

Guidelines for improving accessibility



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Abstract

This document provides both a global view of the issue of accessibility solutions and some general suggestions about what are the possible solutions to be adopted in a range of minimum and cheap interventions.

It provides a series of suggestions that will allow tourism structures operators, managers and owners to enhance the level of fruition of their premises.

These suggestions have been developed on the basis of the conditions more frequently met within the premises assessed during the WP4 Accessibility assessment

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Introduction

The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide both a global view of the issue of accessibility solutions and some general suggestions about what are the possible solutions to be adopted in a range of minimum and cheap interventions.

This document provides a series of suggestions that will allow tourism structures operators, managers and owners to enhance the level of fruition of their premises.

These suggestions have been developed on the basis of the conditions more frequently met within the premises assessed during the project.

The Guidelines are not meant as an exhaustive collection of all the possible verifiable situations but as cues developed on the concrete basis of certain conditions objectively observed and for whom some adaptations are indicated.

Exactly for this assumption, in this document there are no solutions of structural character as they have to be reported to the specific context of intervention and the need of in-depth analysis of technical aspects requires specific professionals.

The architectural planning of a space must be therefore assigned to competent persons that must be able to understand, propose and realise the adequate solutions, considering every technical aspect, included – not an insignificant detail – the regulatory one that must be applied in the actual situation that is projected, correctly encompassing the elements of Universal Design and Design for All

It is evident and proved that design solutions for all are not an additional cost but, on the contrary, in terms of capitalization of the economic investment, a multiplier element on the product/service saleability, fitting a larger target of customers.

Design solutions anyway shall not be a mere application of the laws on the elimination of architectural barriers (that should be given for granted) but rather a global approach to the enhancement of the level of accessibility of the whole structure in a harmonious and non ghettoizing way.

An architect or a designer can face two general cases:

- the project of a new structure,
- an intervention on an existing one.

In the first case, being aware of them, the professional can face all the aspects related to accessibility from the preliminary phase to the executive one, therefore reaching good performance levels, namely accessibility and fruition levels of the spaces designed.

In the case of an intervention on an existing building or venue, instead, even for the possible presence of protective restrictions, the global approach to the possible accessibility solutions is somehow more limited with respect to the previous case.

In this second case, even when it comes to non protected buildings, but anyway in those situations where there is no will or possibility to intervene, or simply where one wants to make easier adaptations, the contents of these Guidelines can be useful, providing as we said a series of suggestions for operators/managers/owners in order to realize "light" – so to speak – adaptations.

These suggestions will have a great impact first on major awareness about the ways in which one can intervene and then, in the realization, on the enhancement of the fruition grade of the space.





The contents of the Guidelines, through a preliminary general framework on the accessibility characteristics providing an overview of the prerequisites that satisfy the needs of users with disabilities, intend to provide the tools to understand what is explained later.

In this sense, the comparison between these characteristics and what has been indicated in the Tool Kit on the needs expressed by people with disabilities, already released, can increase the awareness on the whole issue.

Secondly, some indications on dimensions will be provided as they are one of the most important points for what pertains to the adoption of accessibility solutions. These dimensional prerequisites will be treated in a more detailed way.

At the end of this paper, some planning and design tips are provided, considering that, even if in a synthetic way, the theme of intervention is one of the issues in relation to which operators/mangers/owners have to gain the maximum awareness, also because of the non irrelevant economic effort they may have to face.

Attached we propose a synoptic table of the requisites for the elements, useful as a compendium and an extension of the issues treated.



Accessibility features

Accessibility features are the totality of dimensional and qualitative requisites (materials, etc.) able to meet to the widest possible number of needs expressed by people with disabilities.

These requisites, when existing, enhance the comfort and safety inside every place for every user, even without disability.

In fact, if a certain characteristic is an essential element, for example, for the orientation of a person with visual impairment, it is also important in order to facilitate and favour the mobility and orientation of a person with no impairment or disability.

There is also the possibility that some of these requisites could be useful to some persons while they could be not recommended to others (for example, people with visual impairment prefer stairs to ramps unlike people using wheelchair for whom a ramp is an essential element).

Spaces where accessibility requirements are adopted – preferably in an integrated way in order to meet the widest possible number of needs – are in fact more easy and intuitive to use for everyone.

These requirements are of various kind and they pertain to both the material and immaterial part of the structure. Moreover, for some needs, some requisites are more important than others.

Indeed, in the context of the needs expressed by people with disabilities using wheelchair or moving with the support of any kind of aid, the dimensional requisites, the slopes of the ramps, the characteristics of the floor or ground, the cladding are fundamental, unlike what happens when we talk about people with visual impairment for whom the priority is represented by the requisites of communication systems and modalities.

The latter, insofar as they are essential for some people more than others, are very important not only for people with disabilities, but for all.

Requisites listed below must be compared and integrated to the ones each national law indicates for each Country.

Dimensions

In order to guarantee the use of paths and spaces, it is necessary to verify that furniture and equipments are not obstacles, especially for people using wheelchair.

In these cases, it is possible to guarantee the use of these spaces simply removing the elements that are an obstacle.

Another equally important aspect is the one regarding the possibility to buy furniture meeting accessibility requirements and to evaluate the possibility to modify the kind and/or the opening direction of the doors.

Below, general indications for checking and modifying dimensions and also for guiding to the purchase of furniture and equipments are provided.

These requisites must be considered as a whole, as it is not the mere dimension of the passage that allows an easy fruition but it is the checking, the arrangement and the correct combination among the various elements to make it possible. For example, having a corridor that is one meter large, it must be present a point, along it, where the dimension is such as to allow the change of direction; in the same way, a proper length is necessary before and after a door to allow its opening.



Passage width

The minimum dimension of a passage allowing the transit of a person on a wheelchair must not be less than 90 centimetres. This dimension allows the passage of only a wheelchair while the contemporary passage of two wheelchairs is possible with a minimum width of 150 centimetres.

Therefore, it is necessary to be sure that paths and corridors have at least a minimum width of 90 centimetres (for corridors it is preferable 1 metre) and that there are places where it is possible to turn.

Moreover, opening direction, width and dimension of doors along corridors are to be taken into account too. In these cases, in fact, the dimensions of the doors' shutters in relation to the opening direction can be an obstacle to the movement.

Dimensions for wheelchair turning

The dimensions for a 360° turning are 140 X 140 centimetres or 140 X 170 centimetres. For a 90° turning, the minimum space required is 120 X 120 centimetres. Also movement with combined manoeuvres are possible (opportunely verified). These manoeuvres through more movements, but in smaller spaces, anyway allow diverse movements.

Space for frontal and lateral approach

The free space for the frontal approach of the wheelchair to any piece of furniture and equipment is equal to a minimum width of 70 centimetres, depth of 45 centimetres (minimum 30), height 70 centimetres.

The space in front of pieces of furniture or equipments must be preferably 140 X 140 centimetres, so that it allows even 360° turning, although it can be a different dimension if anyway useful to allow easy wheelchair manoeuvres (also combined), that must always assure at least a length of 140 centimetres.

The spaces for approach are also the same useful to permit the transfer of the person from the wheelchair to pieces of furniture and WC. Also this kind of approach and transfer can be frontal or lateral.

Height from the ground

The height from the ground is the dimension measured from the ground or the floor to the level at which the countertop (e.g. of a table), the edge (e.g. of a washbasin) or the part of a device or equipment (e.g. the handle of a door or the slot to validate a ticket) and it is, fundamentally, the "plane" where it is possible to perform an activity of every kind (for example, to eat or wash themselves).

The adequacy of this dimension depends on what has to be used and goes from a minimum of 40 cm (for sockets and switches) to a maximum of 140 cm. In the case of tables, desks and other pieces of furniture that can be used by wheelchair users the dimension must allow the approach and the comfortable use with a free space below with a minimum height from the ground of 70 centimetres, a minimum width of 70 centimetres and a depth of 30 centimetres.

The recommended height from the ground for washbasins is not more than 80 centimetres, with free space below, even evaluating the possibility to remove the pedestal or any other element that could obstruct the approach to the washbasin.

Adaptations/precautions

Here below, in a punctual way, some proposal for the realization of adaptations or precautions are provided, even in relation to what previously said.



Parking

A car park is a very useful space, especially for people using a wheelchair, moving autonomously with their cars.

When a structure has a parking it is recommended to:

- Signpost the parking spaces reserved to people with disabilities;
- Choose the space to design as reserved considering that it is necessary a space to get on/off
 the car in relation to the kind of parking (parallel, angle, etc.), that must be marked and linked
 with the footpath, if present;
- Cover the reserved parking spaces if uncovered;
- Make sure of or realize the most possible plain, stable and smooth ground or floor for the parking space, even on the side used to get on/off the car.

Bathroom

The bathroom is one space that, even though equipped with aids and reserved to people with disabilities (especially wheelchair users), when lacking some precise requisites, can be unusable. Moreover, remind that sanitation fixtures must not have particular forms or dimensions and that common fixtures used in non reserved bathroom are suitable if arranged with adequate clearances for their use.

To improve the usability of the fixtures already available it is suggested to:

- Install grab bars and support handrails useful to allow the lateral and frontal transfer from the wheelchair to the toilet: these aids must be put on the sides of the toilet at an adequate distance, so that they are not an obstacle for approaching and transferring.
 - An excessive number of grab bars, particularly vertical ones when placed in front of toilet, can produce the opposite effect on accessibility, becoming the bars obstacles themselves. Similarly, when placed behind the toilet, grab bars are practically of little or no use.
 - Grab bars are of different kinds: fixed, horizontal bars, flipping bars, 45° bars. The flipping bars are used to preserve the side clear space to approach the toilet.
 - It is very important that grab bars and handrails are fixed in a stable way so that a secure hold is guaranteed.
- Highlight where grabs, switches, toilet paper dispenser or holder, soap dispenser and so on through the use of coloured elements contrasting with the walls.
 - These elements can be even simply adhesive coloured sheets. This arrangement allows people with visual impairments to have a chromatic differentiation of objects.
- Provide a plastic chair that can be used in shower even if the shower is equipped with a fixed folding seat.
- Check the presence of and remove every kind of obstacles can impede the approach and the use of fixtures.

For public places bathrooms it is important to remember that:

- It must be possible to close accessible/reserved bathroom from the inside
- Both women and men bathrooms have to be accessible
- Bathrooms must have an anteroom.

An important aspect is that of the hygiene of premises that must be always assured.

Steps

Steps can be modified in order to improve their perceptibility by affixing some stripes creating chromatic contrast a few centimetres from the external edge of the tread.



The same stripes can be useful as anti-slippery elements too, if their surface is rough.

Another important aspect is lighting, that has to be provided so that the shadow of people using the steps is not projected on them.

Therefore, it is preferable that the light is oriented in a parallel way to the length of the steps and always on the halfway landings.

It is good moreover to have handrails on both sides of the steps, so that the length of handrails goes beyond the end and the beginning of the flight of stairs of at least 30 centimetres.

Ramps

Ramps can be fixed or removable. Their slope, whatever the change of quota they overcome, must be lower than 8%, the maximum possible percentage (only in exceptional cases, it is allowed a maximum slope of 12% for lengths lower than 3 metres).

This means that, indicatively, it needs a ramp almost 2 metres long to overcome a step (generally 16 centimetres high).

Removable ramps are generally used to overcome little differences in height, such as thresholds (usually defined as change of quota of less than 2 centimetres).

Fixed ramps are placed in permanent way, realizing masonry construction or structures, for example, in iron. In these cases, the ramps must always have handrails on both sides and a curb along it. If the ramp is short and overcomes minimum changes of quota with a low slope it may not have these requirements.

It is important to pay attention to where the ramp begins and ends, trying to reduce as much as possible the difference between the elements and the materials, first of all through the correct design or, at most, through the superimposition of linking elements in iron or other rigid materials.

It is recommended that both fixed and removable ramps are indicated through chromatic signalling at their beginning and at their end and, at least at the beginning of the ramp (going downwards), by an anti-slippery stripe with embossed hemispheres allowing the perception by blind people.

The surface of ramps must be in a non smooth material and it is useful, anyway, to affix antislippery stripes on it.

When ramps are composed by more sloping tracts, it is important to make sure that the dimensions of the landings are at least 120 x 120 centimetres and in any case that, at the beginning and at the end of the ramp, there is a dimension useful to permit the stop of wheelchair (at least a width of 70 centimetres and a length of 120 centimetres).

Lifts / elevators / platform lifts

Lifts and more in general the means of vertical link with cabin are clearly a useful solution.

Their internal dimension and door dimension affect the possibility to be used by people using wheelchairs.

Little adaptations that can be easily made on existing lifts are:

- Chromatic differentiation on both internal and external buttons;
- Installation of an emergency intercom, with a forwarded call signalling system;
- Use of indications on relevant premises or services at floors (e.g. it should be indicated "Reception" or "Restaurant" near the button of the corresponding floor)
- Installation of a vocal announcement system of the floor reached
- Signalling through a signboard of the floor reached
- Checking of dimensions of the space at lift entrance/exit at the various floors and, in case, arrangement of the free space



Signage

Signage is an often neglected element while on the contrary it is a very useful mean to overcome some orientation barriers. Affixing the signage is a low cost intervention that can help in every kind of space and structure.

Identification signage indicates entrances, exits and spaces and gives accurate indications about the availability of equipments and services.

Useful suggestions are: signalling the entrance; signalling the presence of special devices for deaf persons (induction loops, infrared or other); signalling the accessible/reserved bathroom.

Orientation or directional signage indicates directions, mainly directional arrows or other signs with destination.

Tactile guide paths and floor signalling are useful for people with visual impairments. A defined code is used for the orientation and information of blind persons through the presence of elements perceived through the tactile sensitivity of plantar surface, used in large and urban spaces.

This kind of signage has some coded characteristics that can be reproduced with materials, using texture and chromatic differentiation to indicate paths, changes of direction and possible sources of danger.

An orientation system in smaller spaces can be arranged even through the application on the floor of coloured lines or carpets or guides in textile materials. In these cases, it is important to be sure that the elements perfectly adhere to the floor to prevent tripping.



Design choices

When it comes to design, an adequate attention to the inclusive design and design for all must take into account some fundamental aspects, such as:

- Preferring the realization of solutions that eliminate most of the obstacles present, starting from those creating the biggest problems for use by the larger number of users such as, for example, stairs.
- Not intervening only on a single situation but taking the chance of the renovation to modify in a
 more incisive way the whole structure. The improvement process can be gradual but the aim
 must be clear in order to create the right harmonization among the different interventions one
 will do.

Accessibility is the results of a set of conditions.

For example, it is not the availability of an accessible space that is not reachable by wheelchair users because it is beyond one or more steps.

Approaching to the adoption of possible solutions means first of all to have understood what obstacles are present, that we can summarize in: presence of stairs or steps; lack of signage; lack of adequate aids; lack of adequate dimensions for the use of the spaces.

Anyway, we advise against solutions as the installation of mechanical link systems such as stair lifts or, worse, stair climbers.

Solutions that are going to be adopted shall be as much as possible for all and not specifically addressed to people with disabilities, or at least this should be limited. These solutions must take into account the whole structure and its fruition, seeking to:

- Always prefer the possibility that all the premises are accessible;
- Arrange also alternative paths anyway allowing to reach all the spaces;
- Use punctual identification signage that permits immediate and easy recognisability of spaces;
- Use orientation or directional signage indicating paths to reach the various spaces;
- Equip with devices favouring blind and deaf people.



Immaterial conditions

A part of conditions and requirements constituting accessibility is of immaterial nature.

Within this category, there are both information and the relationship established with costumers and, thus, also the training and the competences of the staff working in a place.

For what concerns information, beyond its material aspect (that is the physical characteristics the supports used to convey information must have), it is very important to keep in mind that there are also important immaterial characteristics valid for all the persons.

In the first place, information must be provided in a detailed but, at the same time, simple way, so that everyone can understand what is being communicated. No information, for what pertains to the position of spaces in a building or for what concerns their use, should be given for granted.

Secondly, information must be true and – especially for information provided through websites, brochure, etc. – updated.

As we can see, what is said above is quite obvious if we think to the disorientation each of us experienced the first time he or she entered in a place, used a device or a service without having received any information before.

Putting yourselves in the customers' shoes is the best way to understand their possible needs.

Beyond these general needs, yet, it must be taken into account that some customers can have particular needs due to their particular personal condition.

As it does not seem strange or weird that a person travelling with the family wants information about the room size or on the availability of menu for children, in the same way it must not seem odd to receive other kinds of requests.

As usual, what seems to be strange is mainly what we don't know or what we've never thought about, therefore we have to learn as much as possible so to be able to respond to the requests that may come from our customers or guests. The acquisition of some competences, moreover, helps to prevent some possible needs that can be expressed.

Particular attention has to be paid, in this sense, to the approach to people with problems of communication and orientation, whether because of a learning disability or of a sensory one.

Very often, communication problems can affect also people with mobility impairments or other "physical" disabilities since relational and communicative problems can arise from the attitude one has toward a person with disability and from the sense of uncertainty and inadequacy sometimes felt when relating to people with disabilities.

Just think of the embarrassment experienced when talking to a blind person one uses phrases where there's a reference to the sight. It is clear that, in this case, the communication problems are due to the "able-bodied" attitude, not being any objective difficulty in oral communication with a blind person.

We can see, on the contrary, an objective difficulty – that, anyway, as such can be foreseen and resolved through training – arising when talking with a blind person the reference to sight it's no more figurative but it is part of a piece of information.

While the classic "see you" mustn't worry nor embarrass, the thing is different when giving indications information referable to the sight is used. If explaining how to reach a place we use reference like "near the red building" or "there" accompanied by hand movement or gesture, obviously language can become a barrier.

Considering that the aim of these Guidelines it providing information on the elimination of barriers without training or substituting technical figures (as architects or blind tourists guides), in the



following we are going to provide some little suggestions useful for the reception of and the relationship with people with sensory and learning disabilities.

Most of the needs in relation and communication are, anyway, common to all human beings. Among these needs, as we said, we can mention:

- Clearness of communication:
- · Reliability of information;
- Completeness of information;
- Polite, attentive and relaxed relationship.

Having the opportunity to communicate in calm spaces is very important especially, even if on the basis of different motivations, for people with sensory impairments and for people with mental or learning difficulties.

Persons with visual impairments

Introduce yourselves as you would do with everyone else, telling your name and, if you want, don't hesitate to extend and shake hands.

Keep in mind that if the person is blind, your voice will be the first element through which you will be recognized and associated to the name.

If the person wants to feel your face features let him/her touch you.

Both the first time you meet and later, to draw attention of a blind person, manage to use your voice, calling the person by name and, if needed, slightly touching him/her.

This also applies when you are giving something to a person. In this case, if necessary, you could guide the person's hand toward the object.

In the same way, after asking, you could help a person to get in a car or to sit down, simply guiding the person's hand toward the car door or the chair back.

As ever after asking person's permission, you can hold out your arm toward him/her (not take him/her arm) to accompany him/her in another place.

It is important to always remember to inform the person when you are leaving or when you are momentarily performing any other task.

As already mentioned, care must be taken with the language used, not so much from the point of view of "etiquette" but rather from the point of view of effectiveness.

In this sense, space references shall be given avoiding, as useless, indications ascribable to sight, such as colours or buildings, and in many cases, furniture or equipments.

It will be enough using simple indications such as "right", "left", "forward", "behind".

This is very important because accommodating people with visual impairments in a place it is useful to give them indications on the position of its spaces and services.

If the blind person wants to, the first time he or she visits a structure it would be better if he or she is accompanied, in the above mentioned ways, in the various spaces that could be used. This is very useful as it will allow the person to understand how the place is articulated and to memorize it so to be able to autonomously move later.

Always inform the person when, along the path you are walking, there are obstacles, steps, footpath, road crossings.

In accommodation facilities it is important to accompany the person to the room, explain how to open it and the position of furniture and equipments inside. The same applies to the position of any other piece of furniture or device that can be in the premises and that can be used by guests (for example, in breakfast room).



If the person doesn't want to be accompanied and the room key is a nontraditional one, explain how it works and if needed provide the person with indications on the side to insert (even affixing something on the surface of the key or card or scratching it so to create a tactile reference).

More generally, provide information on the functioning of every equipment or device the customers could use, without being influenced by doubts about, for example, whether the person could use the TV or switches.

In the case of places where food is served, menu can be described vocally and so the position of food, drinks, cutlery and so on.

It is important to remember that, not only for blind persons but for all the people with visual impairments, hanging obstacles (such as wall mounted shelves) are very dangerous as they can be not seen or touched with the cane.

In the case of people not completely blind, it is appropriate to meet them in good lighting conditions and to provide for elements of chromatic contrast where needed (for example, in signage, directional information, etc.). The environment where the relationship occurs should be always quite calm and not noisy.

For everyone, but in particular for people with visual impairments, it is necessary to make large glass surfaces such as those of doors and windows visible in order to prevent people walking into them. For this purpose, besides glass treatments, it is also possible to use adhesive coloured stripes.

Persons with hearing impairments

Even when talking to people with hearing impairments it is important that the environment where the relationship takes place is calm, not noisy and well lighted, in this case to allow lip reading, if the person is able to perform it.

Precisely because of the possibility that the person we are talking to is lip-reading, but also just to avoid to lower the volume of your voice it is important to be always oriented toward the person and to not cover the mouth with hands.

Not necessarily, it needs to raise the volume of your voice or to talk slower. Sometimes it is useful if you open your mouth a little bit more. Don't mumble. If there is the need to repeat what you have said, try to slightly change the phrase.

If the communication difficulties are relevant you can communicate simply by writing.

In the case of distance communication, the solution is simple as well because at present, email and SMS are communication systems commonly used by everybody.

Use simple language, avoid abstract description of facilities.

For what concerns people using hearing aids they must be informed on the possible presence of induction loop or similar systems or, on the contrary, on possible sources of interference (electronic devices, metal detector, etc.).

Generally speaking, people with hearing impairments haven't particular needs but keep in mind that everything that is generally communicated through an acoustic signal (bells, alarms, lifts signals) must be integrate with a corresponding visual signal.

In this sense, beyond emergency alarms like flashing lights or light emergency paths, thanks to the present technology it is now very simple and cheap to provide useful aids for people with hearing impairments, as there is a huge availability of very useful devices such as vibrating pillows, pads and alarms, bells with light (useful also in hotel rooms), and so on.



Persons with learning difficulties or mental disability

When talking to persons with different metal disabilities or mental health problems, we can expect different needs. Beside general advice about being polite and treat this guests as all others we would recommend patience because of their lower psychic or mental abilities. We should be prepared also to some surprises such as direct personal questions, hugs or extreme happiness. Through communication we would suggest use of language with simple sentences, without jargon or technical terms. Use practical examples and avoid to present too much different topics at the same time. You can help yourself in communication with usage of colors, pictures and photos.





Synoptic table of requisites for elements

Elements	Requisites
Signage	Adequate ⁱ information signage, realized even in different ways and individuating paths, spaces and equipments, describing their characteristics in an easy way.
Car park	 Reserved parking spaces of adequate dimensions, with adequate signalling and at an adequate distance from the entrance of the premises or from the points of interest; Adequate cover near the point of getting in and off the car.
Paths	 Adequate features of the transit space so that it is free from obstacles, even hanging; Adequate protection from the sun along external paths; Adequate length; Adequate signalling, even tactile, and with direction indications.
Pavements	 Adequate, compact, regular, flat and nor slippery nor too smooth surface; Adequate signalling of change of quota.
Doors/passages	 Adequate width of passages and doors; Adequate resistance of doors opening system; Adequate chromatic contrast to highlight the door; Reflecting or glass surfaces of limited dimensions.
Flat space	Adequate dimensions and placed along paths and within spaces as well, in order to allow wheelchair manoeuvring and reaching of devices and equipments.



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Vertical links	 Overcoming changes of quota through: Ramps with adequate slope equipped with handrails on both sides and at a proper height, and with markings near the edge that favour their recognition and individuation; Steps, in a low number, with an adequate ratio between the tread and the rise and equipped with handrails on both sides and at a proper height, and with markings near the edge that favour their recognition and individuation; Mechanical means with adequate dimensions and equipped with adequate control and warning panels. Avoiding the installation of stair lifts or stair climbers.
Furniture and equipments	 Proper positioning in order to avoid to make them obstacles or dangers; Adequate height of counters and desks, cases, button panels, public phones and other devices; Elements to rest or sit, placed at adequate distance along the paths, in open spaces and in accommodation premises.
Safety signposting and devices	 Adequate devices – audio, visual systems – and calm spaces to guarantee safety in case of emergency; Adequate safety markings at the beginning and the end of elements linking different quotas.
Environmental comfort elements	Adequate lighting and sound diffusion conditions in spaces where communication, fruition and stay take place.

¹ When you read "adequate" in this table, it makes reference to dimensions and characteristics described in the "Accessibility features" chapter of this document.