# *2010:*

# *A EUROPE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL*

**Report from the Group of Experts set up by the European Commission**

**October 2003**

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# 1. THE OBJECTIVE: A EUROPE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

An accessible built environment is a key for a society based on equal rights, and provides its citizens with autonomy and the means to pursue an active social and economic life. For an individual to enjoy his/her **rights as a citizen**, he/she should be able to access buildings, premises and other facilities: an accessible environment means that a person will be able to **seek employment**, **receive education and training**, and **pursue an active social and economic life.**

The European Union decided three years ago that 2003 would be the European Year of People with Disabilities. In this context, the Group of Experts set up by Mrs. Anna Diamantopoulou, Member of the Commission in charge of Employment and Social Affairs, was given the mandate to address accessibility within an increasingly diverse and ageing society, and to put forward concrete proposals[1].

**The "red thread" of this report is that promoting accessibility for all will contribute to the success of the European strategy of "economic and social renewal" launched three years ago at the Lisbon European Council.** The European Union committed itself to modernising and reinforcing social cohesion and social protection as a key to deliver more and better growth by 2010. And to make Europe a better place to live. It is thus a unique opportunity to address disability issues as key elements of the "Lisbon strategy" which is based on four strategic goals: raising competitiveness, achieving full employment, strengthening social cohesion and promoting sustainable development.

We should promote a dynamic, positive, approach to accessibility with a clear objective: **implementing an "accessibility agenda" by 2010**, which is the target date set by the Lisbon European Council when it launched its strategy.

With this objective in mind, the Experts Group has endorsed four principles which underpin this Report:

- **Accessibility is a concern for everyone, not only for a minority with physical disabilities.** With an increasingly diverse society, and against a backdrop of an ageing population, accessibility should be taken into account across a wider range of policies than it used to be a few years ago, when it was perceived as the remit of disabilities policy alone. Accessibility policies should now **focus on the "real" people who are using the built environment on a daily basis, and not imaginary individuals created from statistical averages**. And they should cater to their rights and for the diversity of their needs.

- **Accessibility should be dealt with in a global and integrated way**, cutting across all policy areas (construction, health and safety at the workplace, Information and communication technologies, public procurement, education etc.). It should no longer be the domain of building or transport experts alone. It should be achieved by a **co-ordination of all actors involved** (from the areas of social policy, physical planning, Information and communication technologies, construction, transport and others,…).

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[1] See annex 1 for the mandate and scope of the group

- **Accessibility policies can only be designed and implemented with the participation of the people and of the NGOs which represent them**.

- **Accessibility is a key to sustainable development**, because it enhances the **quality of life**, and makes the urban environment more **liveable**.

> We should build upon the momentum of the European Year for People with Disabilities, and achieve concrete, immediate progress: accessibility has been on the agenda for a long time now, with too few achievements. That is the objective of this report.

The report has been drafted by a group of experts chaired by Mr. Domenico Lenarduzzi, Honorary Director-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, with Mrs. Mitzi Bollani, architect, as deputy chair. It has benefited from contributions and advice provided by various Directorates General of the European Commission with an interest in accessibility policy[2].

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[2] DG Enterprise, DG Information Society, DG Research, as well as the Secretariat-General of the Commission.

# Accessibility to the built environment: what is it?

All of us experience difficulties while walking on the streets, entering a building, or finding a location inside, because the pavement is too high for a pushchair or a wheelchair; the doors are too narrow for a wheelchair, too heavy for a child or an older person with arthritis, or they cannot even be found by visually impaired people because the contrasts are to weak or attention fields are missing; the signage is inadequate, over-complex or confusing,... Our environment, especially in large cities, creates obstacles and barriers, both permanent and temporary for all people, but particularly for those who have a disability. Those whose lives are circumscribed by an inaccessible built environment are pre-eminently people with a physical disability (permanent or temporary), a visual or hearing impairment or a learning disability. They may also be those who are very young or very old.

Accessibility means firstly that **everybody should have equal access to the built environment**, i.e.:

- The **buildings**. They can be *public*, either run by the public service (such as museums, post offices, hospitals, employment agency,…) or run by a business (shops, restaurants, offices etc). They may be *private* dwellings. Special attention should be paid to *historical buildings*, where experience shows that they too can be made accessible without compromising their architectural or historic integrity. Accessibility requirements change in relation to the nature and use of the buildings –which themselves may change faster than before, with housing transformed into office space, for instance-, with public authorities being given a special responsibility to demonstrate "good practices". These requirements will also differ in relation to new or proposed buildings and existing buildings, which are dealt with in most legislation through renovation or adaptation works.

**- What is around and between buildings**: the streets, roads, pavement, footways, the signage, the open spaces and recreational areas, like parks and playgrounds. Accessibility for all means that these areas are safe, convenient and enjoyable for everybody. Transport facilities belong to the built environment (i.e., bus stops, metro and train stations, road and street signs. Accessible means of transport are an essential pre-requisite for accessibility to the built environment.

- The "**virtual environment**". In our knowledge-based societies, the built environment increasingly includes electronic devices and equipment such as access pads, environmental controllers, automated vending machines, alarms etc. Information and communication technologies are a key element of accessibility to the built environment, and they should contribute to lifting barriers that exist for people with disabilities and be manageable by people with sensory and mental disabilities as well. With the fast diffusion of these technologies, more and more "smart constructions" will be built.

Building upon decades of debates, research and concrete achievements of "universal design"[3] and "design for all"[4] concepts, we can put forward a definition of "*accessibility to the built environment*" that will be the basis of this report:

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[3] "*The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.*" See: http://www.design.ncsu.edu:8120/cud/univ_design/princ_overview.htm.

[4] "*The European Concept for Accessibility is based on the Design for All principles.*

*1. The objective is the provision of environments which are convenient, safe and enjoyable to use by everyone, including people with disabilities.*

*2. The Design for All principles reject the division of the human population into able-bodied and disabled people.*

*3. Design for All includes supplementary provisions where appropriate.*"

*"Accessibility" means providing buildings and places which are designed and managed to be safe, healthy, convenient and enjoyable to use by all members of society. It implies that buildings should be accessible[5], that they should be really "usable" from ground floor to the top, and that adequate means of autonomous exit should be provided[6].*

## 2. ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL: A KEY FOR AUTONOMY, INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Many changes are taking place in our societies which contribute to an understanding of how accessibility to the built environment is a key to an inclusive society and is increasingly a concern for everybody. Society is coming to terms with its diversity. There is a growing appreciation that we are all different but we all seek to belong and that an accessible built environment accommodates diversity.

### 2.1. Promoting accessibility for people with disabilities and for a diverse and ageing society

Accessibility to the built environment matters to a large number of groups and people within our societies. Over a quarter of the EU population may face accessibility problems on a daily basis, ranging from doorsteps that are too high to poorly designed stairs. Everyone of us may be faced by such hazards: however, while health and safety regulations have dramatically reduced the number of fatalities when buildings are being built, less attention has been paid to hazards linked to the accessibility of the buildings once they are completed.

- *People with permanent and temporary disabilities.* There is no common definition of "disability" across Europe and some Member States do not have statistics on the numbers of people with functional disabilities. Where figures do exist, they are almost always linked to eligibility to *benefits*. Available figures date from 1999 and are based on people who have *reported* being hampered "to some extent" or "severely" in their activities: it is thus subjective, and there are huge discrepancies between countries, which can be accounted for by the differing attitudes towards "well-being" and "disability" across Europe. In 1999, **18%** of the EU's total population reported "severe" or "moderate" impairment in their daily lives, of whom **7%** reported being "severely disabled"[7].

- *Older people*. Disabilities are strongly linked with age, and our societies are facing with a growing number of people aged 75 and more, who are more likely

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See: http://www.eca.lu/index.htm

[5] For instance, with a level or a ramped entrance that is well contrasted and marked by tactile or acoustic guidance systems.

[6] For instance, a lift providing evacuation in the event of fire, with the necessary keyboards for wheel chair users and visually impaired people, including speech output and guidance systems to find it.

[7] Source: Eurostat

to have impairments or disabilities. This group will comprise **14.4%** of the population in 2040, against **7.5%** in 2003 –almost a twofold increase[8]. Around **45%** of those aged 75 and over reported (in 1999) being impaired in their daily life, either physically or mentally, of which **27%** reported that they were very severely impaired. The strong desire of older people to remain independent and within their own homes coupled with improved health care, care in the community, advances in technology and in some cases increased purchasing power will ensure that they can and will stay at home. This will push for a more accessible built environment –for instance: no stairs at the entrance to houses, low pavements, and a lift –or a capability for a lift- in every house with at least two storeys.

- *Young children, parents and carers*. Many Europeans are concerned with a built environment that is poorly accessible to young children, e.g. high pavements, narrow lift doors, steep stairways at the entrance of buildings, high bus platforms,…etc. This means that, in many respects, children under 5 and their carers have to overcome the same difficulties as people with disabilities regarding accessibility to the built environment.

| *(as a % of overall EU-15 population, source Eurostat)* | **TODAY** | **2040** |
|---|---|---|
| People reporting a physical, sensory or mental disability | 23% (1999) | |
| *Of whom: reporting "severe" disability* | *8% (1999)* | |
| People over 75 | 7.5% | 14.4% |
| Children under 5 | 5.3% | 4.5% |
| Persons reporting a temporary impairment in their daily life (in the past two weeks) | 13.4% (1996) | |

*The figures cannot be added due to possible overlaps between different categories*
*(e.g.: 45% of people over 75 report a disability)*

Accessibility for all is therefore no longer limited to a minority with special needs. Designers, architects, urban planners and others should look at **all aspects of human functioning** – such as walking, climbing stairs, holding objects, lifting weights, seeing, hearing, understanding etc. as laid down in the WHO's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*. They should design buildings and objects in order to **accommodate diversity of performance** for each of these different functions, and thus to cater to the diversity of people concerned by accessibility issues.

## 2.2. Promoting growth and employment

The "traditional" view of accessibility as a mere "add-on" feature catering to specific needs (usually, those of wheelchair users and/or visually-impaired persons) means that it is only an issue of enforcing technical standards, hence entailing *compliance costs* for businesses, local authorities and public services. Such costs may occur

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[8] Source: Eurostat, baseline scenario for population projections, 1999 revision

when mandatory standards are enforced. However, there is evidence that costs entailed by accessibility accommodation are commonly overestimated[9], or are rather limited relative to the size of our economies[10].

> Accessibility should be seen as an investment in infrastructure, leading to increased production and higher productivity.

- **Creating value for owners.** A building meeting accessibility for all requirements will be able to adapt easily to changing needs (including the ageing or emerging disabilities of its occupants) without further work: it could therefore fetch a higher price than a less accessible property, that will require extensive and costly adaptations further down the road.

- **Increasing turnover**. An accessible building broadens custom by allowing people with a disability to enter and use the premises. It also increases overall efficiency by facilitating everyone's use of the facilities, as demonstrated by some public transport utilities[11].

- **Attracting and retaining workers**. With accessible buildings – and often, only with limited adjustments - employers are able on the one hand to tap into a pool of *potential new workers* (people with disabilities), and on the other hand to *retain existing ones* who may become disabled. These two issues lie at the heart of the new "European employment strategy", which sets out as an "overarching objective" "*to achieve full employment by implementing a comprehensive policy approach incorporating demand and supply side measures*"[12]. In this context, fostering accessibility for all helps in integrating people with disabilities into the labour market.

- **Lowering social protection expenditures**. An accessible environment enables people with disabilities and older people to pursue an autonomous life (living at home and participating in social life), hence saving public money spent on institutionalised care.

- **Saving on insurance premiums**. Applying accessibility for all requirements helps improve the overall safety of buildings (removing slippery floors and stairs, avoiding hazardous changes in height, improving warning signals, removing accident hazards with lifts doors,…), which has a direct impact on the costs of

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[9] For instance, a study commissioned by Sears in the USA indicates that of the 436 "reasonable accommodations" provided by the company between 1978 and 1992, 69% cost nothing, 28% cost less than $1,000, and only 3% cost more than $1,000. See the leaflet released by the US Department of Justice at: http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/pubs/mythfct.txt

[10] For instance, the *Regulatory Impact Assessment* of an amendment to the UK Building Regulation, estimated the cost accrued from new constructions and extensions at €173m a year, which should be related to a GDP to the tune of €1548bn in 2000 (i.e. 0.01%).

[11] For instance, the public transport of Grenoble (France): the drivers should make few efforts to park at the stations; the customers can access trams and buses more easily, which decreases station time and allows to cater for more customers. See a presentation made by Mr. Joël Pitrel, Director of the TAG (Transports de l'Agglomération Grenobloise) at: http://www.accessibilityforall.org/ita/roma_atti.htm

[12] *Guidelines on employment policies of the Member State*s, COM (2003) 176 final

falling and slipping accidents[13], both for health & safety insurers (workplace accidents) and health care insurers (non-work related accidents).

Although the rationale behind accessibility is easy to understand, few empirical studies have delved into it in order to verify its costs and benefits.

> The Commission should support research work in order to provide strong analytical material which will help push forward the accessibility agenda.

## 2.3. Delivering a sustainable built environment

Promoting accessibility is also in the long-term interest of the construction industry, of every individual or company owning real estate and of society as a whole. It contributes to delivering a more sustainable development and way of life:

- An accessible building is *safer* and *healthier* (with better fire and accident prevention systems, with effective evacuation lifts…), thus avoiding accidents, while allowing more people to enter.

- An accessible building is more *comfortable*: it can be visited more easily and it is more liveable.

- An accessible building is more *adaptable*. People invest a large share of their financial resources in their home (or office), and they expect to stay there for a long time without incurring high adaptation costs. However, if the building has not been designed to accommodate later changes (in health, autonomy,…), such costs will be higher than the initial bill for an accessible building (i.e., designed from the outset to cater for a wide range of abilities). Experience shows that integrating accessibility requirements from the outset of a construction project may result in much lower costs, and perhaps none, than altering a project or a building afterwards.

Accessibility should be addressed in the wider perspective of **spatial planning**. It would be pointless to design accessible homes or facilities if regions and cities continue to create obstacles for people with disabilities, as well as young children and older people. At EU level, the Commission has launched a debate on the sustainability of cities, including their accessibility[14]: however, much remains to be done as far as a global approach is concerned.

Accessibility for all needs to be recognised as a factor in **sustainable development**. In this context, the Group of Experts calls upon the independent working groups addressing the issues of the "*Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment*" to include *accessibility for all* in their final recommendations, although it is not mentioned explicitly in their terms of reference[15].

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[13] Those costs amount to €420 million a year in Finland alone (Source: Ministry of Transport and Communication Finland)

[14] Communication from the Commission, *La question urbaine: orientations pour un débat européen*, COM (97) 197 final

[15] See http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/urban/thematic_strategy.htm for further details on this project under the 6th EC Environment Action programme.

## The time is ripe for action

Accessibility has been high on the political agenda for a long time now, at EU as well as at global levels. Many commitments have been made over the years, which have helped deliver an extensive – if not comprehensive - body of political declarations, technical standards and guidelines.

1981 was hailed as the first *International Year of Disabled Persons*. It was followed up by the adoption of a *World Programme of Action concerning Disabled persons* (1982), with concrete recommendations on accessibility to the built environment, including the concept of "accessibility for all". Subsequently, a manual (*Designing with Care*) was published to provide technical and architectural guidelines. More recently, the *Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action* (1995) provides that States should make efforts to render the physical environment accessible for people with disabilities[16].

Since the International Year of 1981, many initiatives have been carried out at EU level. A Communication from the Commission[17], which was followed up by a Resolution from the Council of Ministers in December 1981, proposed an "integrated programme" supporting local projects with the aim of removing obstacles to the full participation of disabled persons in active life, including access to buildings and facilities. In order to pave the way for an initiative on accessibility, a report was commissioned in 1986[18] and a conference was held in 1987. Furthermore, the Commission announced in 1987[19] its intention to table a number of policy initiatives. The two subsequent HELIOS programmes supported projects aimed at promoting an independent way of life, covering access to public buildings and facilities[20].

As recently as 2000, the Commission Communication *Towards a Barrier Free Europe for People with Disabilities*[21] called for a more co-ordinated approach to accessibility across policy fields, both at EU and at national level. Finally, at a global level, the UN set up an Ad Hoc Committee in 2001 to consider "proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities", among which accessibility to the built environment[22] may be included.

*However, we must recognise that, despite these longstanding commitments to achieving accessibility concrete improvements were not made at all levels concerned. Regulations and standards, where they exist at all, are not implemented and enforced properly everywhere. In some Member States, little has changed for the past 20 years, as acknowledged by Governments in the context of the European Year of People with Disabilities..*

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[16] For a compilation of international instruments relating to accessibility, see: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/discom409.htm

[17] The Social Integration of Disabled People – A Framework for the Development of Community Action, 4 November 1981, OJ n° C 347 of 31/12/1981 p. 0014 - 0031

[18] Accessibility of Public Buildings for the Disabled, Report to the Commission by Pr.Johan Galjaard, 1986

[19] COM (87) 342 final

[20] Council decision 88/231 of 18 April 1988 (HELIOS I) and Council decision 93/136 of 25 February 1993 (HELIOS II)

[21] COM (2000) 284 final

[22] See the Experts contribution to the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee at http://www.sre.gob.mx/discapacidad/whatrights.htm and the EU position paper at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/adhocmeetaac265w2e.htm

## 3. ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL: PROPOSALS FROM THE GROUP

Accessibility for all should from now on be dealt with as an inclusive process, which benefits a large number of people across society and help meet the challenges of growth and sustainable development. **It is therefore an intrinsic part of the agenda agreed at the Lisbon European Council, in 2000, which aims at Europe's economic and social renewal by 2010. This is why 2010 is the target date which should be set for the implementation of the broad range of measures discussed by the Group.** Such a shift in policy requires the involvement of many actors and the definition of an agenda based on many instruments, ranging from legislation to financial support, to be effected through public authorities and the private sector.

### 3.1. Creating an effective regulatory framework

An effective legal framework is crucial in seeking to achieve accessibility for all. Legally binding instruments are often decisive in triggering a shift in attitudes and in changing the behaviour of all involved actors. If such instruments are to meet this objective, they should be properly designed, so as to foster a positive process of change and to be effectively complied with on the ground.

Policies dealing with accessibility issues are mostly the responsibility of Member States (building regulations, disability policy, transport, spatial planning,…). The debates within the Convention have shown that an overwhelming majority wishes that this should remain so. However, those national policies must comply with basic EU principles, in particular the rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and they cannot undermine EU policies (Internal market, competition,…).

#### 3.1.1. The current situation in the EU

The Group stresses **that there are few studies – if any - which present a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of Member States' legislation and practices (standards, guidelines,…)**. There is not even a repository where this information could be accessed. In some Member States, accessibility policies are under the responsibility of federal entities or local authorities, which increases the difficulties in collecting the relevant information.

> It is therefore necessary **to build a network of "accessibility information centres"** across Europe, including the acceding countries, based whenever possible on existing structures.

Such a network should have **a focal point** supported by the European Commission: it would facilitate comparative studies, foster identification of "best practices" (regarding regulation, standards, corporate social responsibility initiatives, involvement of actors, education,…) and disseminate information. The EU's Research Framework Programme should include in the work plan comparative studies in order to initiate a networking of information centres.

As a consequence, the Group held its discussions on the basis of a first, tentative, study[23] which shows that accessibility legislation differs widely in scope and

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[23] *Accessibility Legislation in Europe*, Status Report by the Toegankelijkheidsbureau v.z.w. Hasselt and LIVING Research and Development s.p.r.l. Bruxelles

structure across countries. Sometimes, accessibility is still not consistently defined, let alone addressed. It is dealt with in different sets of regulations issued by various, and often uncoordinated, departments (building, transport, manufacturing standards, Information and communication technologies, social policy). This situation has two negative consequences:

- Accessibility to the built environment lacks a global approach, maintains a low profile on Governments' and administrations' agendas and is dealt with as a purely technical, "standards-based", issue (and often only with a wheelchair user's perspective);

- information, awareness-raising and enforcement are split between various actors, without a common view, which is detrimental to the effectiveness of the regulatory framework.

The European Year of People with Disabilities has triggered a review, and sometimes an overhaul, of the regulatory framework in many Member States and regions. It is now foreseen that the European situation will change rather quickly.

### 3.1.2. *Accessibility for all is a fundamental right*

In this context, the European Year of People with Disabilities provides a unique opportunity to make real progress towards a comprehensive approach to accessibility which cuts across sectors and departments. As far as the regulatory framework is concerned, there are two complementary routes which should be explored:

- A rights-based approach covering all aspects of civil, economic and social life, and including accessibility as a key element.

- Specific legislation, or regulation, in all relevant areas (transport, construction, health and safety, Information and communication technologies, product safety etc), with an effective co-ordination between all departments and actors involved.

The EU has already passed legislation providing for "*reasonable accommodation*" for people with disabilities, admittedly in employment only. The deadline for implementing article 5 of Directive 2000/78 into national law is December 2nd, 2003 (with a grace period of up to December 2nd, 2006). The effective implementation of this article should be monitored closely, and a specific report should be tabled by the Commission on this issue alone. On the basis of such an assessment, the Commission will be in a better position to decide on which route a disability-specific legislative instrument could take.

Furthermore, **the European Year has created a momentum throughout Europe behind a rights-based, inclusive approach to disabilities**[24]. In this context, policies and regulatory frameworks are being reconsidered, which may eventually lead to major changes.

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[24] See for instance the Report to the French Senate, by Paul Blanc (*Compensation du handicap: le temps de la solidarité*) at http://www.senat.fr/rap/r01-369/r01-369.html. This report calls for a definition of a "comprehensive approach" of disability policy, including accessibility to the built environment.

> **The Experts Group invites the Commission to review closely all initiatives launched in the framework of the European Year** in order to consider whether, and how, EU-wide legislation can actually add value to Member States' policies.

### 3.1.3. Mainstreaming accessibility for all

Implementing accessibility for all requires mainstreaming this objective across all relevant policy areas, instruments and sectors, on the basis of a simple, inclusive, principle:

> **All legislation, standards, guidelines, etc should be designed and implemented with an aim to make the built environment accessible and usable by all those who could be expected to use it.**

No instrument, or single text, should be seen as a "magic wand" which will deliver accessibility. The best results will be achieved through a combination of various instruments, depending on the area concerned and the optimum moment. Every level of governance and all sectors of society should have the responsibility to mainstream accessibility within their own domain. This requires that they should each acquire and develop the necessary competencies to make their environment and services accessible, drawing on appropriate technical expertise and involving the widest possible range of users in planning and design.

> Mirroring the principles applicable to other areas (such as health and safety on the workplace), **accessibility regulations should provide that one legal or natural person is responsible in last resort for complying with them.**

#### 3.1.3.1. Construction products

The Construction Products directive[25] is a "new approach" directive which is based on compliance with "essential requirements": "*the products must be suitable for construction works which (as a whole and in their separate parts) are fit for their intended use, account being taken of economy, and in this connection satisfy the essential requirements.*"

> The essential requirements should be amended to include accessibility for all: "The construction works must be designed and built in such a way that independent approach and entry to, use in service and in operation, and exit from the works shall be accessible, safe and convenient for all those who could be expected to use them."

The essential requirements should apply fully to **products integrating Information and communication technologies** (internal surveillance networks, smart homes, alarms, messaging systems,…).

#### 3.1.3.2. Health and safety at the workplace

Much of the "built environment" is made up of workplaces. Restaurants, museums, hospitals, office buildings etc, are workplaces for their own employees. Improving

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[25] Directive 89/106, 21 December 1988 (OJ 11.2.89)

accessibility opens up new employment prospects for people with disabilities, and helps prevent early retirement of older workers. It also improves the working environment for every worker, making it safer and more "user-friendly" –which contributes towards raising quality at work. At the same time, the public will find it easier to use the facilities, which will benefit the business (or the public service). It means that health and safety regulations should pursue a twofold objective: *increasing well-being in the workplace, while promoting accessibility for all.*

Directive 89/654 (30 November 1989)[26] provides for health and safety minimum requirements which apply to workplaces. The Group calls for a comprehensive review of this annex, with an aim to include the following elements:

- **Accessibility for all should be mentioned as an overall objective for designing and building workplaces**. An **"Accessibility appraisal"** should be performed when the construction of the workplace is planned, or when the lease is being discussed. It should be made mandatory for **employers (public and private) to perform an "Accessibility assessment"** on a regular basis.

- **Workplaces should provide means of evacuation for people with disabilities in the event of fire**[27].

- **Routes, stairways, corridors etc should be properly identified with distinctive signs, using contrasting colours**.

### 3.2.   Updating and developing standards

For many years, standards organisations have been developing standards and issuing guidelines addressing the needs of people with disabilities in building design. However, these developments have fallen short of dealing with the whole range of products which constitute the "built environment", including "assistive technologies" or "user-to-product" information and communication technologies. Setting adequate standards, based on design-for-all/universal design principles, will be increasingly important for adapting to an ageing and diverse society. This standardisation process should involve closely all partners, beyond its usual stakeholders (industry), and extending to people with disabilities, older people and relevant NGOs. Much progress has been made recently in this direction, notably:

- A new European standard[28], published in 2003, specifies the minimum requirements for the safe and independent access and use of lifts by all persons, including persons with disabilities. It is **the first European "accessibility for all" standard**, drafted by the industry, standards organisations, "notifying bodies" and representatives from the EU-disability NGOs;

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[26] OJ n°L 393/2, 30 December 1989

[27] See for instance British Standard 5588-8:1999, *Fire precautions in the design, construction and use of buildings – Part 8: Code of practice for means of escape for disabled people.*

[28] EN 81-70

- A **guide**[29], published in 2002 by CEN (Comité Européen de Normalisation/European Committee for Standardization) and CENELEC (Comité Européen de Normalisation ELECtrotechnique/European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation), addresses **the issue of older and disabled persons' involvement in standardisation work and make recommendations on the ways to mainstream accessibility in standardisation work**.

However, the present situation is still far from being satisfactory. This is widely recognised by standards experts and organisations themselves, with ISO and the European Standardisation organisations (CEN, CENELEC, ETSI) at the forefront in reviewing existing standards (and requesting national standards organisations to do so). Three points are often highlighted:

- Many existing standards do not comply with accessibility requirements. Some of them are explicitly set according to "average" or "mainstream" abilities (thus excluding persons with disabilities, children and other groups with functional limitations).

- Cognitive and sensory disabilities are not catered for, and standards where they include accessibility are tailored to the needs of wheelchair users: it is actually easier to set standards on height and width, which are easily measurable.

- Professionals developing and enforcing standards lack awareness of accessibility issues as well as proper training.

However, standardisation is a key to promoting accessibility for all: tendering documents should refer to international or European standards whenever possible, and building owners need to be given clear guidance as to the outcome they are to achieve. This has several implications:

- **Large-scale research should be conducted to identify how people behave and "function" in ergonomic terms**. Such research should be based on the actual "behaviour" of the whole population, so as to measure the actual range of performances across society. The EU (through the Research Framework Programme) and standard organisations, at EU and national level, should support such a project, which would provide updated data.

- Standards organisations should further develop their role as a **repository of information and knowledge on accessibility** and promote their dissemination (handbooks and manuals; web sites; conferences, workshops,…).

- An **"accessibility for all" European standard** on design, construction and use of buildings, should be developed, including provisions on fire safety and means of evacuation for people with disabilities.

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[29] *Guidelines for standards developers to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities*, CEN/CENELEC Guide 6, January 2002.

- Alternatively, national standards should be reviewed in order to identify "best practices". These **"good" national standards should then be extended to the whole of Europe**, which would reduce time and efforts needed to design a European standard[30].

- **Standards relating to products, transport, construction, and Information and communication technologies should be developed following design for all principles** as agreed in the "Design for all and Assistive Technology Standardisation Co-ordination Group", in order to achieve "accessibility for all"[31]. They should be co-ordinated, particularly standards related to "physical" products and those dealing with "user-to-product" technologies and Information and communication technologies included in buildings (access pads, video security networks, electronic keys, vending machines etc).

## 3.3. Developing statistics and indicators

Statistics on disabilities –let alone on the various categories of people who may face accessibility difficulties- are outdated and are based on self-reported disability. They are hence culturally and socially biased, and depend on every country's attitude towards disabilities.

Eurostat should include disability data in the new *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (SILC), which will replace the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) starting next year.

This would require an agreed definition. The definition laid down by the World Health Organisation (*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*), although it is admittedly broad (it encompasses drug use, social interrelations, and all types of diseases), may be used as a starting point for this work.

Furthermore, although the rationale behind accessibility is easy to understand, few studies have dwelt upon it.

The Commission should support research work on the economics of accessibility for all in order to provide the comprehensive analytical material which will help push forward the accessibility agenda.

## 3.4. Promoting responsibility by public authorities

### 3.4.1. Making the built environment accessible for all by 2010

Public authorities – starting with EU institutions themselves - have a special responsibility in setting "best practices" on accessibility. This is why **the Spring**

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[30] For instance, see the Danish Standards Association's Accessibility Standard DS 3028 (August 2001). This standard defines requirements which aim at ensuring general accessibility (including accessibility for disabled people) to buildings and facilities as well as the access to these.

[31] See at: http://www.ict.etsi.fr/DATSCG_home.htm

**European Council 2004 should set an ambitious and concrete target**, which would help focus resources and attention:

- By 2010, **every new element of the "built environment"** under the responsibility of public authorities (e.g. offices, schools, public housing, roads, train stations, museums, pavements,…) should be designed and built to be accessible, safe and usable by everybody. This includes new construction, as well as renovation or extension of existing buildings.

- By 2010, public authorities should set accessibility for all requirements applicable to new constructions, extensions or renovations by promoters/builders.

- As for the **existing built environment**, responsible departments/authorities should start setting objectives and targets for making a set proportion of public buildings, roads etc accessible each year. They should report each year on progress made.

Such an ambitious commitment has two implications:

- Public authorities should **include accessibility for all requirements in their tendering documents**, or set themselves target dates for developing them.

- **Audits of existing constructions** should be made mandatory every 5 years, and prior to maintenance/rehabilitation works, in order to adapt to technical progress and new usage.

Since **the Commission** occupies a large number of buildings, in Brussels, Luxembourg and in the Member States, **it should be the first to set "good practice" on accessibility.**

### 3.4.2. *Public procurement*

Public authorities can trigger a decisive shift in attitudes towards accessibility for all requirements if they use the leverage they have, when tendering public works and services. It is essential that accessibility requirements are stipulated by the planner/purchaser in tender documents when buildings and other facilities are being planned (and before they are commissioned). The decisions taken at this moment will have far reaching consequences, lasting for decades, and can be difficult to correct. This entails awareness-raising and training of all stakeholders involved.

It also points to the effectiveness of the overall regulatory framework and its proper implementation on the ground. The Works Procurement Directive[32] -which is currently being recast[33] on the basis of a Commission's proposal by the Council and the European Parliament- co-ordinates works tendering procedures. This directive does not provide for specific requirements - on social policy or accessibility - but lays down common rules that should be complied with by purchasers when they

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[32] Directive 93/37, 14 June 1993 (O.J. L199 of 9.8.93)

[33] COM (2000) 275

advertise a tender. In this respect, article 10 of the directive provides that "*technical specifications*" should be included in the tendering documents, and should refer whenever possible to national standards implementing European standards or to common technical requirements.

In its common position reached on March 20th, 2003, the Council amended the definition of "technical specifications" by strengthening the possibility of the contracting authority to include accessibility as a requirement for the works being tendered. The European Parliament went a step further last July in a second reading, by imposing this inclusion whenever possible for the contracting authority[34]. These are major breakthroughs.

To ensure real progress in this area, decisions must be made about accessibility by the purchasers/tenderers at an early stage. At this moment, **purchasers should be requested to perform accessibility appraisals**, in order to include comprehensive and clear accessibility requirements in the tendering documents. Guidelines should help tenderers to comply with the new provision of the Directive.

> In 2005, the Commission should support the provision of **an accessibility/design-for-all "tool-kit"** which will be readily made available to tenderers when the directive comes into force.

### 3.4.3. *EU regional policy*

EU structural funds and the Cohesion Fund subsidise works which are being tendered. Accessibility requirements should be made mandatory in every project that is co-funded by a European grant. The mid-term evaluation of the structural funds should take this issue into account, and pave the way for the inclusion of accessibility requirements in the new set of regulations for the next programming period (2007 onward).

Since projects co-funded by the ERDF and the ESF have to be tendered and must comply with the Works Procurement Directive, including mandatory accessibility requirements would give the necessary impetus to the development of EU standards, which would eventually spill over into Member States.

## 3.5. Involving all actors

### 3.5.1. *Raising awareness and strengthening co-ordination*

Awareness-raising can only be achieved through an integrated, co-ordinated, approach:

- *Integrated*. In order to get the "accessibility for all" message across, a clear commitment should be made to developing a global disability policy,

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[34] Article 23 of the Directive as amended by the European Parliament: "*Whenever possible, the contracting authority should take into account accessibility criteria for people with disabilities or design for all when laying down specifications. These technical specifications should be clearly indicated so that all tenderers fully understand the requirements established by the contracting authority.*"

dealing with all relevant issues (employment, compensation, access, housing) in a single policy framework.

- *Co-ordinated.* Accessibility is often dealt with on a technical basis, which implies a division between various areas of expertise. However, achieving better co-ordination requires special arrangements.

**At national level**, Member States could consider complementary options to promote a mainstreamed approach to accessibility:

- The development of **independent, not-for-profit, "*centres for accessibility*",** which would carry out building audits and pre-construction appraisals, training and dissemination of information and "best practices".

- Setting up an **"accessibility ombudsman"**, with a responsibility for receiving complaints and seeking a non-judiciary settlement of disputes.

- Creating an **"accessibility commission"** with a responsibility to issue technical guidelines (in co-ordination with standards organisations). The board of this commission/authority should involve representatives of NGOs, to allow the full participation of civil society.

**At EU level**, the Commission should ensure that accessibility is properly mainstreamed across its various Directorates General and the policy areas for which they are responsible (environment, regional policy, products labelling, ICT, public procurement, social and employment policies, as well as its own staff and building management policy).

A *Special advisory group* should be set up, which would deliver an opinion to the Commission on any initiative with accessibility implications, prior to its adoption.

### 3.5.2. Education and training

One of the main obstacles – if not the most important one - faced by the "accessibility agenda" is the low level of awareness among many groups of actors, in particular those with expert technical knowledge in related fields. This has far-reaching consequences, both in the short and long term, as a professional may hold a teaching position in the course of his/her career, and contribute to the shaping of the next generation of professionals. Hence, it is important to have accessibility courses in education at all levels, starting at primary school and including professional education and training.

- Children should be encouraged as early as primary school to give a critical appreciation of their own environment regarding accessibility, and their sensitivity to accessibility issues should be raised by **short and dedicated modules, visits, etc**.

- A dedicated **course on « Accessibility to the built environment for all »** should be developed in all languages, which may be distributed to schools and colleges training architects, engineers and related professions. Respecting Member States' primary competence over education matters, such a course could be developed with the participation of relevant

professional associations through a call for proposals from the European Commission. Efforts would be made to integrate this course into curricula across Europe. Existing Community programmes –Leonardo, Socrates- should also be used.

### 3.5.3. *Involving businesses and private owners*

All actors should be encouraged not only to comply with existing standards and legislation, but also to take voluntary initiatives which go beyond this legal framework.

For individuals, the route of **subsidies or tax incentives** should be explored, as a first step towards raising awareness of the relevance of accessibility to every member of society. Individuals build a house, or buy an apartment, to live there for a long time, possibly several decades, and their needs regarding accessibility will go through many changes over this period of time (they may have children, they may be injured, they will grow old,…). However, it is hard for them to give a present value to changes or events which may occur in many years, which make a mandatory requirement difficult to implement. In this context, tax relief, or subsidies, may be the most effective way to help households putting an actual "price tag" on accessibility and realising that it increases the value of their property. Such schemes already exist in some countries, and should be developed[35].

- In the context of the promotion of corporate social responsibility, the Commission should create a **European award** for the "best workplaces for accessibility" or for the "most accessible building/premise/facility".

- The Commission should support the development of an **accessibility label**, based on the definition of common European standards[36]. These standards would be applied by relevant auditing bodies or consultancies, in order to avoid the development of uncoordinated labelling initiatives. Such a label should take into account the input of front-office workers and people with disabilities themselves.

## 3.6. Strengthening EU-level co-ordination

The EU has developed new instruments for co-ordinating and benchmarking national policies in areas where the principle of subsidiarity applies, for example in relation to the Employment Strategy, which has just entered its second generation, and the Inclusion strategy, launched in 2000.

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[35] For instance, the French *Agence nationale d'Amélioration de l'Habitat* (www.anah.fr) subsidises accessibility works in private dwellings built more than 15 years ago and which are used as main dwelling for at least 9 years after the completion of the subsidised works.

[36] In the area of eAccessibility, the Council resolution on "*eAccessibility – improving the access of people with disabilities to the Knowledge Based Society*" (December 2002) calls upon Member States "to consider the provision of an "*e*Accessibility mark" for goods and services which comply with relevant standards for *e*Accessibility."

- With the new employment guidelines adopted in June this year, the National Action Plans will be tabled to the Commission in September. In its preparation of the next "Joint Employment Report", the Commission should pay close attention to the measures and commitments presented by Member States regarding the integration of people with disabilities and the link between this overall objective and promotion of accessibility.

> In its proposal for the 2004 guidelines –the first to be published after the European Year of People with Disabilities-, the Commission should mention specifically the issue of accessibility, in relation both to people with disability and to older workers (in the context of active ageing).

- The second batch of National Action Plans combating social exclusion has been sent to the Commission, following the adoption of new "common objectives" in December 2002. Accessibility must be recognised as a key to integrating people with disabilities into active social and economic life and its profile should be raised in the inclusion strategy.

## 4. CONCLUSION

An accessible built environment is a key element for the realisation of a society based on equal rights, and provides its citizens with autonomy and the means to pursue an active social and economic life. It is a cornerstone of an inclusive society, based on non-discrimination. Our society is based on diversity, which entails a need to build a barrier-free environment, that does not *create* disabilities and impairments. It means that accessibility is a concern for everyone, not only for a minority with special needs. With an increasingly diverse and ageing society, the objective should –and will- increasingly be to promote accessibility for all.

Accessibility is thus an intrinsic part of the strategy launched at the Lisbon Summit, in March 2000, that aims to foster growth, employment and social cohesion. Because accessibility benefits everybody, it strengthens inclusion and promotes an active participation of people with disabilities in economic and social life.

**This strategy has a target date: 2010. This is why the "accessibility agenda" which is fleshed out in this report should be implemented with this same 2010 deadline.** By this date, all new constructions, their vicinity (pavement, bus stops,…) and their environment (signage, electronic devices,…), should be accessible for all. Such an effort will require a strong political commitment –to be reinforced at the next Spring European Council 2004. This commitment is necessary to trigger all the concrete steps, across a broad range of policies –from transport to information technologies, from spatial planning to construction- and by all concerned actors, that will be needed to deliver real progress.

The mandate of the Expert Group, to be achieved by a co-operative effort of all stakeholders, is to provide the Commission with a knowledge of current accessibility legislation in the Member States together with insights and recommendations that can help identify new initiatives to improve access to built environment within the framework of the European Year of People with Disabilities. The Expert Group is also to provide the Commission about the actual situation in the member States, as it appears not always to be the same as the legislation orders.

The Expert Group will carry out the following tasks:

- Review the current state of play, including information on any changes about to be introduced (with dates of implementation), of accessibility legislation on built environment in the Member States and document the current situation in the light of opportunities for free movement for persons with disabilities. The legislation is only to be reviewed in highlights by drawing a comparison between the states and note if there is anything in particular that is interesting. Regarding this it can be valuable to know that DG Enterprise are doing a report on accessibility for tourist. In this matter hotels will be reviewed. Very often hotels are included as many other types of buildings in the same legislation as public buildings. A co-operation can therefore be valuable.

- It will also be useful to know about the actual situation in the Member States and analyse if there is an obvious connection between legislation and the actual situation. It will also be interesting to search about the costs involved in a different way than it is usually done. If the Expert Group will find any financial benefits in Design for all added to the practical benefits that could really help to changing peoples attitudes toward the issue. Good accessibility will also give opportunity to reduce costs in other sectors. Good solutions can make the user no longer having need for support by for example an auxiliary nurse or homecare. For example when a person is out of their dwelling instead he or she very often can go by themselves. Another example is to se Design for all as a product of commercial value. For example has Barcelona with its great accessibility achieved economic benefits by this, because this is a product in demand by all sorts of people. Good accessibility can therefore cause positive spreading consequences in the whole city.

- In addressing accessibility and legislation, the Expert Group will also look at current European Union policies as they affect or may affect the overall design of the design of the built environment.

- The Expert Group will develop a list of feasible recommendations which the Commission can consider in order to improve accessibility.

**Chairperson: Domenico Lenarduzzi**

Engineer and exam in Social politics. He is currently an honorary Director-General and has been Deputy Director-General in DG Education and Culture, in charge of European Co-operation in the field of Education and Youth. Conception, negotiation and the launch of the education and training programmes Socrates and Leonardo.

**Deputy Chairperson: Mitzi Bollani**

Author of "Without barriers" – a Project of accessible residential units. Building regulation of Parma city including requirements of accessibility - 1988 / Member of Supervising Group of "European Manual for an accessible built environment" - Rijswijk (NL) / Pedestrian Mobility Planning particularly for disabled people - Fidenza 1990 / Pedestrian Mobility and good accessibility in the Historical Centre of Genoa - Life program - 1994-996 / Course for Architects in "Design for All" - Genoa 1996 / Course for Architects in "Design for All" - Savona 1998-1999.

**Expert members:**

- **Ivor Ambrose**

  Independent Consultant and Researcher specialising in the areas of accessibility, disability, information and communication technologies and management of European projects. Project Technical Assistant to the European Commission DG Research in the fields of Ageing population and Generic Research on Disabilities. He has previously worked as *intra-muros* Expert to the European Commission DG Information Society, and for 15 years was a Senior Researcher at the Danish Building Research Institute, working on planning and evaluation of housing and neighbourhoods.

- **Cleon Angelo**

  Disability expert and academic with specialised knowledge of the problems of people with reduced mobility and is himself a wheelchair user. Influential in the installation and implementation of activities of daily living (ADL) units in many cities in Belgium. Has lobbied for: legal agreement in Brussels and Walloonia for ADL units; reduced VAT for adapted houses; a grant for adapted housing in Walloonia. Is a specialist in the conception and creation of a databank for assistive technology (AT), housing and services for people with disabilities. Has conceived and created a web-site promoting the integration of disabled people (in French). Works with the national housing association and "autonomia" association. Has been a disability specialist since 1983. Has been Administrateur-Délégué of "Acces-A" asbl since 2001.

- **Mieke Broeders**

Mieke Broeders, community worker , worked for 15 years in an organisation of regional development (project leader for projects in the field of training of the unemployed and tourism) and the last 10 years as director of a centre for accessibility in Flanders. The centre has a staff of 12 people with architects, industrial designers and occupational therapists. The working areas are information, advice on home adaptations and advice on accessibility for the public domain and transport, training and education programmes, field research on accessibility and research on standards, guidelines, recommendations on accessibility of transport, tourism and the public domain. The centre has contracts with provinces, municipalities, Belgian railways, Public Bus companies, Tourism of Flanders.

- **Mike Freshney**

  UK Member of the Union of European Developers and Housebuilders (UEPC). The UEPC supports and defends the Interests of Developers and House Builders in Europe. Non Executive Director of the UK House Builders Federation. Chairman of the UK National House Building Council Building Control Company. Non Executive Director of three House Building Companies. Past Chairman of UK working group establishing Accessibility Standards for new Housing in conjunction with the introduction of Part M (Accessibility) of the National Building Regulations.

- **Sarah Langton-Lockton**

  Chief Executive since 1979 of the Centre for Accessible Environments, the leading non-profit organisation in the UK concerned with the practicalities of ensuring that the built environment is accessible to everyone, including disabled and older people. In this role she has developed access audits and other access consultancy services, training and continuing professional development and published design guidance and other material to advance understanding of the issues. Member of the Disability Rights Commission's Built Environment Advisory Forum. Awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2000 for services to disabled people.

- **Dr Peter Neumann**

  Director of Neumann Consult ([www.neumann-consult.com](www.neumann-consult.com)), a German consulting agency which focuses on Town and Regional Development, Tourism Consulting and Design For All. He is also senior lecturer at the Institute of Geography, University of Münster and member of the German DIN CERTCO Expert Group on "Barrier-free Plannings, Constructions and Products" and of the "European Concept for Accessibility Network" ([www.eca.lu](www.eca.lu)).

- **Ulrich Paetzold**

  Secretary general  European Construction Industry federation (FIEC).  FIEC represents, via its 30 national Member Federation in 23 countries (17 EEA countries plus Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) construction enterprises of all sizes, i.e. small and medium-sized enterprises as well as "global players", performing all sorts of building and civil engineering activities.

- **Finn Petren**

  Managing director of The Nordic Co-operation on Disability and secretary general of The Nordic Council on Disability Policy under The Nordic Council of Ministers. Responsible for a wide spectre of Nordic co-operation on accessibility an Design for

All issues in different societal sectors. Also vice president of European Institute for Design and Disability (EIDD) and founder/managing editor of Form & Funktion, a Nordic Design for All magazine.

- **Luc Rivet**

  Secretary General, European Lift (Elevator) Association (EEA). The main purpose of the EEA is to promote the quality and safety of equipment and services related to elevators, freight lifts, escalators, passenger conveyors and associated systems manufactured, installed or maintained in the European Union to serve the public interest in safe and uninterrupted usage of such equipments.

- **Christina Rodriguez-Porrero**

  Director in the organisation [Centro Estatal de Autonomia Personal y Ayudas Tecnicas](#) Member of : ICTA Vicepresident, AATE, ECMT, ISAAC, ISO, CEN

- **Fionnuala Rogerson**

  Irish architect with expertise in Accessibility.  She represents the Architects Council of Europe (ACE) which is the representative body for the architectural profession in Europe.  Former chairperson of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) Task Force on Accessibility, board member of the Irish Institute for Design & Disability and secretary of the International Union of Architects (UIA) Workgroup on Architecture & Disability – Design for All.  She has contributed to several professional courses and publications on Accessibility and Inclusive Design.  From 1998 – 2000 she worked with the EU Horizon funded "Draware" Programme in the School of Architecture in University College Dublin where she was responsible for developing education in accessibility to the Built Environment for architects in practice.

- **Bas Treffers**

  Vice-President of the European Disability Forum. Is involved in many projects related to accessibility, technology, standardisation both nationally and internationally. From 1988 to 1996, he was chairman of RI International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA). He has contributed to EU-Programmes HELIOS, COST, TIDE. He has presented papers at many international conferences all over the world, among others, Council of Europe and AAATE.

- **C.J. Walsh**

  Chief technical consultant in the organisation [Sustainable Design International](#) Architect; fire safety engineer & technical controller Member of  CIB  (International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction.

  **Rapporteur: Marc Berthiaume** European Commission's official (DG Employment and Social affairs)