

EGA-Min01
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THE EXPERT GROUP ON ACCESSIBILITY

Minutes of the first meeting

8 November 2002

PARTICIPANTS

Chair	Mrs Gabrielle CLOTUCHE (DG Empl) on behalf of Mr Lenarduzzi
Experts	Mr Bas TREFFERS Mr Alain SAGNE Mrs Fionnuala ROGERSON Mrs Sarah LANGTON-LOCKTON Mrs Christina RODRIGUEZ-PORRERO Mrs Mitzi BOLLANI Mr CJ WALSH Mr Mike FRESHNEY Mr Luc RIVET
Observers	Mrs Jacqueline WESTCOTT (DG ENTR) Mr Manfred FUCHS (DG ENTR) Mr Gunnar FAGERBERG (DG INF SO) Mr Harmut OFFELE (SEC GEN) Ms Nora BEDNARSKI (DG TREN)
DG EMPL	Mrs Wallis GOELEN
Secretariat	Mrs Beth STRAW Miss Ellen INGVALDSEN
Secretaries	Mr Johan SNIJCKERS Ms Nina MCARTHUR

1. Introduction by the Commission

Mrs Clotuche welcomed everybody, the Commission was indeed grateful for their participation. The Commissioner herself was very interested in the work of the Expert Group on Accessibility (EGA).

Apologies had been received from: **Ulrich Paetzold, Ivor Ambrose, Finn Petren, Peter Neumann, Harrie Bijen and Jan Van der Putten**. They hoped to be available for future meetings.

It was most unfortunate that Mr Lenarduzzi was himself unable to attend as he was presently in hospital. With his agreement, Mrs Clotuche was temporarily taking the Chair on his behalf. It had been decided to continue with the meeting in spite of Mr Lenarduzzi's absence given the limited time available to the EGA and the need to set the work in motion with the minimum of delay. For the future, a Vice Chairman would be appointed to assist in the direction of the EGA, and to deputise for Mr Lenarduzzi should the need arise.

This initial meeting represented an opportunity to exchange ideas and to formulate a strategy for the future work of the EGA.

In spite of his hospitalisation, Mr Lenarduzzi had kindly provided a message to be read out to the experts. He was very enthusiastic about the EGA which was very important to him. He expressed his willingness to take the Chair and wanted to take this opportunity to explain his ambitions for the EGA and his vision for the outcome of its work. He wanted above all to achieve worthwhile recommendations that could influence future Community policies for people with disabilities and to have long-lasting effects. He noted in this respect that the EYPD 2003 offers a unique opportunity to see the issue of accessibility high on the political agenda.

The EGA would be free and independent, that was very important. He was himself a wheelchair user and his experiences had made him aware of the necessity for greatly improved access to buildings. With support from DG EMPL, he wanted the experts to think beyond social issues on accessibility. The economic aspect was equally important and in this connection, the addition of an economist was highly desirable, preferably as an expert rather than as an observer. The person appointed would add value to the EGA; they would be able to advise on the economic aspects of any recommendations and thereby contribute to a realistic outcome that took account of the financial implications. Any suggestions as to a suitable person to approach would be welcome.

He made the following specific points:

- the work at European level fitted into a broader context. For example, an ageing population had accessibility needs, and accessibility is about much more than people with disabilities. We are living in a changing time with

fast moving technology, notably in the knowledge field, that is creating improved facilities. We are now a knowledge-based society in which knowledge and skills determine the competitive edge.. It is still not an inclusive society however, notably regarding employment.

- There are also issues of mobility and exclusion associated with accessibility. The EGA should focus on the economic aspect in a positive way, finding solutions that could stand as references for 20 years. Member States were trying, but were far from good in relation to accessibility.
- The EGA's work should go beyond national arrangements and should also include the Commission. Europe should be strong in both social and employment matters. The Barcelona Council highlighted the need for Member States to have policies designed to get people with disabilities into work. This was the best way to achieve social inclusion, hence reinforcing the European Social model.
- The Lisbon Council emphasised the need for greater efforts in social and economic affairs and co-ordination between corresponding policies. It was important to take new initiatives and go beyond the usual sectors. We should consider how best to influence major stakeholders such as builders, engineers, economists, architects, and industrialists in Accessibility.

2. Presentation of the Commission

In a tour de table, the observers and experts introduced themselves.

Mrs Wallis Goelen was Head of the disability Unit in DG Employment with responsibility for the integration of people with disabilities. Her Unit was available to support the experts, including providing reference documents as required.

Mrs Beth Straw (DG EMPL), a member of the disability unit, would provide the Secretariat to the EGA.

Ms Ellen Ingvaldsen (DG EMPL): would assist Mrs Straw in the Secretariat.

Observers

Ms Jaqueline Westcott (DG ENTR): Her Unit had commissioned an expert group to conduct a study on accessibility to tourist sites for people with disabilities. Both EGAs would maintain a close liaison.

Mr Hartmut Offele (SEC GEN): His expertise was more based on personal experience as a wheel-chair user.

Mr Manfred Fuchs (DG ENTR): A civil engineer with previous experience in accessibility to buildings.

Mr Gunnar Fagerberg (DG INFSO): His expertise was in research, empowerment, and barrier free technology.

Ms Nora Bednarski (DG TREN): Has a background in law and urban planning and has a personal experience of disability.

3. Presentation of the Experts

Mr Bas Treffers EDF: In 1981 worked in the Netherlands on the physical environment. Has been 6 years in CEN. Has worked on the "Design for all" concept. Has been chairman and member in RI International Commission on Technology and Accessibility ICTA. Has contributed to EU-Programmes Helios, Cost, Tide. Expertise comes from experience and personal study. Currently working for European Disability Forum.

Mr Alain Sagne ACE: ACE is interested in sustainable and urban environment. Involved with a programme (2001-2010) on urban environment for sustainability.

Ms Fionnuala Rogerson ACE: Architect. Started in mid 70s. Has taken part in committees working on Design for All, Design and Disability and Accessibility etc. Has done some government work on accessibility using her expertise as an architect.

Ms Sarah Langton-Lockton: Chief Executive in the organisation 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 whether persons with a disability or the elderly.

Ms Christina Rodriguez-Porrero: Director in the organisation Centro Estatal de Autonomie Personal y Ayudas Tecnicas for 7 years. Working with accessibility, design for all and assistive technology. Recently published a book on Accessibility. Member of: ICTA Vice-president, AATE, ECMT, ISAAC, ISO, CEN. Although Barcelona is well known as the city with good accessibility, Valencia, Bilbao and other cities have also made great efforts in this area.

Mr CJ 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). Contributed a chapter to a book on Universal Design, published in the USA.

Ms Mitzi Bollani: Architect. Has been interested in this field from the beginning of her studies. Received award for Design for all product. Member of several groups regarding accessibility which she considers is not only a disability issue. Accessibility is much more than social affairs. Design for all is a universal concept.

Mr Mike Freshney UEPC: Civil engineer dealing mainly with housing and the wider environment. UK member of Union of Developers and Housebuilders (UEPC-promoters/constructors). Collaborates with and advises European institutions.

Mr Luc Rivet: Secretary General, European Lift Association (EEA). This organisation also includes the EFTA-countries and Turkey. The main purpose of the EEA is to promote the quality and safety of equipment and services related to elevators, freight lifts, escalators etc. to serve the public interest in safe and uninterrupted usage of such equipment.

Mrs Clotuche noted the comments about urban planning, sustainable design and environmental issues. This added an extra dimension to the work of the EGA.

Mrs Goelen said that the European Year for People with Disabilities 2003 (EYPD) was a major political initiative that represented a perfect opportunity for this EGA, as had been acknowledged by Mr Lenarduzzi. We were looking for success-stories and other positive experiences to implement in the EYPD. Ms Bollani had made an important point regarding the universal benefits to be derived from the Design for All concept. There could also be economical advantages in the this kind of thinking. A good example was the tram system in Grenoble. By improving accessibility, the trains had been able to go faster and therefore run more frequently thereby increasing passenger revenue by 13%.

4. Presentation of the Mandate

Mrs Straw explained that the Mandate was at this stage very much a document for discussion with the experts who have the greater expertise. Adjustments could therefore be made and ideas were welcome. It would be helpful if the EGA could identify the current legal situation in the Member

States, and also the situation regarding implementation. There were fears that what happened in practice did not always follow the legislations.

The scope of the current mandate was wide and it might be better to be more explicit in order to produce a mandate that was feasible and achievable in the time available. In that connection, hotels had been excluded so as not to duplicate the work of the Tourism study currently in progress in DG ENTR.

The timetable in the mandate was not, however, a matter for discussion. The study was part of the Commission contribution to the EYPD and the report would be presented during the latter half of 2003. Prospective dates for the three remaining meetings were: 17 January, 9 May, and 12 September 2003. If possible, it would be helpful to have an interim report to inform policy discussions that would need to take place before September 2003.

5. General Responses by the Experts

In discussion the following general points were made:

- The social model of disability is a challenge to the traditional medical model of disability. Ideologically, the social model of disability emphasises that it is better no longer to classify people as disabled, but instead to classify the environment as disabling, recognising that barriers are located in society.
- Immigration had not been mentioned. Use of the expression "Citizen of Europe" excluded refugees. That was discrimination. The term 'person' or 'people' might be better. The terminology used in the Design for All concept would be better.
- The needs of people with mental and psychological disabilities should also be included, as should those of the elderly.
- Human Rights and non-discrimination were also important in relation to accessibility.
- Legislation was a better option for some experts. While examples of current good practice were helpful, it was important to look at future options as well. It was important to include mention of sanctions here. A comparison of current legislation might be better and more achievable than an in-depth report on legislation in each Member State.
- Different degrees of accessibility as well as the differences in legislation and sanctions (for example employment or building requirements) affect people's mobility and migration. People's ability to enjoy the same level of

quality of life varies from Member State to Member State. These differences may also have consequences for someone who wishes to move or take up employment in another Member State.

- Legislation relating to accessibility is also a relevant consideration in relation to fair competition and public procurement. Companies from one Member State may be bidding for a contract in another and may be required to implement more stringent accessibility standards.
- The situation in accession states should also be considered by the EGA.
- There was also an issue for the Commission, whose own buildings often had poor accessibility.

6. Specific responses to the mandate

In the **afternoon**, experts continued to discuss their vision for the mandate of the Expert Group on Accessibility (EGA), bringing to the discussion their individual expertise and experience.

Statistics

Some discussion ensued around the availability of statistics. It was suggested that figures are needed to add weight to arguments and to convince legislators to listen to recommendations. Several members felt there were no reliable statistics on disability in Europe noting that EUROSTAT seems to collect no data on disability, and suggested that statistics that reveal not only disability demographics but also demographics related to the ageing population might be useful. Analyses comparing social and cost benefits of enabling at-home care for older people rather than in care-homes might be useful in substantiating recommendations by the EGA. On that note it was also pointed out that there is an ongoing Commission Expert Group on Ageing – a group the EGA should contact.

Mrs Clotuche noted that the Commission is sensitive to this issue and consequently the Directorate has requested that EUROSTAT prepare statistics relating to disability, in particular in the domain of employment. However, some of this data may be somewhat subjective in that it is dependent on self-identification rather than a specific definition of disability.

The Commission (Mrs Straw) noted that the lack of data on disability may relate in part to the fact that not all Member States collect data on disability and that furthermore, the definition of disability is not common throughout the EU. This relates in part to the fact that the recognition of disability differs in Member States and is often linked to the provision of social security benefits.

Several members urged the EGA to look beyond statistics, noting that if the EGA is serious about looking at environments rather than people, we don't need statistics. However it was suggested by others that without statistics, policy-makers would not listen.

Global Thinking / Environments for All

Much emphasis was placed by members on the idea of 'design for all'. This 'global' design approach takes into consideration the consequences of interventions in the built environment on a broader scale than that of individual buildings – for example, it would consider the implications, in terms of available transport choice, of urban planning decisions vis-à-vis residential projects, new schools and commercial areas. Such planning decisions may have an effect on people's ability freely to choose the means of transport they wish to use. People should have mobility choices which enable them to lead an autonomous life.

In addition, 'design for all' is just that. It relocates the concept of 'disability' within the environment and recognises that environments can be disabling. Certain people are excluded – disabled – by the environment in which they live. 'Design for all' is an approach that aims to promote environments that are inclusive and accessible to all members of society.

Mandate of the EGA

Mrs Clotuche urged the experts to be focused and realistic in defining the scope of their mandate for the next ten months and to address issues on the table with a plan for the future. An inventory of existing groups whose work relate to that of the EGA and a good understanding of existing legislation in each Member State are needed.

Several members agreed that the focus of the EGA should be limited to politically relevant aspects since too wide and too detailed recommendations will not be taken up by the Commission.

Legislation

Members widely agreed that the EGA should carefully consider existing legislation in Member States, and in particular review the means to enforce legislation and the ability to impose sanctions. It was noted that building legislation in the UK is currently under review. **Information on legislation in each Member State should be circulated and studied (the Commission will endeavour to obtain relevant documents).**

Mention was made of the American and British approach in which it is the responsibility of the owner of a building to comply with building regulations and ensure access. Several members spoke in favour of legislation, stressing that 'coercion does work' especially if it is enabling rather than prescriptive. It

was suggested that such a rights/obligations based approach should be fundamental to the philosophy put forward by the EGA.

EGA working plan

The Commission hopes that by January members will have launched some preliminary 'tracks' of investigation. **Members were each asked to prepare a brief document (one page), based on their expertise, which will influence the direction of the EGA.**

Mrs Clotuche suggested an to precise the EGA mandate with two points which can enlarge it:

(a) to encourage political recommendations that could influence legislative and other initiatives within the competence of the Commission; (b) to identify Commission DGs and Member State groups not represented at the EGA table who may be carrying out initiatives of interest and relevance to the EGA mandate. **Mrs Goelen will contact the inter-service disability network of 22 DGs and facilitate the task of putting the EGA in touch with DGs.**

Mrs Clotuche noted that the Chair of the EGA, Mr Lenarduzzi, wanted the expertise of an economist within the EGA which would enable the group to be realistic and to consider the cost of infrastructure-related recommendations. Ideally this person would be an independent expert and would raise potential issues rather than carry out complex economic analyses. **Members and the Commission (DG INFOSO) were asked to put forward names to Mr. Lenarduzzi of economists who could act as a consultant to the EGA.**

Subsidiarity

Members felt the issue of subsidiarity had to be addressed by the EGA: first, by determining the legal base in the EU for legislating with respect to accessibility and also, by considering whether and how such legislative competence should be examined.

The Commission agreed that the EGA must be clear about whom it addressed its recommendations to. Considering the objectives of social inclusion and cohesion, the ambit for recommendations was not limited. However, the Commission would like to signal to the EGA that it be realistic in its vision and that it develops a strategy within the competence of the Commission so that concrete actions can follow the recommendations.

Mrs Clotuche outlined the 'open method of co-ordination' within the EU which sought to enable progress in areas of policy which may be controversial and unlikely to succeed if proposed as Directives, while at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The open method of coordination encouraged Member States to develop common principal objectives which were then translated into policy at the Member State, Regional or Local level. Political engagement occurred at those levels through the submission by the

Member State to the Commission of a National Plan or a Strategic Report detailing how they intended to realise the agreed-upon common objectives. This open method had been successfully employed in a number of important policy areas and was a very strong tool. Crucial, however, to its success, was the existence of indicators used to evaluate the policies implemented by each Member State.

Other

Mr Hilbert (DG EMPL) gave a detailed presentation on the CIRCA network, which was a highly effective and instant method of communication that could greatly facilitate the work of the group. Members would each be given a personal password and could up-load and access documents easily. CIRCA enabled a given community such as the EGA, geographically spread across Europe and beyond to maintain a private space on the internet where information could be shared, documents loaded, and discussion groups set up. It was agreed that this would greatly facilitate the work of the EGA and the **Secretariat would arrange to set up the group as soon as possible**. A question was raised about the accessibility of the CIRCA web site and the response indicated there is an ongoing effort to bring it up to the same accessibility standards as the rest of the Europa web site.

Mrs Clotuche thanked the experts for their contributions which had been extremely worthwhile. Once the experts had provided their individual assessments of their contributions to the group **these would be discussed with Mr Lenarduzzi and would inform the way forward**. Moreover, following this initial exchange of ideas it was hoped **that a more contents-based agenda would be provided for the next meeting**.

The Commissioner, Anna Diamantopoulou hopes to attend the next meeting of the EGA on 17 January. (To be confirmed)

Minutes prepared by the Secretariat

Cc. Mrs Quintin
Mrs Helfferich
Mrs Clotuche
Mr Curell
Mr Olsson
Mrs Goelen and E4 members
Mrs Nolan
Mrs Bussacchini
Participants