

# DESIGN FOR ACCESS

Europe's growing multicultural society is made up of an ageing population surviving illnesses and accidents as never before. Disabled people now live fuller, more independent lives and have access to sophisticated technology allowing them freedom of movement that increases year on year.

*But do our meetings and congress facilities live up to the task? Does the way we present information reach the maximum number of people? Is this something that figures into the planning of events, conferences and meetings? Not always!*

'*Adopt a disability attitude*' is the slogan of the **European disability Forum**, encouraging manager and planners to think ahead when organising an event or communication to the broadest possible audience. A planned approach is likely to ensure maximum accessibility. As part of a basic approach, we need to make sure venues have facilities like ramps, adapted toilets and accessible lifts,

and we should investigate the use of amplified voice systems, indication in Braille, and accessible signage. (see box for a more complete checklist.)

## WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** was adopted in 2006 - no longer viewing persons with disabilities as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection, but instead aiming to view persons with disabilities as 'subjects' with rights and an active part to play in claiming benefits and voicing needs.

Under **European law** (Council Resolution of 6 May 2003 on accessibility of cultural infrastructure and cultural activities for people with disabilities -2003/C 134/05), anyone organising an event is requested to make reasonable efforts to eliminate existing barriers and to try to facilitate and improve the access of people with disabilities. Specifically, this means:

- + evaluating physical access before the event
- + providing information via the most accessible and available modern information technology, and
- + enhancing access by providing aids such as subtitled performances and presentations, simultaneous sign language, guides and catalogues in Braille, signage that is accessible to the visually impaired, accessible use of exhibition space and maximum website accessibility.

## A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

A few concepts have been put together to help decision makers understand what's needed and provide a holistic and workable approach that aims to meet the needs of the widest group of potential guests, delegates and stakeholders.

**Universal Design** is a concept developed in USA as a checklist to help designers focus on results. Inclusive Design was developed in Scandinavia and is another guide for event planners, facilities

managers and organisation executives, again aiming at maximum social inclusion. The focus is on process - an approach to the whole idea of planning events, building websites, and making information accessible - as the way to achieve the best results meeting the needs of the widest range of individuals.

The thinking is that if disability issues are investigated separately for each event, then each separate investigation into the suitability of each venue and the meeting of each 'special need' is bound to incur a separate cost, potentially wasting valuable time and resources. Better to plan the most efficient use of locations and services from the outset, catering for the needs of more people well in advance. This holistic approach has practical applications for anyone coming into contact with the public.

The European Institute for Design & Disability's Design for All approach also aims for an inclusive result, but its process stands out for its inclusiveness as well. This process suggests:

- + shaping the design brief to ensure the result caters for a wide diversity of users,
- + including a variety of different users and their experiences in the planning process.
- + recognising users as potential 'experts'.

**Design for All applies** not just for event planning, but also to the built environment, services, and access to media, culture and information. As service providers - but also as users - we are encouraged to think out of the box: how can we make everything more accessible, to more people?

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Design for All suggests the following first steps to insure inclusiveness:

- + Adopt a definition of seamless inclusiveness
- + Establish a Chain of Custody:  
Who is responsible?
- + Build a dialogue with representative user groups
- + Factor infrastructural modifications into your regular ordinary maintenance plans
- + Initiate a process of staff awareness training
- + Maintain a regular dialogue with host cities and service providers

Accessible design sells places, products and services. By planning for maximum accessibility, we

enrich our events and delegates - with immediate, tangible benefits for all.

### More information:

European Institute for Design and Disability  
[www.designforall.org](http://www.designforall.org)

Convention on the Rights  
of Persons with Disabilities  
[www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities)

European Disability Forum  
[www.edf-feph.org](http://www.edf-feph.org)

## ADOPT A DISABILITY ATTITUDE

Source: European Disability Forum  
[www.edf-feph.org](http://www.edf-feph.org)

- + Ensure that the venue infrastructure/hotel is totally accessible (ramps, lifts, door width, accessible toilet, indications in Braille, assistance dogs allowed, adapted rooms)
- + Consult with each disabled participant about the necessary technical aids to compensate for their different needs
- + Place pens, paper, documents materials within easy reach
- + Allow room for wheelchair entry and disabled parking
- + Provide extra chairs and ordinary tables (rather than high cocktail tables) - more accessible to wheelchair users and deaf persons who need hands free for sign language
- + Provide information in advance of the event information in large print or in electronic format for to read it with a Braille reader
- + Make presentations accessible through a clear oral description or send information before the event.
- + Background noise or loud music should be avoided
- + Provide an induction loop system (sound amplifying system) and/or a velotyping system (simultaneous transcription)
- + Provide sign language interpretation if no sign language interpreter is accompanying the deaf participant
- + Pay special attention to persons with disabilities in case of emergency