



COUNCIL OF EUROPE    CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE  
Committee of Ministers  
Comité des Ministres

### **Resolution ResAP(2007)3 “Achieving full participation through Universal Design”**

*(adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 December 2007  
at the 1014th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, in its composition restricted to Representatives of the States members of the Partial Agreement in the social and public health field,<sup>1</sup>

Referring to its Resolution (59) 23 of 16 November 1959 on the extension of the activities of the Council of Europe in the social and cultural fields;

Having regard to Resolution (96) 35 of 2 October 1996 revising the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field, and resolved to continue, on the basis of revised rules replacing those set out in Resolution (59) 23, the activities hitherto carried out and developed by virtue of that resolution, aimed at, *inter alia*, integrating people with disabilities into the community with a view to defining and contributing to the implementation at European level of a model coherent policy for people with disabilities, based on the principles of full citizenship and independent living, implying the elimination of barriers to integration, whatever their nature, whether psychological, educational, family-related, cultural, social, professional, financial or architectural;

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members and that this aim may be pursued, *inter alia*, by the adoption of common rules in the disability policy field for the purpose of promoting the protection of political, civil, social, cultural and educational rights;

Bearing in mind the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5) and the principles embodied in the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), namely the right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community (Article 15);

Having regard to Recommendation No. R (92) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on a coherent policy for people with disabilities;

Having regard to Resolution ResAP(2001)1 of the Committee of Ministers on the introduction of the principles of Universal Design into the curricula of all occupations working on the built environment (“Tomar Resolution”) and to Resolution ResAP(2001)3 of the Committee of Ministers “Towards full citizenship of persons with disabilities through inclusive new technologies”;

Having regard to the Ministerial Declaration on People with Disabilities “Progressing towards full participation as citizens”, adopted at the 2nd European Conference of Ministers responsible for integration policies for people with disabilities held in Malaga (Spain) on 7 and 8 May 2003;

Having regard to the Action Plan of the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, adopted in Warsaw on 17 May 2005, which lays down the principal tasks of the Council of Europe in the coming years;

Having regard to Recommendation Rec(2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the “Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015”, which states that “the application of Universal Design principles is of paramount importance for improving the accessibility of the environment and the usability of products”;

Having regard to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1592 (2003) “Towards full social inclusion of people with disabilities”;

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

Having regard to the 1983 Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (No. C159) and the corresponding ILO Recommendation on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) (No. R168) (1983);

Having regard to the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2001), and to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006;

Reaffirming the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for people with disabilities to be guaranteed their full enjoyment without any discrimination;

Considering that failure to promote the rights of citizens with disabilities and to ensure equality of opportunities is a violation of human dignity;

Considering that ensuring equal opportunities for members of all groups in society contributes to securing democracy and social cohesion;

Convinced that the human rights based approach to ensuring the integration and full participation of people with disabilities in society should be incorporated in all relevant policy areas at international, national, regional and local level;

Acknowledging the fact that in the process of integration of people with disabilities into society, a conceptual and methodological shift has been taking place in Europe since the middle of the 20th century, namely a shift from approaches identifying and eliminating existing barriers that prevent the participation of people with disabilities within society to an emphasis on avoiding the creation of new barriers of any kind, in order to ensure equal and democratic rights in society for all individuals, regardless of age, abilities or cultural background;

Addressing the challenge of developing mainstream solutions with built-in adaptability and compatibility, accommodating as many people as possible, including people with disabilities, on the basis of the general idea that planning and shaping policies, built environments, information, products and services should be made responsive to the needs of people with diverse abilities;

Acknowledging the work carried out by the Council of Europe's Committee on the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities (CD-P-RR) and its subordinate body, the Committee of Experts on Universal Design (Accessibility) (P-RR-UD), and their recommendations on the application of Universal Design principles, as they appear in the report "Achieving full participation through Universal Design",

Recommends that the governments of the member states of the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field, having due regard to their specific national, regional or local structures and respective responsibilities:

- i. promote full participation in community life, and in particular, prevent the creation of new barriers by designing, from the outset, solutions that are accessible and usable for all; and in doing so, take into account and integrate as appropriate in their policy, legislation and practice the principles of Universal Design;
- ii. be guided, in their processes of integrating Universal Design principles in policy, legislation and practice, by the measures advocated in the appendix to this resolution;
- iii. promote the application of Universal Design in the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015;
- iv. assure to this end the widest possible dissemination of this resolution amongst all parties concerned, for example through awareness-raising campaigns and co-operation with the private sector and civil society, involving, in particular, non-governmental organisations of people with disabilities.

## Appendix to Resolution ResAP(2007)3

### 1. General principles and definitions

Universal Design is a strategy which aims to make the design and composition of different environments, products, communication, information technology and services accessible and understandable to, as well as usable by, everyone, to the greatest extent in the most independent and natural manner possible, preferably without the need for adaptation or specialised solutions.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of Universal Design is to make the built environment, communication, products and services accessible and usable to the greatest extent possible.

It promotes a shift towards user-centred design by following a holistic approach and aiming to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, regardless of any changes they might experience in the course of their lives.

Consequently, Universal Design is a concept that extends beyond the issues of mere accessibility of buildings for people with disabilities and should become an integrated part of policies and planning in all aspects of society.

### 2. Recommendations to governments

Governments should accept Universal Design as a philosophy and strategy supporting implementation of full citizenship and independent living of all people, including people with disabilities. In doing so, governments are invited to take note of the report: "Achieving full participation through Universal Design" drafted by the Committee of Experts on Universal Design (Accessibility) (Partial Agreement) (P-RR-UD) in co-operation with Mr S. Ginnerup, Consultant, where the concept of Universal Design is introduced as an adequate strategy with special attention to the action lines of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015.<sup>3</sup>

Considering that, as stated in Recommendation Rec(2006)5, "the estimated proportion of persons with disabilities in the total population in Europe is 10%-15%, that the main causes of disability are disease, accidents and disabling conditions among the elderly, and that the number of disabled people is expected to grow steadily due to increasing life expectancy, *inter alia*...", governments should put in place measures aimed at integrating people with disabilities as fully-fledged members of society, allowing for their participation in public life (employment, political participation, etc.) and in promoting social inclusion by giving them a greater choice and control.

Governments should take full advantage of the potential of Universal Design to cope with ageing and the increasing number of people with disabilities, as implementing and enforcing Universal Design strategies can facilitate the promotion of equal rights of all citizens in all aspects of society. The overview of historical events and the current situation demonstrate that the work done to improve accessibility, including Universal Design measures, has led to greater participation of people with disabilities in public life.

Public and private bodies should be involved on an equal footing since progress in human rights at international, European, national or regional level relies heavily on governments and elective bodies as driving forces, whereas it is often the private sector that leads the technological advancement.

<sup>2</sup> As defined in Council of Europe Resolution ResAP(2001)1 on the introduction of the principles of Universal Design into the curricula of all occupations working on the built environment ("Tomar Resolution"). The terms "design for all", "integral accessibility", "accessible design", "inclusive design", "barrier-free design", "transgenerational design" and "accessibility for all" are regarded as converging towards the term "Universal Design" used in this text.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation Rec(2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015.

Member states should take actions incorporating the principles of Universal Design, encompassing all aspects of society, for example the built environment, information and communications technology (ICT) networks, transport, services, tourism, products and goods, information, employment and education.

Co-ordinated initiatives should be undertaken through the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015, carefully examining how its key action lines relate to Universal Design and accessibility.

In order to develop, implement and maintain Universal Design strategies, incentives should be given to key actors in different sectors of society, public as well as private. With countries organising their social life differently in Europe, both the market and legislation are important arenas and should be addressed by policy makers.

### *2.1. Adoption and decision*

Policy makers should first of all adopt a co-ordinated, harmonised and intersectorial approach to Universal Design. Policies on disability at national levels should be inclusive and mainstreaming, incorporating Universal Design, which should be acknowledged and promoted in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies. Bearing in mind that these policies touch upon equal opportunity issues, they should be applied at the highest level of legal responsibility, and should include enforcement measures in line with the framework provided by the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015.<sup>4</sup> Examples of basic issues to be decided upon are the suggested actions to improve participation in political, public and cultural life, to provide for accessible and inclusive communication systems and information, education, built environment, transport systems, health care and research and development. This may be achieved by applying Universal Design strategies.

The input of experienced representatives of user organisations, in particular those where services are managed and controlled by people with disabilities, research groups and knowledge centres should be ensured at all levels where decisions are made on principles of Universal Design. The diverging requirements of various categories of people can in this way be taken into account, and involvement of experienced user representatives can also help mobilise the critical mass required for triggering political action.

### *2.2. Co-ordination*

Policy makers should involve key actors from all sectors of society, public as well as private, centralised as well as decentralised. Co-ordination is important on a European level, too, as co-ordination between member states and sharing of knowledge and best practices simplifies the process for governments, planners and designers, in addition to making European societies more coherent for people with disabilities. At national level it should be ensured that different ministries co-ordinate their work from the initial stages, for example within the framework of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015. Co-ordination between, and stimulation of, public and private partnerships are vital as well. Target agreements should be concluded in order to allow for such co-ordination.

Incentives should be given to designers, architects and engineers to consider the needs of people of different ages, abilities and cultural origins at the earliest stages of designing, for example through the inclusion of Universal Design requirements in public procurement. This should be accompanied by an information flow on Universal Design for professionals, by making compliance with standards on accessibility compulsory and by following up with quality assessment procedures.

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendation Rec(2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015

Governments should set up a framework for the education sector to instil the principles of Universal Design. Education professionals should be involved in this process and contribute to the introduction of the principles of Universal Design into curricula. In particular all occupations working on the built environment should do so, but those offering services, information and products should also cater for this. Courses in teaching Universal Design should be set up, and teaching material complying with Universal Design principles should be produced. Considering that it is sometimes difficult for governments to have an influence on curricula, the allocation of money to Universal Design training programmes may be a means of raising awareness within the education sector.

Courses should be planned at all levels, ranging from basic to more specialised and aimed at different professions, preferably backed by an advisory service from experts on Universal Design.

Researchers, knowledge centres and representatives of end user groups should be asked to contribute with clearly defined user requirements for guidelines and standards, based on research comprising a multitude of user groups.

In order to make marketers and developers target broader user groups and markets, policy makers should be at the forefront by including Universal Design features in public procurement. Job markets in the private as well as the public sector should be opened to wider groups of people by target agreements with managers and employers.

### 2.3. *Implementation*

Legislative measures and provisions should be introduced in order to create a basic framework for the implementation of Universal Design strategies.

Governments should provide information on legislative measures, social services, products, assistive technology etc. to citizens and user organisations empowering users to make their own decisions. Acceptance of Universal Design requires new ways of thinking. Governments should, therefore, raise public awareness about Universal Design with the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 as an obvious opportunity.

Responsibility in Universal Design issues should be assigned to key persons in organisations to ensure acceptance throughout. A taskforce of influential captains of industry could be one way of promoting social interaction between all citizens, especially with people with disabilities. Adequate financial resources should be provided in order to allow for Universal Design action plans to be implemented, and these should be accompanied by procedures for the conveying of detailed requirements, guidelines and standards. Especially important are plans for improved accessibility to the existing environment, using Universal Design methods. Non-physical environments, such as information technology and communication, should also be addressed.

Cost-benefit analyses of the application of Universal Design and the communication of the results should be carried out to provide for greater visibility of the effects of Universal Design.

Knowledge centres on Universal Design with the defined task of ensuring easy access to information for the public and stakeholders should be established. A collection of examples of good practice of the use of Universal Design should be provided by such centres.

### 2.4. *Evaluation*

Quality assessments should be carried out and feedback should be given in the course of and following the implementation of action plans based on Universal Design principles.

Progress should be benchmarked, follow-up procedures put in place, and monitoring should lead to the correction of goals and methods if necessary. Experts in quality assessment and research should be asked to translate clearly defined, evidence-based user requirements into instruments for the statistical measuring of effects. Both social aspects and technical issues should be measured. Monitoring the fulfilment of human rights of the user groups becomes simpler if resources are allocated to representatives of end users, enabling them to participate.