries have looked to the ADA as a source of inspiration and guidance when crafting their own laws to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. Although the specific laws and regulations on accessibility vary from country to country, the ADA has played a significant role in shaping global discussion on accessibility and promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities. Its impact in the US has led to advances in accessibility legislation and practices worldwide.

4.3. Canada

In November 2022, Accessibility Standards Canada produced a draft document of 116 pages entitled, "A model standard for the built environment – accessibility". The planned standard would apply to all the provinces of Canada, when approved. While this draft is under development and subject to change, it

provides both functional requirements and technical specifications for accessibility of buildings, systems and design components which can be a useful reference source for a possible harmonised standard in Europe.

4.4. United Kingdom

The British Standards Institute (BSI) has revised BS 8300:2018 “Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment”. This standard aims to give clients, design professionals, builders, local government officials, enforcers and ultimately users of buildings the information they need to create an inclusive environment from the outset of a project. An inclusive environment is one that works for as wide a range of people as possible – including disabled people, the elderly, and children.

BS 8300 now comes in two parts: *Part 1: External environment – code of practice* and *Part 2: Buildings – code of practice*. Part 1 primarily covers access in and around the external environment and the approaches to buildings; part 2 provides guidance on access within buildings, including the facilities that should be provided inside buildings. The recommendations in both parts of BS 8300 are accompanied by “scene-setting” commentary that places the recommendations in context for readers not familiar with the barriers experienced by disabled people. In some instances, recommendations are specific; in others, they include dimensional ranges. Dimensional ranges are intended to provide designers with some flexibility of design solution.

5. Concluding remarks

Accessible EU will develop actions addressing EU built environment policies, monitoring of implementation and compliance with legislation and standards, with the aim of improving access to relevant knowledge and developing skills of professionals, identifying and sharing good practices and carrying out studies.

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