
Invitation to Endorse the EMEA Environmental Accessibility Initiative

Dear Colleagues,

The European ME Alliance (EMEA) warmly invites organisations representing people with neurological, neurodevelopmental, chronic, rare and disability-related conditions to join a new collaborative initiative that we believe addresses a significant gap in accessibility policy across Europe and beyond.

Why this initiative?

Over the past year, EMEA has been examining the barriers experienced by people living with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) in healthcare settings, workplaces, educational environments, conferences, public transport and other public spaces. One issue emerged repeatedly across countries and across patient experiences: many people are excluded or placed at risk because everyday environments contain sensory and chemical exposures that their bodies cannot safely tolerate.

Noise, bright or flickering lighting, fragranced products, cleaning chemicals, temperature instability, overcrowding and other forms of environmental stimulation can become barriers to participation, healthcare access, employment, education and civic life.

As we explored existing accessibility frameworks, we found extensive guidance on physical accessibility and, in some contexts, workplace accommodations. However, we found no widely recognised framework that addresses **environmental and sensory barriers** as a distinct accessibility issue across sectors.

Conversations with representatives from other communities, including autism, migraine disorders, multiple sclerosis, vestibular disorders, acquired brain injury, sensory processing disorders and other neurological conditions, confirmed that this challenge extends far beyond ME.

A shared accessibility concept

EMEA therefore proposes **Environmental Accessibility** as a shared accessibility concept for disability policy and practice.

Environmental Accessibility refers to the conditions necessary to ensure that sensory, chemical and other environmental exposures do not become barriers to participation, health, safety, dignity or equal access.

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It recognises that accessibility is not limited to removing physical barriers. For many people, the surrounding environment itself can become inaccessible when it creates physiological harm or prevents safe participation.

An environment that is excessively noisy, chemically intensive, visually overstimulating or otherwise physiologically intolerable can prevent participation just as effectively as a staircase prevents access for a wheelchair user.

A rights-based approach

This initiative is grounded in the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, which recognises that disability results from the interaction between individuals and environmental barriers.

Environmental Accessibility should therefore be determined by **functional need**, rather than assumptions about diagnosis, visibility, permanence or prognosis. Many people live with disabilities or accessibility needs that remain unrecognised or poorly understood. When environmental barriers are not identified or accommodated, individuals may experience avoidable physiological deterioration simply in order to access essential healthcare, work, education, products or public services.

Removing those barriers is not a matter of comfort or preference. It is a matter of equal access and non-discrimination.

Building the Environmental Accessibility Framework

EMEA is currently developing a draft framework on **Environmental Accessibility Requirements (EAR)**, intended to translate this principle into practical recommendations for healthcare settings, workplaces, educational institutions, conferences, public venues and other environments.

We believe this framework will be stronger if it is developed collaboratively across disability communities, reflecting both shared principles and the diversity of environmental accessibility needs.

We invite your organisation to join us

We would welcome organisations interested in:

- Endorsing the principle of **Environmental Accessibility**.
- Reviewing and contributing feedback to the draft EAR framework.
- Sharing evidence, lived experience and policy expertise.

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- Exploring opportunities for joint advocacy at European and international level, including engagement with WHO Europe and other disability and public health institutions.

An invitation to build this together

This initiative is not intended to represent one condition alone. It is an invitation to work together to address a longstanding gap in accessibility policy and practice that affects many disability communities in different ways.

By joining this initiative, organisations are endorsing the principle that environmental barriers deserve recognition within accessibility frameworks and should be addressed through inclusive, rights-based policies developed in partnership with affected communities.

If your organisation would be interested in endorsing the principle of Environmental Accessibility and/or participating in the development of this initiative, we would be delighted to hear from you, and we can include the endorsement of your organisation in our statement to WHO Europe at their Regional Committee Meeting in the last week of October.

We hope you will join us in shaping Environmental Accessibility as the next frontier of disability inclusion.

With best regards,

Gracemarie Bricalli

President

On behalf of the **European ME Alliance (EMEA) Executive Committee**