

Workshop Towards common European criteria on accessibility of the built environment: Outcomes of Mandate M/420

Presentation of the EN 17210 Standard: Accessibility and usability of the built environment

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11:10 – 11:50: User's perspective

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Good morning to all,

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation to participate in this workshop representing Ceapat-Imsero. Allow me also the opportunity to congratulate everyone who participated in the development of this standard and to thank you for the effort made to agree on functional common accessibility criteria based on so many divergent and specific technical regulations for each country and including regions of the European Union.

We are all aware that every day a greater number of people benefit from accessible technologies, environments and services. Accessibility not only favours people with disabilities and the elderly, but makes life easier for a large part of the population also.

Public procurement accounts for a large part of the market for goods and services. If public administration tenders do not take accessibility into account, discrimination will be financed. Spain and most European countries have signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and must ensure that the criteria of universal accessibility and the principle of non-discrimination are met.

Countries like the United States and Canada have seen the importance of accessibility in public purchases, making their companies leaders in this area.

Europe is highly committed to responding to the challenges of social and technological innovation through public procurement. In this sense, Law 9/2017, of November 8th, on Public Sector Contracts, by which the Directives of the European Parliament and of the Council 2014/23 / EU and 2014/24 / EU are transposed into the Spanish legal system, of February 26th, 2014, includes social and accessibility clauses to take advantage of the impact of public tenders.

Requiring compliance with accessibility criteria by default in public tenders will benefit many people who need accessible facilities, products and services. It will also ensure equal opportunities for all people, and will force many companies to be competitive, innovative, and respond better to consumer demands.

The accessibility market will be strengthened and the administrations will fulfill their function of promoting social, technological, innovation and responsibility for the well-being of present and future generations.

This path requires the commitment of everyone with political and public procurement policy responsibilities, and the support of many entities, to facilitate this process.

The Observatory of Public Procurement indicates that public procurement represents in Spain, approximately 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

As described in the "Virtual Higher Education Program in Public Procurement", "The importance of public procurement is not only related to the magnitude of resources involved, but also the impact with which the State efficiently develops its activities and provisions for public service and relationships established with different social factors, including companies, suppliers, public and private workers, as well as the general public. In addition, public purchases are an instrument with great influence on social, environmental and innovation policies".

Through public procurement, governments can lead by example and achieve fundamental policy goals. It presents an opportunity to drive markets towards innovation, sustainability, accessibility and social progress.

The recently published European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 states that the European Commission will provide, in 2021, practical guidance to Member States to support the implementation of accessibility obligations through directives on public procurement and promote the training of public buyers to buy accessible products.

Furthermore, EU rules make accessibility requirements mandatory for Member States to benefit from shared management funds. Furthermore, the purchase of accessible goods, services and infrastructure is an obligation in public procurement. It also encourages Member States to integrate accessibility financing into recovery and resilience plans.

Spain's case of Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, "Spain Can", refers to the investment in the application of accessibility criteria in a transversal way within all environments - physical and virtual - through the future "Spain Plan Accessible Country". It also makes a special impact on the application of accessibility in digital products and services, in health systems, and in all types of public service.

The EN 17210 Standard: Accessibility and usability of the built environment, is a useful and pedagogical tool to train those responsible for public administration on the accessibility requirements that can be incorporated into the contract specifications of public works and renovation tenders in order to guarantee the autonomy and usability of future environments for all people.

Compliance with accessibility can also be required, citing the standard as a requirement that the winning company must meet with its design and construction project.

From a legal point of view, the standard can serve as a reference for review, updating and standardization of criteria defined in the multiple Spanish regulations on accessibility for the mandatorily built environment, be they national, regional or municipal. In practice, there are more than 20.

The application of this standard in the European Union, with common criteria, will facilitate in the medium and long term that people with disabilities and older people will be able to circulate and travel through the 27 countries with reasonable guarantees and homogeneous accessibility criteria. For tourism in Europe, this is especially relevant when one takes into account that in 2019 travellers over 50 years of age represented 47% of travellers in the EU, and that, according to the study carried out by the University of Surrey in 2014 for the European Commission, travellers with accessibility needs contribute annually at least 400 billion Euros to the European economy and generate 87 million jobs. Promoting accessible environments and transportation throughout the EU would increase these figures.

In addition, the application of this rule will facilitate mobility for work or educational purposes for young people and adults with disabilities, an aspect currently with many possibilities for improvement. In 2019, only 0.14% of students who participated in the Erasmus program were students with disabilities, whom, due to their accessibility requirements, needed a scholarship with a higher economic endowment to solve the lack of accessibility in the university and/or the destination and hiring of on-site personal assistants when they were needed.

Another positive aspect of this standard to highlight is how it addresses accessibility in both public and private environments, such as housing. Its application will contribute to the construction of housing models prepared from the beginning adapting to the accessibility needs of its residents, which change throughout their lifespan. In addition, it is a success in this standard to link home to home automation and social health equipment provided through technological tools that will be regulated by the European Accessibility Act. This is very important considering the accelerated aging of the European population and the need to migrate from institutionalized housing models to community life models that stimulate active and healthy aging.

The standard also correctly introduces the concept of "accessibility statement", a tool that not only allows the manager of the built environment to monitor its level of compliance and capacity for improvement, but, at the same time serves to objectively inform potential users and customers what they will find in that environment and allows them to decide for themselves, whether it is accessible to them according to their particular needs.

Finally, acknowledge and be thankful that this rule has been worked on, as should be done, for any plan, project or regulation that affects our lives as citizens. Constituting a multidisciplinary team in which, public administrations, architecture and urban planning professionals, experts in the field and above all, potential users with accessibility needs, represented by EDF and AGE Platform Europe, have been included.

Before concluding, I want to congratulate my colleague Nieves Peinado, for her participation in the drafting of this standard as expert in accessibility and as representative of the Spanish public administration.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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