



EUROCITIES STATEMENT

EUROPEAN ACCESSIBILITY ACT

The ratification by EU member states of the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities has put accessibility at the forefront of the EU agenda. The European Commission has also developed initiatives to improve accessibility at EU level, such as the 'European strategy for persons with disabilities 2010 to 2020 - renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe'. This includes an action plan for 2010 with measures directly applicable at local level. The strategy covers areas such as the built environment, local public transport and access to information. It supports the accessibility rights of people with disabilities in an ageing society so that they can participate in public life. This is in agreement with the European charter for the safeguarding of human rights in the city.

EUROCITIES, the platform for Europe's major cities, supports the goal of making our cities barrier-free for all our citizens, and sees practical commitment and steady progress being made on accessibility. In view of the upcoming discussions on a possible European accessibility act, we call on the European institutions to take the following recommendations into consideration:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- European standards for accessibility in cities are needed in addition to statutory requirements. Such standards should be developed with the involvement of experts, practitioners, and of people with disabilities themselves, in cities where real progress is being made.
- National statutory regulations and planning guidelines that have already been successfully introduced in cities should be retained to take into account local particularities like climate or topography.
- The EU should support the development of European planning manuals for accessible buildings, for public spaces and for transport infrastructure.
- The EU should help disseminate city experiences on the design of information in public spaces and public transport facilities, with requirements for the prevention of risks - especially as regards measures for blind and deaf persons, the elderly and children.
- The EU's role should also be to promote the development and introduction of curricula on accessibility and design for relevant university courses.

Detailed recommendations for a barrier-free city

Accessibility of the built environment

The accessibility of public spaces and buildings has become a concern for planning and construction, not least because of social and demographic changes. However, statutory regulations on barrier-free buildings and the implementation of compulsory standards in EU member states are not uniformly regulated. Furthermore, in some member states, due to a federal structure, national regulations are implemented at regional level only.

Some statutory requirements have been made more precise at local level via manuals and administrative regulations. In practice, the implementation of statutory requirements and the obligation to use manuals have proved to be useful.

European manuals, which would include basic planning principles for the needs of persons with disabilities, could simplify the planning processes in cities, for example in the following areas:

- publicly accessible buildings
- public spaces
- transport infrastructure

Equally, the development of defining principles for accessibility in building projects would be valuable at European, national and local levels. The principles would set out the main elements of a barrier-free built environment, from the beginning of the planning process, and would be updated on a regular basis, based on European and national standards.

Accessibility of transport

Access to mobility is a basic requirement in an ageing society and for cross-border mobility.

The needs of persons with disabilities and people travelling with children should be taken into account in the planning and design of transport infrastructure, vehicles and other facilities provided by local public transport authorities. This particularly affects the needs of those:

- with walking or mobility disabilities
- with visual impairments
- with hearing impairments
- with cognitive disabilities
- using transport with children

Accessibility standards should be applied when new transport infrastructure is being built, or when vehicles for local public transport are being procured.

All new transport developments (e.g. vehicles, ticketing systems, and infrastructure) should comply with the principles of a design-for-all approach.

As regards international or cross-border transport links, interoperability of transport systems should be assured. In order to improve access to goods and services, the use of information and communication technologies is essential.

Improved access to information, particularly for people with hearing and visual impairments, will enhance personal mobility and access to public services. This approach also ensures improved mobility of people travelling with children and children travelling alone.

Implementation and efficiency of statutory regulations/standards

Statutory regulations on accessibility at European and national level are a precondition for the social participation of people with disabilities. For this reason, these statutory requirements should be formulated clearly and coherently. Standards and minimum dimensions must be stated. Well-trained architects, engineers and builders on the different aspects of accessibility are a prerequisite for implementing statutory requirements consistently. In order to make this possible, the European Commission should raise awareness within professional bodies and the academic sector of the need for appropriate curricula in relevant university courses on accessibility and design-for-all.

In addition to statutory requirements, consistent European standards are needed. A role for cities is set out in the European standardisation mandate M/420 on 'European accessibility requirements for public procurement in the built environment'. This also applies to the standardisation mandate 376 on 'European accessibility requirement for public procurement of products and services in the ICT domain'.

In order to draw on best practice, the European Commission should involve city experts and practitioners, as well as groups representing people with disabilities, in the process of developing standards for the built environment at European level. It is essential too to take into consideration statutory regulations and planning guidelines that have already been successfully introduced at national and/or local level.

Fields of cooperation between the EU, national, regional and local levels to improve accessibility

The role of the EU should be to create consistent standards for accessibility in the built environment, (e.g. European standardisation mandate M/420 on 'European accessibility requirements for public procurement in the built environment'). These standards are a prerequisite for the participation of people with disabilities in an ageing society and for cross-border mobility.

Consistent requirements are especially important in public spaces. This affects, for example, the design of information provision in public spaces, as well as the design of public transport facilities to minimise risks.

The expertise in cities, where progress is being made on accessibility, must be incorporated into the process of developing this legislation.

The EU should promote the involvement of people with disabilities in the development of accessibility strategies, and take into consideration the requirements for accessibility and design for all public procurement at all governance levels.