

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 208 (2007)¹ Access to public spaces and amenities for people with disabilities

1. In recent years, member states have adopted various measures and made a number of commitments to ensure accessibility to public spaces for people with disabilities (whether physical, cognitive or sensory) – that is, the possibility of moving from one place to another, enjoying public facilities and, by extension, using all public services independently. However, as governments acknowledged during the European Year of People with Disabilities (2003), results have not met expectations. Those regulations and standards which do exist are not always applied;

2. The Ministers responsible for Integration Policies for People with Disabilities (Malaga European Conference, 2003) therefore drew up a timetable for European disability policies for the next ten years. The Council of Europe Action Plan set out in Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2006)5 to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society, which aims at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe over the period from 2006-2015, is the direct result of that conference;

3. With its adoption, in 1984, of Partial Agreement Resolution AP (84) 3 on a coherent policy for the rehabilitation of disabled people, the Council of Europe had already moved away from a purely medical approach to disability towards one based on access to social, economic and cultural rights for people with disabilities;

4. For its part, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities believes that an environment accessible to all is a crucial factor in the establishment of a society based on equal rights and in enabling all citizens to lead independent lives;

5. An environment free of barriers and obstacles is in the interests of all citizens and not just people with particular constraints. Indeed, all individuals may encounter problems of reduced mobility at some point in their lives for various reasons related not only to a disability but also to their age or a specific temporary physical condition (for example, pregnant women). Accessibility therefore concerns everybody and fosters integration and participation in society by people with permanent or temporary disabilities;

6. Accessible dwellings and amenities serve no real purpose if the various other parts of the environment (roads and transport systems) are not also properly adapted. The Congress therefore believes that it is essential that the concept of accessibility and the principle of “universal design” (application of integrative standards and technology to public spaces and amenities to promote more independent

living) are incorporated in spatial planning at all levels (local, regional, national);

7. The Congress therefore fully endorses the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society and recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask the member states to:

a. assess their national disability programmes in relation to the Council of Europe’s Action Plan in readiness for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan at national level in co-operation with local and regional authorities and organisations of people with disabilities;

b. develop an integrated accessibility policy at national level, in consultation with local and regional authorities and organisations of people with disabilities, to enable the development of coherent spatial planning policies aimed at ensuring the accessibility of public spaces and amenities, based on the “universal design” principle;

c. take into consideration the problems of the specific groups of persons with disabilities, including children and persons with disabilities who live in the outermost regions and regions with extremely severe climate;

d. make sure that local and regional authorities have the necessary resources for setting up special bodies to monitor the consistency of local and regional plans and measures aimed at improving accessibility for people in disability situations;

e. establish at national level, if none exists, a post of “accessibility mediator”, who would liaise between central government and the “local” mediators responsible for ensuring equal living conditions for people with disabilities at local and regional level;

f. provide financial support for non-governmental organisations of people with disabilities to enable them to operate properly and work in a network, and encourage the establishment of such organisations where necessary;

g. to sign and ratify, if they have not already done so, the European Social Charter (revised) and, in particular, accept Article 15 concerning the right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community;

h. to sign and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which covers a number of key areas such as accessibility, liberty of movement, health, education, employment, facilitation and rehabilitation, participation in public and political life and equality and non-discrimination;

8. The Congress also calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the Committee on the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities (CD-P-RR), and in particular its Committee of Experts on Universal Design (Accessibility) to:

a. promote the establishment of a common timetable for all relevant levels of government (national, regional, local), covering a ten-year period, for making public spaces and

amenities accessible with a view to supplementing the respective measures and action plans of the Council of Europe and the European Union;

b. envisage the creation, at European level, of a network for sharing good practice and information about ways of applying the principle of “universal design”. The network would have the task of conducting comparative studies and identifying innovative practices and would be based on existing bodies and services at national and sub national level;

c. take into account the local and regional dimensions in its discussions and in its forthcoming report on participation

and equal rights by achieving accessibility through universal design;

9. Lastly, the Congress expresses its support for the European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (CAHPAH), whose terms of reference were adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 September 2006, and confirms its intention to take part in it.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 27 March 2007 (see Document CG(13)41, draft recommendation presented by E. Hider (Austria, R, SOC), rapporteur).