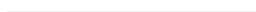
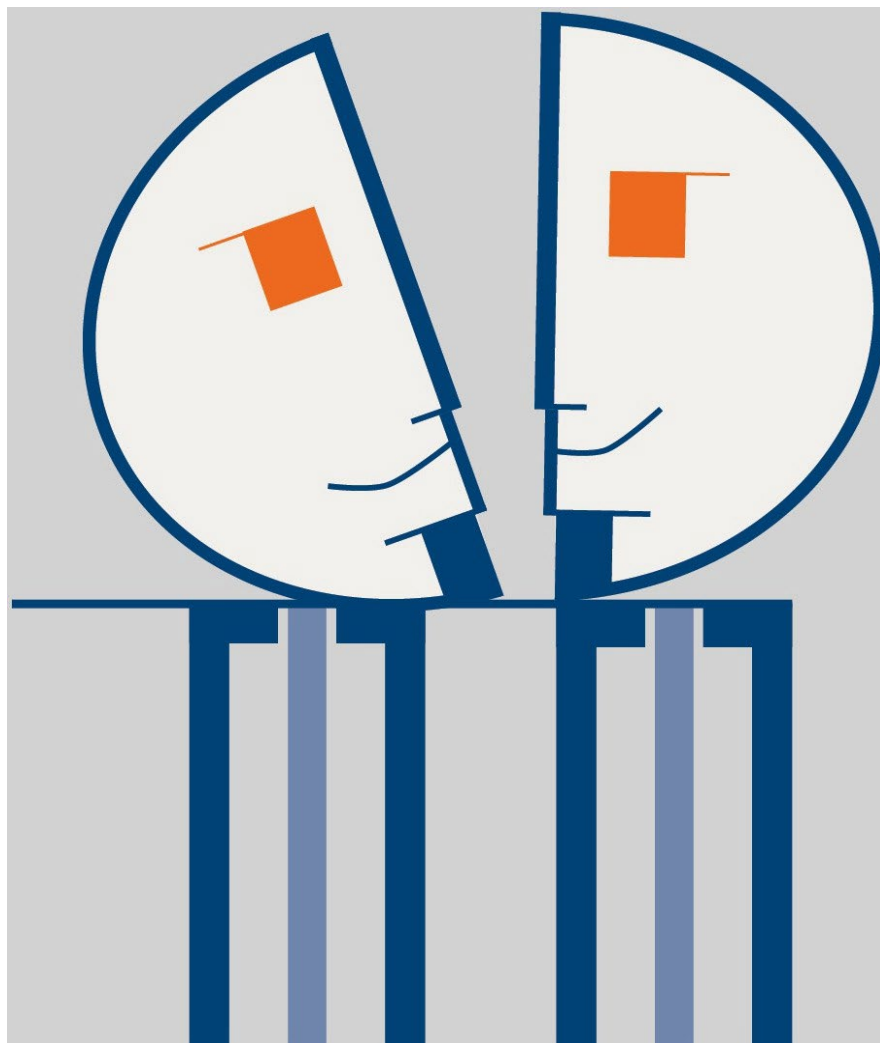
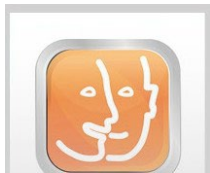


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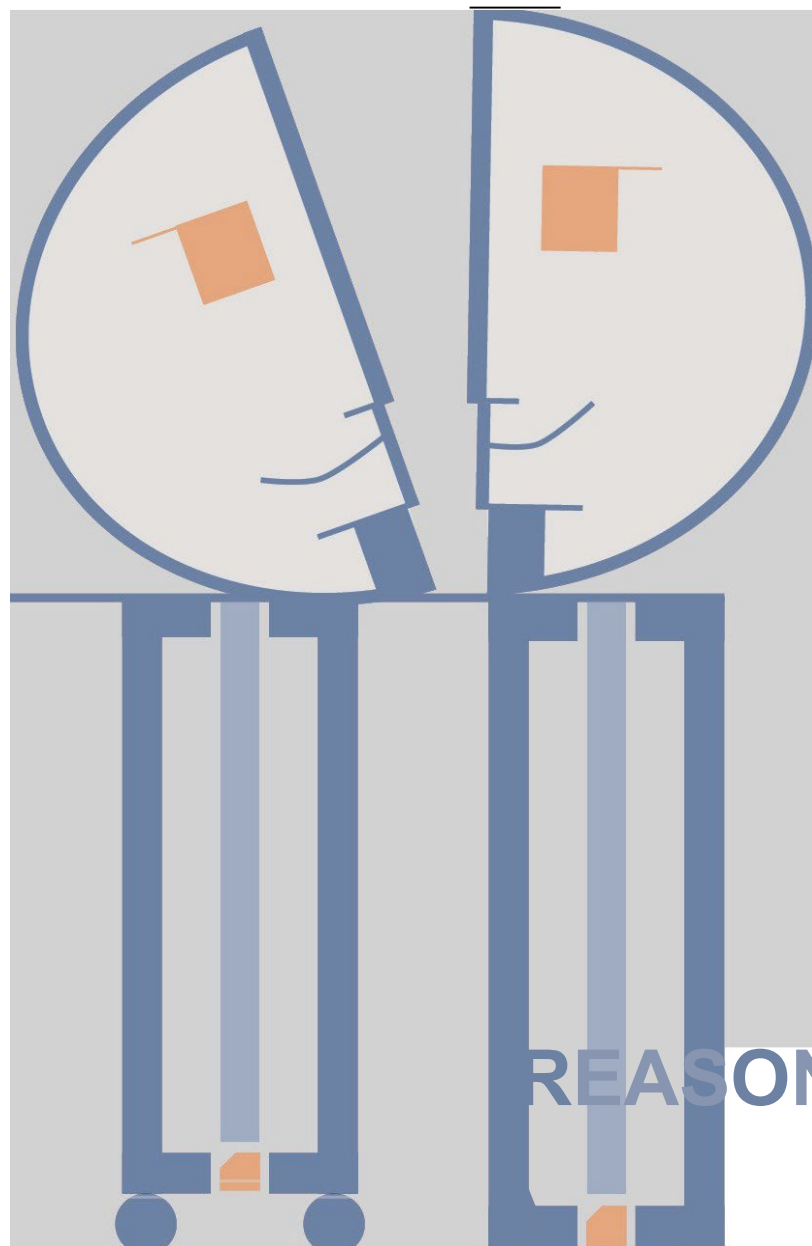
REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

Guide on Reasonable Accommodation Arrangements for Persons with Disabilities



REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

Guide on Reasonable Accommodation
Arrangements for Persons with Disabilities



REASONABLE

ACCOMMODATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION.....	8
What are reasonable accommodations?.....	8
Is the GSC obliged to provide 'Reasonable Accommodation'?.....	10
Who is responsible for providing 'Reasonable Accommodation'?.....	11
Who is entitled to 'Reasonable Accommodation'?.....	11
How to define 'disability'?.....	11
What is 'fitness for work'?.....	11
What are the essential functions of the job?.....	12
What is 'reasonable'?.....	12
What is the purpose of the 'Request for Reasonable Accommodation' form and the 'Sharing Personal Information about Disability or Medical Condition' form?.....	13
What is the role of the Equal Opportunities Officer?.....	14
What is the role of the 'Advisory Committee on Reasonable Accommodation'?.....	14
Can part-time working, teleworking or an overtime exemption be considered as a reasonable accommodation arrangement?.....	14
Why is 'part-time work on health grounds in the context of return-to-work' not a reasonable accommodation arrangement?.....	14
Why is 'occupational health' not a reasonable accommodation arrangement?.....	15
How do reasonable accommodations differ from accessibility?.....	15
What is the purpose of the 'Reasonable Accommodation Decision'?.....	15
What is the 'Reasonable Accommodation Register'?.....	16
Once the reasonable accommodations have been granted, can they be reviewed?.....	16
Can a successful candidate or member of staff appeal against the Reasonable Accommodation Decision by the Appointing Authority?.....	17
How are privacy and confidentiality ensured?.....	17
Where can I get more information?.....	18
PROCEDURE FOR THE PROVISION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE WITH A DISCLOSED DISABILITY.....	19
PROCEDURE FOR THE PROVISION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR A STAFF MEMBER DISCLOSING A TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT DISABILITY.....	21
ANNEX I: POSSIBLE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS.....	23
Section I Reasonable Accommodation for persons with mobility impairments.....	24
<i>1. About mobility impairments.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>2. Adjustments for persons with mobility impairments.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>3. Building an inclusive working environment for a person with a mobility impairment.....</i>	<i>27</i>

Section II: Reasonable Accommodation for persons with visual impairments.....	29
1. <i>About visual impairments.....</i>	29
2. <i>Adjustments for persons with a visual impairment.....</i>	29
3. <i>Building an inclusive working environment for a person with a visual impairment.....</i>	31
Section III Reasonable Accommodation for persons with hearing impairments.....	33
1. <i>About hearing impairments.....</i>	33
2. <i>Adjustments for persons with hearing impairments.....</i>	34
3. <i>Building an inclusive working environment for a person with hearing impairments.....</i>	36
Section IV Reasonable Accommodation for persons with autism.....	39
1. <i>About autism.....</i>	39
2. <i>Possible adjustments for persons with autism.....</i>	41
3. <i>Building an inclusive working environment for a person with autism.....</i>	43

INTRODUCTION

The GSC aims to create a working environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to all staff, including staff members with a disability. Providing reasonable accommodation arrangements to enable staff members with a disability to have access to, participate in, and advance in employment is an important step towards this objective.

SG Decision 12/2019 sets out the procedure according to which reasonable accommodation arrangements are granted within the GSC.

The purpose of this guide is to explain the concept of 'Reasonable Accommodation' in a comprehensive way and illustrate the procedure involved. Its first part explains the basics of 'Reasonable Accommodation' and the procedure for requesting it. It mainly uses the Frequently Asked Questions approach to allow the reader to easily find information on a specific topic. The procedure is explained in a step-by-step plan. Annex I to this guide gives examples of reasonable accommodation arrangements and describes them in the context of some impairments.

This clear framework for the provision of 'Reasonable Accommodation' ensures equal treatment for all staff while increasing the GSC's internal know-how on 'Reasonable Accommodation'. Eventually this harmonised procedure will also help overcome barriers in recruiting persons with disability.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

WHAT ARE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS?

Reasonable accommodations (RA) are about allowing people with disabilities to have the same access to everything that is involved in doing and keeping a job as a person without a disability. This is done by providing appropriate measures, where needed, to enable a person with a disability to have access to all areas of employment, including selection and recruitment, career development, training, promotion and career advancement, transfers or any other employment benefit, and social relationships within the Council, enabling staff with disabilities to participate and interact on the same basis as any other staff member, unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer.

RA Decisions are made on an individual case-by-case basis as no 'one fits all' solution is possible. The focus is very much on the staff member's ability to function in the workplace on a day-to-day basis rather than on their medical diagnosis. The RA medical examination is linked to the specific job description and its essential and non-essential tasks. The medical examination which a selected candidate with a disability is asked to undergo should be the same as that required for other selected candidates. Candidates who have a disability should not be disqualified due to their impairment from posts for which they are suitably qualified and whose essential functions they are capable of performing when RA are provided.

RA are not limited to the exercise of the essential functions of the job, but apply to all areas of employment, including:

- selection (competition phase) and recruitment;
- long-term career development;
- training;
- promotion (career advancement), mobility opportunities or any other employment benefits;
- social relationships within the GSC, enabling staff with disabilities to participate and interact on the same basis as any other staff member.

With regard to RA, SG Decision 12/2019 provides the implementing provisions for Article 1d(4) of the Staff Regulations¹. The Equal Opportunities Officer (hereinafter 'EO Officer') coordinates the procedures for providing RA in the GSC.

¹ In accordance with Articles 10, 80(4) and 128 of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants, Article 1e(4) of the Staff Regulations also applies to temporary and contract staff.

In the GSC, RA can include:

- **provision or modification of equipment, technical aids or devices** (e.g. adapted screen, text-to-speech software, braille keyboard, specific keyboard/mouse, adapted office desk and chair, etc.);



Staff member with a visual impairment using text-to-speech software

- **providing social assistance** (e.g. liaison with Belgian disability services);
- **making existing facilities, already in use by staff, readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities** (e.g. accessible meeting rooms, special parking spaces for colleagues with disabilities, etc.);
- **provision of assistance by floor messengers** within and between any of the GSC buildings², and, when necessary, **by drivers**³;



Driver assisting a staff member with a mobility impairment

² See [CP 21/18 'Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility \(PRM\)'](#)

³ See [CP 65/18 'Transport Services'](#)

- **restructuring of tasks** (e.g. if a job requires lots of movement around the office, the job could be restructured for someone with a physical disability which inhibits effective mobility. The job might then entail more phone and electronic communication or other duties that the staff member can perform from their desk area);
- **flexible working arrangements** (e.g. such as job sharing, part-time working, teleworking, etc.);



Wheelchair user who is teleworking

- **adjustment of training materials and practices** (e.g. providing the person with a disability with a copy of the PowerPoint presentation beforehand);
- **adjusting policies or practices** where these place a person with a disability at a substantial disadvantage in relation to others in a comparable situation (this could involve waiving certain requirements, e.g. allowing a staff member with reduced mobility to use a service car with a driver⁴ to attend meetings in Brussels, etc.).

IS THE GSC OBLIGED TO PROVIDE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

Yes. Provided, of course, that the conditions for RA are fulfilled. The GSC's legal obligations are based on the **Staff Regulations**, notably Article 1d, which prohibits any discrimination based on disability. The Staff Regulations state that a person is 'fit to perform [the] duties [of the job]' if he or she can perform the essential functions of the job when 'Reasonable Accommodation' is made and define the notion of 'Reasonable Accommodation' (see FAQ question page 8). Therefore, if 'Reasonable Accommodation' was not granted, a person considered 'fit to perform [the] duties [of the job]' in accordance with the Staff Regulations would be denied access, participation or advancement in

⁴ See [CP 65/18 'Transport Services'](#)

employment, which would in turn constitute a discrimination based on disability. Granting 'Reasonable Accommodation' is conditional on the prior assessment of whether such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer.

The GSC's obligations must be also considered in light of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (hereinafter the 'CRPD')⁵. The CRPD states that persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others. To facilitate access to work, the employer must provide RA to persons with disabilities who request it, unless this would impose a disproportionate or undue burden (e.g. unreasonable costs, safety of staff members, etc.) on the employer. Denial of RA constitutes discrimination on the basis of disability, which is prohibited.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

The Appointing Authority (AA)⁶, exercising the powers conferred upon it by the Staff Regulations, is responsible for making decisions on and implementing reasonable accommodations⁷.

WHO IS ENTITLED TO REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

Successful candidates and staff members employed under contract (officials, temporary staff, contract staff, local staff, special advisers and trainees) with disabilities who request it are entitled to RA provided by the GSC, unless this would impose a disproportionate burden (e.g. unreasonable costs, safety implications for other staff members, etc.) on the employer.

HOW TO DEFINE 'DISABILITY'?

Article 1d(4) of the **Staff Regulations** states that '*a person has a disability if [that person] has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder [...] full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.*'

The **European Court of Justice** has clarified in its case law that '*the concept [of disability] must be understood as referring to a limitation which results in particular from physical, mental or psychological impairments and which hinders the participation of the person concerned in professional life.*' The Court concludes '*that if a curable or incurable illness entails a limitation which results in particular from physical, mental or psychological impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation of the person concerned in professional life on an equal basis with other workers, and the limitation is a long-term one, such an illness can be covered by the concept of 'disability' within the meaning of Directive 2000/78.*⁸

WHAT IS 'FITNESS FOR WORK'?

According to Article 28 point (e) of the Staff Regulations, officials may be appointed only on condition that they are physically fit to perform their duties. So, a person with a disability meets the 'fitness for

⁵ Since the EU has ratified the CRPD, the EU institutions are bound by it. For more information, see [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

⁶ The Appointing Authority may delegate its powers to other persons as per the latest Decision No 16/2017 of the Secretary-General of the Council delegating the powers of decision and the power to sign concerning the application of the Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Union and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants.

⁷ For employees covered by the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants (CEOS), the equivalent body is called the Authority Empowered to Conclude Contracts of Employment (AECC). The CEOS cover the same areas as the Staff Regulations and apply to all staff of the institutions employed under contract, namely temporary staff, contract staff, local staff and special advisers. The provisions of the CEOS, although they differ from the officials' Staff Regulations on some fundamental points, contain numerous references to provisions of the Staff Regulations which are applicable by analogy.

⁸ Joined cases [C-335/11 and C-337/11](#) (Ring and Skouboe Werge), EU:C:2013:222 (interpreting the concept of 'disability' in the context of Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation).

work' criterion when they can perform the essential functions of the job when 'Reasonable Accommodation' is made.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE JOB?

The line manager assesses on a case-by-case basis which tasks and functions, as detailed in the job description, are essential and which of them are non-essential.

Essential functions are those basic job duties that a person must be able to perform, with or without RA. In the absence of a legal definition, the following factors may help to determine the 'essential functions' of a job:

- the job description as a whole;
- the time spent performing the function; if (almost) the entire job consists of that function, then that function is essential;
- the consequences of not performing the function;
- whether the function can be performed by other staff members;
- the degree of expertise or skills required to perform the function.

In other words, essential functions are the fundamental duties and skills which are necessary in order to perform the job.

WHAT IS 'REASONABLE'?

An accommodation is regarded as reasonable when its nature and cost do not represent an undue burden for the AA. Consideration should also be given to the likely effectiveness of the accommodation and the practicalities of implementation. Many RA are simple, cost effective and can be charged to the relevant internal budget.

For the purpose of assessing whether the provision of RA imposes an undue burden, the following elements can be taken into consideration:

- the cost of making the accommodation and the availability of the respective appropriations under the relevant budget lines;
- any adjustments already made or required by other members of the team;
- how practical/feasible it would be to make the adjustment (e.g. how long it would take to implement the adjustment, whether additional training would be needed for the staff member or anyone else, whether it would impact on the fundamental nature of the job);
- any service disruption likely to be caused by making the adjustment;
- any effect the adjustment might have on other staff members;

- any health and safety risks to the staff member or other members of the team as a result of making the adjustment;
- possible alternative appropriate adjustments.

If there is a choice between different types of appropriate RA at different costs, the AA retains the ultimate discretion to choose one or another option. If a specific RA cannot be provided, the AA will have to be able to justify and demonstrate why the request was 'unreasonable' because of the disproportionate burden it imposed on the AA.



People with and without a disability holding a meeting

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE 'REQUEST FOR REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION' FORM AND THE 'SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT DISABILITY OR MEDICAL CONDITION' FORM?

The [RA Request](#) form supplied by the EO Officer, and duly completed by the person requesting the RA, constitutes a formal request for RA and allows staff members with a disability to:

- explain the impact of their disability on them doing their job;
- suggest adjustments that would allow them do their job;
- provide further information from their doctor, specialist or other expert.

The duly completed RA Request will enable the Medical Officer (MO) and the RA Committee to understand how a particular staff member's disability or medical condition affects him or her at work.

The [Sharing Personal Information about Disability or Medical Condition](#) form helps the staff member to decide whether or not they want to share information with their colleagues, what information they want to share, and who should share this information.

Both forms contain a **Privacy Statement**. By signing this statement, the person gives their express and unambiguous consent to information being shared with relevant staff, on a strict 'need to know' basis.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER?

The EO Officer assists the successful candidate or staff member, where necessary, with filling in the RA Request form, chairs the RA Committee and is responsible for the organisation of the RA Committee's secretariat, as well as maintaining and updating the RA Register of all RA Requests and RA Decisions, which have been granted, and coordinating their implementation, if several GSC organisational services are involved.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE 'ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION'?

The RA Committee meets to consider a request submitted by a successful candidate or a staff member where the MO considers that RA arrangements may be required.

The RA Committee is chaired by the EO Officer. It is composed of the EO Officer, the line manager, and a representative of the Healthcare and Social Services, appointed by the Head of Unit on a case-by-case basis. Its opinions are adopted by simple majority, during its meeting or via a written procedure. Where necessary, other internal or external services involved in the provision of RA can be consulted.

The RA Committee adopts an opinion based on all the necessary elements, which is then submitted to the AA for the final RA Decision.

CAN PART-TIME WORKING, TELEWORKING OR AN OVERTIME EXEMPTION BE CONSIDERED AS A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENT?

Part-time working in case of disability

Part-time working in case of disability may be granted as RA under the RA procedure. In the case of part-time work on the grounds of RA, a salary reduction is applied. The period for which the authorisation is granted may not be less than one month.

Teleworking and exemption from overtime as an RA arrangement

Derogations to the teleworking scheme and exemptions from overtime may be granted as RA under the RA procedure.

WHY IS 'PART-TIME WORK ON HEALTH GROUNDS IN THE CONTEXT OF RETURN-TO-WORK' NOT A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENT?

'Return-to-work' arrangements⁹ help an official readjust to work gradually in the event of absence owing to illness, an operation or an accident. These can include part-time work on health grounds for up to three months (in duly substantiated cases an extension may be granted). No salary reduction is applied. Before a medical certificate setting out the reasons for 'part-time work on health grounds' can be accepted by the Examining Doctor, he or she will examine the official and give an opinion. These cases do not follow the RA procedure, as the decision about 'part-time work on health grounds' is taken by the Examining Doctor and not the RA Committee and falls outside the scope of this guide.

⁹ See [CP 93/12 Arrangements in the event of absence owing to illness or accident \(Articles 59 and 60 of the Staff Regulations\)](#)

WHY IS 'OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH' NOT A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENT?

Occupational health deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards. The health of staff has several determinants, including risk factors at the workplace leading to cancers, accidents, musculoskeletal diseases, respiratory diseases, hearing loss, circulatory diseases, stress related disorders and communicable diseases and others, as defined by the [World Health Organisation](#).

The GSC Healthcare and Social Services unit (ORG.1.E) provides occupational health services within the institution. It organises mandatory annual medical examinations of staff to establish their aptitude for work and is responsible for ergonomics.

HOW DO REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS DIFFER FROM ACCESSIBILITY?

RA refers to the provision of conditions, equipment and an environment that enable a staff member with a disability to effectively perform their job. This is different from the principle of **accessibility to all**, relating for instance to buildings, websites and information. **CP 21/2018**¹⁰ gives more information on accessibility for persons with reduced mobility (PRM) in the GSC.



Wheelchair user taking the adapted lift

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE 'REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION DECISION'?

The RA Decision is a note signed by the AA and addressed to the successful candidate or staff member. It is a formal record of RA which the AA has decided to grant on the basis of the RA Request and the opinion of the RA Committee. A copy is sent for information and/or action to the line manager, the EO Officer, the MO and the Healthcare and Social Service and, in the case of a successful candidate, also to the Recruitment Sector.

¹⁰ See [CP 21/18 'Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility \(PRM\)'](#)

The purpose of the note is to:

- ensure that both the staff member and the AA have an accurate record of what has been decided;
- minimise the need to review RA every time the staff member changes jobs, is re-located or assigned to a new service within the organisation;
- provide staff members and their line managers with the basis for any future discussions about RA.

WHAT IS THE 'REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION REGISTER'?

The RA Register is a confidential database listing all of the 'RA Requests' and 'RA Decisions', representing a repository of all related written records. This register establishes the validity of the execution of the RA procedure in case of complaints.

The EO Officer uses the RA Register for monitoring, analysing and reporting on the application of the RA process. It provides the AA and COPEC with an annual report with recommendations concerning the application or modification of the RA Guide using anonymised data from the RA Register.



Not all disabilities are visible

ONCE THE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS HAVE BEEN GRANTED, CAN THEY BE REVIEWED?

RA are made, in principle, as a 'one-off' solution to assist the individual in their role. However, there may be times when additional or other accommodations are required, at which point the RA procedure would be relaunched. For example:

- following a change in the person's condition, physical or otherwise;
- following mobility;

- new line managers taking note of the adjustments outlined in the RA Decision and ensuring that they continue to be implemented (if a new line manager sees fit to make changes, they would discuss this first with the EO Officer before the RA procedure would be relaunched);
- following the yearly evaluation interview, during which - through dialogue - the reportee's performance is considered;
- before a change of job, duties, work environment or the introduction of new technology or ways of working, to alleviate possible stress;
- as a result of an assessment of the effectiveness of the RA;

Furthermore, a person may submit a complaint against an act affecting them adversely under Article 90(2) of the Staff Regulations.



Wheelchair user printing a document

CAN A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE OR MEMBER OF STAFF APPEAL AGAINST THE RA DECISION BY THE AA?

A successful candidate or staff member can appeal against the AA's RA Decision if they are not happy with it. They can submit a complaint with a view to the annulment or amendment of a prior AA decision relating to them, including a rejection of their request, which constitutes an act adversely affecting the candidate (Article 90 of the Staff Regulations).

HOW ARE PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY ENSURED?

The RA procedure must be carried out ensuring complete respect for the dignity of the successful candidate or staff member with a disability, as well as the maximum level of confidentiality and privacy. By signing the RA Request form and - if they so wish - the 'Sharing Personal Information about Disability or Medical Condition' form, candidates and staff members give their express and unambiguous consent for medical information or details about their limitations to be shared with relevant staff, on a strict 'need to know' basis. Only the requirements relating to the disability are disclosed, not its name. The EO Officer is responsible for the protection of personal data.

Successful candidates or staff members with disabilities are entitled to keep their disability status confidential. However, the AA can only be required to accommodate known disabilities.



Staff member with a visual impairment using a braille bar

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

* Contact the Equal Opportunities Office

* Via email: reasonable.accommodation@consilium.europa.eu

* Via telephone: 8333 or 3595

* Via the DOMUS website [Equal Opportunities at the GSC - Persons with Disabilities](#)

PROCEDURE FOR THE PROVISION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE WITH A DISCLOSED DISABILITY

A. The Recruitment Sector sends the successful candidate a job offer, who in turn accepts it and may declare a disability.

1. The Recruitment Sector informs the Medical Officer (MO), the line manager and the Equal Opportunities Officer (EO Officer) that a successful candidate has declared a disability and annexes the job description.

B. The EO Officer starts the 'Reasonable Accommodation' (RA) procedure.

1. The EO Officer contacts the successful candidate with information about Staff Note 19/19. The successful candidate completes the [Request for Reasonable Accommodation](#) form (RA Request) with regard to their specific needs and the [Sharing Personal Information about Disability or Medical Condition](#) form (with the assistance from the EO Officer where appropriate) and submits it via the Recruitment Sector to the EO Officer.
2. The EO Officer sends a note to the MO with the duly completed RA Request.

C. The MO examines whether the successful candidate fulfils the conditions for appointment.

1. The MO makes an appointment with the successful candidate and carries out the pre-recruitment medical examination taking into account the RA Request and the job description.
2. Where the MO considers that RA arrangements may be required, he or she sends a report to the 'Advisory Committee on Reasonable Accommodation' (RA Committee) with a copy to the Recruitment Sector, detailing:
 - the effects of the impairment on the successful candidate's ability to carry out job-related tasks;
 - the type(s) of RA.

D. The RA Committee examines the RA Request.

1. The RA Committee, composed of the EO Officer, the line manager and a representative of Healthcare and Social Services appointed by the Head of Unit on a case-by-case basis, examines the request and issues its opinion to the Appointing Authority (AA).

E. The AA takes a decision and informs the successful candidate.

1. In its decision, the AA may:
 - authorise the proposed RA; or
 - reject the request, if it represents a disproportionate burden; or
 - decide on alternative measures.
2. The AA informs the successful candidate by sending them the RA Decision, with a copy to:
 - the line manager;
 - the EO Officer;
 - the MO;
 - the Healthcare and Social Service;
 - the Recruitment Sector.

F. The RA Decision is implemented.

1. The EO Officer informs the services involved in providing the RA listed in the RA Decision and coordinates its implementation
2. The EO Officer may suggest, where appropriate, training and other necessary steps and assistance to ensure that the successful candidate can adjust to new working methods and/or using new technology.
3. Where appropriate, the EO Officer organises information sessions for (future) colleagues of the successful candidate to raise awareness and to foster an inclusive working environment.
4. The EO Officer monitors the effectiveness of the implementation of the RA Decision. Where RA need to be adapted or additional RA are needed, the RA procedure is relaunched.

PROCEDURE FOR THE PROVISION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR A STAFF MEMBER DISCLOSING A TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT DISABILITY

A. A staff member has a disability.

1. The staff member informs their line manager or the Medical Officer (MO) or the Equal Opportunities Officer (EO Officer), who in turn informs the other two.

B. The EO Officer starts the 'Reasonable Accommodation' (RA) procedure.

1. The EO Officer contacts the staff member with information about Staff Note 19/19. The staff member completes the [Request for Reasonable Accommodation](#) form (RA Request) with regard to their specific needs and the [Sharing Personal Information about Disability or Medical Condition](#) form (with the assistance of the EO Officer where appropriate) and submits it to the EO Officer.
2. The EO Officer sends a note to the MO with the duly completed RA Request.

C. The MO examines the staff member.

1. The MO makes an appointment with the staff member and carries out the required medical examination taking into account the RA Request and the job description.
2. Where the MO considers that RA arrangements may be required, he or she sends a report to the 'Advisory Committee on Reasonable Accommodation' (RA Committee), detailing:
 - the effects of the impairment on the staff member's ability to carry out job-related tasks;
 - the type(s) of RA.

D. The RA Committee examines the RA Request.

1. The RA Committee, composed of the EO Officer, the line manager and a representative of Healthcare and Social Services appointed by the Head of Unit on a case-by-case basis, examines the request and issues its opinion to the Appointing Authority (AA).

E. The AA takes a decision and informs the staff member.

1. In its decision, the AA may:
 - authorise the proposed RA; or
 - reject the request, if it represents a disproportionate burden; or
 - decide on alternative measures.
2. The AA informs the staff member of the RA Decision, with a copy to:
 - the line manager;
 - the EO Officer;
 - the MO;
 - the Healthcare and Social Service.

F. The RA Decision is implemented.

1. The EO Officer informs the services involved in providing the RA listed in the RA Decision and coordinates its implementation.
2. The EO Officer may suggest, where appropriate, training and other necessary steps and assistance to ensure that the staff member can adjust to new working methods and/or using new technology.
3. Where appropriate, the EO Officer organises information sessions for colleagues of the staff member to raise awareness and to foster an inclusive working environment.
4. The EO Officer monitors the effectiveness of the implementation of the RA Decision. Where RA need to be adapted or additional RA are needed, the RA procedure is relaunched.

ANNEX I - POSSIBLE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

This 'Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Arrangements for Persons with Disabilities in the GSC' is intended for anyone involved in arranging or providing RA for a successful candidate or staff member with a disability. The purpose of this ANNEX I is to give a non-exhaustive list of practical examples of reasonable accommodation arrangements and to explain them in the context of an impairment. It is important that decisions about RA are informed and not based on assumptions about what people with a certain type of disability can or cannot do.

In society, perceptions do not always correspond to reality. Here are some common assumptions, which may eventually limit opportunities for people who have a disability¹¹:

MYTH	REALITY
Disability doesn't affect that many people.	It is estimated that disability affects one in four people (including carers, relatives, etc.).
Disability isn't a work issue.	Most people with disabilities acquire their disability during their working life (only around 3% are born with their disability).
Most people with disabilities use a wheelchair.	95% of people with disabilities do not use a wheelchair.
People with disabilities have lots of extra needs.	80% of people with disabilities do not require any accommodation in their workplace.
RA cost too much.	RA are usually easy to implement and far less expensive than people think. Often, they can be provided without difficulty and at little or no cost. Employers surveyed by the US Job Accommodation Network found that as many as 59% of common adjustment types cost <i>nothing</i> for the employer.
People with disabilities take too much time off work.	80% of businesses say their staff with disabilities have the same, or better, attendance records compared to their colleagues without disabilities.

¹¹ Adapted from: [Remploy & Employers' Forum on Disability](#)

SECTION I: REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR PERSONS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS¹²

1. About mobility impairments

Mobility impairments range in severity from limitations on stamina to paralysis. Some mobility impairments are caused by conditions present at birth, while others are the result of illness or physical injury, or could be temporary, e.g. a broken leg. Spinal injuries cause different types of mobility impairment, depending on the area of the spine affected.

- **Quadriplegia**, paralysis of the extremities and trunk, is caused by a neck injury. Persons with quadriplegia have limited or no use of their arms and hands and often use electric wheelchairs.
- **Paraplegia**, paralysis of the lower extremities and the lower trunk, is caused by injury to the mid-back. Persons often use a manual wheelchair and have full movement of arms and hands.
- **Amputation** is the removal of one or more limbs, sometimes caused by trauma or another condition, such as diabetes.
- **Arthritis** is the inflammation of the body's joints, causing pain, swelling, and difficulty in body movement.
- **Back disorders** can limit a person's ability to sit, stand, walk, bend, or carry objects. They include, but are not limited to, degenerative disease, scoliosis, and herniated disks.
- **Cerebral palsy** is the result of damage to the brain prior to or shortly after birth. It can prevent or inhibit walking and cause a lack of muscle coordination, spasms, and speech difficulty.
- **Neuromuscular disorders** include a variety of disorders, such as muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis, that result in degeneration and atrophy of muscle or nerve tissues.

The self-reliance of persons with mobility impairments will depend on the seriousness of their disability; a person with muscular dystrophy in the whole body will have different needs to someone with a lower leg amputation. It will also depend on the degree of functioning of the upper limbs and back.

Manual wheelchairs are used by persons who can only walk with difficulty or cannot walk. The user can move the chair or have it pushed by an assistant. Such chairs can be folded.

Electric wheelchairs users move their wheelchair with a steering module, usually by hand. These can often be height adjusted. They weigh around 100kg or more due to the size of the battery.

¹² Sources: [Steunpunt Handicap en Arbeid](#), [Job Accommodation Network](#), [Open Door Group](#)



2. Adjustments for persons with mobility impairments

2.1 *Working conditions could be adjusted by e.g.:*

- restructuring the job by reallocating duties that a person with a mobility impairment may find difficult, such as attending outside meetings;
- allowing occasional or standard teleworking to take account of the person's condition;
- noting that medical appointments during working hours may exceed 36 hours per year;
- adjusting working schedules with the line manager.

2.2 *Working environment could be adjusted by e.g.:*

- arranging the office in such a way that the staff member using a wheelchair or other mobility aid can move around easily without having to worry about obstacles;
- providing additional room to store the (foldable) wheelchair or mobility aid, or - if the staff member with a disability prefers to use an office chair while working - creating a large enough space for the staff member to move from wheelchair to office chair;
- providing special seating arrangements such as chairs and tables which are height adjustable (manually or with a power unit) to ensure correct posture and successful control of devices;
- making sure all equipment is within reach;
- providing adjustable trays which can move keyboards up and down and tilt them for maximum typing efficiency;
- selecting an office close to the accessible toilets if possible.

2.3 *Equipment and software could be adjusted by e.g. providing:*

- **alternative keyboards** featuring larger or smaller-than-standard keys or keyboards, alternative key configurations, and keyboards for use with one hand (before purchasing a complex keyboard option, evaluate the built-in accessibility features of popular operating systems such as Microsoft Windows or Macintosh);
- a **key guard** which is a plastic or metal shield that fits over a standard keyboard in which holes are drilled to help an individual with poor dexterity or hand control to press only the desired key without inadvertently pressing other keys;
- an **on-screen virtual keyboard** which gives an image of a standard or modified keyboard on the computer screen, allowing the user to select keys with a mouse, touch screen, trackball, joystick, switch, or electronic pointing device; they often have a scanning option that highlights individual keys that can be selected by the user;
- **pointers** which can be held in the **mouth**, mounted on a hat or **headgear** or activated by **inhaling or exhaling** and used to press keys on a standard keyboard whilst also using an additional switch to replace the mouse button;
- **handheld pointers** such as '**trackballs**' used as the control surface is easier to manipulate and the buttons can be activated without affecting the pointer position. Handheld pointing devices with a small control surface area may be useful for someone with very limited hand mobility. For people with mobility impairments who already use a **joystick** to drive a wheelchair, a computer joystick may be an excellent choice;
- **external touchpads**, similar to those built into many notebook computers, offering an ideal pointing system for some;
- **touch screens** allowing direct selection or activation of the computer by touching the screen, making it easier to select an option directly rather than through a mouse movement or keyboard. Touch screens are either built into the computer monitor or can be added onto a computer monitor;
- **keyboard filters** which are typing aids such as **word prediction programmes** and add-on **spelling checkers** that reduce the required number of keystrokes. Keyboard filters enable users to quickly access the letters they need and to avoid inadvertently selecting keys they do not want;
- **voice recognition programmes** allowing people to give commands and enter data using their voices via a microphone rather than a mouse or keyboard. Voice and breath stamina should also be a consideration when evaluating voice recognition as an input option;
- **telephone** with large buttons, voice activation, headphone or telephone holder;
- a **voice recorder** to take notes;
- a **desk light switch** to switch on the office lights.

3. Building an inclusive working environment for a person with a mobility impairment

3.1 *In general*

If a colleague with a mobility impairment is joining the team, it may be useful to organise a general disability information session for the whole team. In order to be more comfortable with persons with a mobility impairment, specific information/training can also be provided about how to interact with colleagues who use mobility aids.

The GSC offers assistance to persons with reduced mobility (PRM)¹³ and PRM staff are encouraged to make use of this service throughout their working day if required. On the first day, it may be necessary to arrange for someone from the PMR support team in the floor messenger service¹⁴ to meet and guide the staff member. The trained floor messengers can also offer a private tour of the buildings to help familiarise the person with wheelchair-friendly routes to the office, meeting rooms, cafeteria, etc. the PMR support team can also be called on as and when necessary at the request of the person with a mobility impairment.

It is important that staff members with mobility issues are not left isolated from their colleagues. Newcomers can be assigned a 'buddy' to help ensure they are fully included and supported as team members. The buddy could also introduce the staff member to other staff or make sure they are included at lunchtime and coffee breaks.

3.2 *Tips when interacting with a person having a mobility impairment*

- If you are interacting with a wheelchair user for the first time, it may be difficult to know how to act. You do not want to accidentally offend someone, but at the same time, you want to be helpful and understanding. The most important thing to remember is that people who use wheelchairs are really no different from you. For more information, see e.g. [How to Interact with a Person Who Uses a Wheelchair](#).
- Before offering assistance, ask the person if and how you may assist. Be aware that your offer may be refused.
- If speaking for an extended time with a person in a wheelchair, sit down. This will make it much easier for the person to see you. If that is not possible, stand at a slight distance, so that they are not straining their neck to make eye contact with you and they do not feel like you are looking down on them.
- If the person has a communication impairment as well as a mobility impairment, take time to understand the person. Repeat what you understand and when you do not understand, say so. Be considerate of the extra time it might take the person to speak or act. Allow the person to set the pace of moving or talking.
- Listen to any instructions the person may give. By virtue of experience they are likely to know the safest and most efficient way to accomplish the task at hand.

¹³ See [CP 21/18 'Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility \(PRM\)'](#)

¹⁴ ORG.2.D.B1 Floor Messengers

- A wheelchair should be viewed as a personal-assistance device rather than something one is 'confined to'. It is also part of a person's personal space; do not lean on or touch the chair, and do not push the chair unless asked, because if you help someone down a curb without waiting for instructions, you may dump them out of the chair or you may detach the chair's parts if you lift it by the handles or the footrest.
- Some wheelchair users may use a mobility assistance dog, a service dog trained to assist a physically disabled person who has mobility issues. When walking alongside someone who is using a mobility assistance dog, walk on the side opposite the animal. Do not pet, feed or otherwise distract a mobility assistance dog as this could be unsafe for the handler.
- Be aware of a person's reach limits. Place as many items as possible within their reach. Also make sure that there is a clear path of travel to cupboards and shelves.
- If a counter is too high for a person using a wheelchair to see over, step around it to assist them.
- People who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves, so never grab them.
- People who have limited mobility may lean on a door for support as they open it. Pushing the door open from behind or unexpectedly opening the door may cause them to fall.
- If you offer a seat to a person who has limited mobility, keep in mind that chairs with arms or with higher seats may be easier for them to use.
- Some people have limited use of their hands, wrists or arms. Be prepared to offer assistance with reaching, grasping or lifting objects, opening doors and operating equipment such as vending machines.

With regard to meetings:

- Try not to seat wheelchair users in a corner. Move a table or desk or rearrange seating at a table, so that the person is part of the regular meeting room seating.
- Wheelchair users with upper body weakness may not be able to raise their hands to participate in a discussion. Establish eye contact with the person and call on them when they indicate that they wish to contribute.
- Do not lean over someone who uses a wheelchair to shake another person's hand.

SECTION II: REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS¹⁵

1. About visual impairments

Visual impairment, also known as **vision impairment** or **vision loss**, is a decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problems not fixable by usual means, such as glasses.

- **Blindness:** Having light perception and a visual acuity of less than 3/60 or irreversible blindness, i.e. no perception of light.
- **Severely sight impaired:** Defined as having central visual acuity of less than 3/60 with normal fields of vision, or gross visual field restriction. Unable to see at 3 metres what the normally sighted person sees at 60 m.
- **Sight impaired:** Able to see at 3 m, but not at 6 m, what the normally sighted person sees at 60 m.
- **Low vision:** A visual acuity of less than 6/18 but greater than 3/60. Not eligible to drive and may have difficulty recognising faces across a street or watching television.

2. Adjustments for persons with visual impairments

2.1 Working conditions could be adjusted by e.g.:

- restructuring the job, reallocating minor or subsidiary duties to another colleague when staff members with a disability have difficulty doing them because of their impairment
- allowing occasional or standard teleworking to take account of the person's condition.
- noting that medical appointments during working hours may exceed 36 hours per year.
- adjusting working schedules with the line manager.

2.2 Working environment could be adjusted by e.g.:

- establishing the layout of the office in agreement with the person and an ergonomist to ensure the most suitable placement of office furniture and equipment, and the appropriate level of lighting and level of contrast in decor and colours are present for safe mobility;
- making the cleaning staff or any other colleagues using the office aware that they should not move objects and office equipment;
- keeping corridors and workplaces tidy and free from clutter to avoid a trip hazard;
- inform the visually impaired staff member of structural changes or hazards they may need to be aware of in the event of new construction or workplace modifications;

¹⁵ Sources: [RNIB](#); [Disability Rights UK](#); [British Journal of Ophthalmology](#); [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)

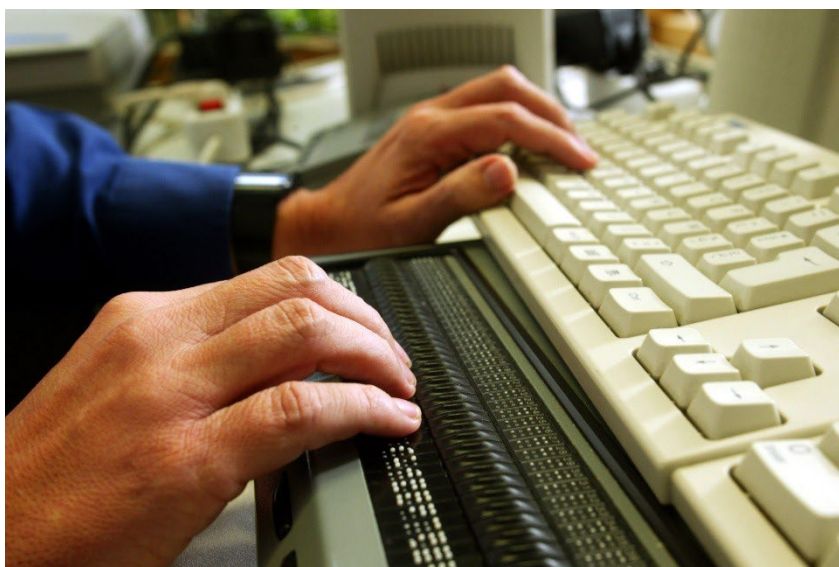
- making adjustments to the workplace where necessary should the staff member have a guide dog;
- providing assistance with the guide dog only if requested as persons who use guide dogs have been trained in the most effective ways to control their dog's behaviour. Do not pet, feed or otherwise distract the dog when it is working as a well-intentioned pat can undo months of training.

2.3 *Equipment and software could be adjusted by e.g. providing:*

- a software package which converts written text into audio format (text-to-speech or screen reader) (e.g. JAWS);
- a software package for optical character recognition (OCR);
- a refreshable braille display or braille terminal to read text output (not all persons who are blind or visually impaired read or write braille);
- a braille note-taking device;
- a mobile phone with headset, speakers and an integrated GPS;
- a handheld or desktop CCTV video magnifier;
- a digital recorder for note-taking in meetings;
- a text scanner and printer.

2.4 *Methods of communication and access to information*

- Braille is a tactile writing system used by people who are blind or visually impaired. It is traditionally written with embossed paper. Braille-users can read computer screens and other electronic supports thanks to refreshable braille displays. They can write braille with the original slate and stylus or type it on a braille writer, such as a portable braille note-taker, or on a computer that prints with a braille embosser.



- Provide any written information, such as handouts for meetings, training material, PowerPoint presentations, etc. in an appropriate accessible format (e.g. Word rather than PDF) and, if possible, in the person's preferred format e.g. large print, Braille or audio.
- Ensure information is presented sufficiently in advance of meetings.
- Provide training on equipment or software which the person will be using, so that they can e.g. use a computer with speech output. If necessary, provide one-to-one training on in-house software with text-to-speech software, e.g. the use of DOMUS, Flexitime, PMO.
- The European Blind Union (EBU) has published [Making Information Accessible to all](#) to facilitate accessibility of printed and electronic documents intended for a broad audience including websites, books, invoices, letters, leaflets, etc.

3. Building an inclusive working environment for a person with a visual impairment¹⁶

3.1 *In general*

If a colleague with a visual impairment is joining a team, it may be useful to organise a general disability information session for the whole team. In order to be more comfortable with persons having a visual impairment, specific information/training can also be provided about how to interact with colleagues who are blind or partially sighted.

The GSC's services for persons with reduced mobility (PRM)¹⁷ might also be useful for persons with a visual impairment.

It is important that staff members with visual impairments are not left isolated from their colleagues. Research has found that almost half of people who are blind or partially sighted feel 'moderately' or 'completely' cut off from people or things around them. Newcomers can be assigned a 'buddy' to help ensure they are fully included and supported as team members. The buddy could also introduce the new staff member to other staff or make sure they are included at lunchtime and coffee breaks. The buddy can also help them in their orientation around the building/work place, as a person who is blind does not have the cues that a sighted person does. Be precise when giving instructions, as it is no good saying 'take the stairs over there'.

3.2 *Tips when interacting with a person having a visual impairment*

- Verbally greet and identify yourself before extending your hand to greet a person who is blind.
- Use the same courtesy when entering or leaving a room, or saying good bye when ending a conversation - do not just walk away.

¹⁶ For more information, see e.g. [How to Interact with the Blind](#)

¹⁷ See [CP 21/18 'Accessibility for Persons with Reduced Mobility \(PRM\)'](#)

- Before offering assistance, ask the person if and how you may assist. Be aware that your offer may be refused.
- When offering a seat, guide the person's hand to the back or arm of the seat – first explain that this is what you are going to do.
- When guiding, offer your arm, do not grab the person's arm. The practical advice and information given for example [here](#) will help you feel confident about guiding people with visual impairments.
- As you walk, tell the person where you are going, make note of steps, stairs, ramps or slopes, and point out opening doors or other obstacles. Remember that most people who are blind or partially sighted have some residual sight.
- If leaving a person who is blind in an area unfamiliar to them, inform the person you are leaving and, if appropriate, leave them in the company of someone else (if you don't do this the person will be left disorientated and possibly talking to thin air).
- When entering a building unfamiliar to the person, offer a brief description of the layout.
- When walking alongside someone who is using a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog.
- Do not pet or distract a guide dog. This will distract them from what they should be doing and could potentially be unsafe for the handler. They need to stay focused on their job.

With regard to meetings:

- Identify yourself clearly and introduce any other people present.
- Clearly indicate where other people are located (it is important to do this at the start of the meeting).
- If speaking in a group, it is helpful to identify the name of the person you are speaking to. Introduce yourself before you begin speaking.
- When someone might normally take notes, a person who is blind may like to record the meeting.

SECTION III: REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR PERSONS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS¹⁸

1. About hearing impairments

Hearing impairment is a difficulty in perceiving or identifying sounds clearly. Depending on the minimum sound that can be heard, the level of hearing loss ranges from mild to severe. The impairment can be either acquired, due to illness or injury, or congenital, and may affect only one ear or both ears. A hearing loss above 90 decibels is generally considered deafness. Around 10% of EU citizens self-report as having some degree of hearing loss, which is often related to ageing¹⁹.

Degree of hearing loss ²⁰	Minimum sound that can be heard	Functional impact	Example sound
Mild hearing loss	25–39dB	Trouble following normal conversation in a noisy room; soft sound such as whispering cannot be heard.	Whispering: 20dB
Moderate hearing loss	40–69dB	Difficulty understanding direct clear conversation in a quiet room. Hearing aids may be necessary.	Normal conversation: 65dB
Severe hearing loss	70–94dB	Unable to hear someone talking to them or hear a doorbell. May rely on lip-reading and sign language, even with the use of a hearing aid.	Loudest doorbell available: 90dB
Profound deafness	95dB or more	Difficult to perceive any sound. Unlikely to benefit from hearing aids, therefore relies solely on lip-reading and sign language.	Shotgun blast: 130dB

To understand the spoken word and communicate, persons with hearing impairments have their preferred methods. They may use speech, **sign language** interpretation, **finger spelling**, **lip-reading**, hearing aids or cochlear implants.

You should find out from your deaf staff member how they prefer to communicate on a one-to-one basis, in groups and in meetings. For general work communication on a one-to-one basis, the options include email, instant messaging, lip-reading, writing or visual demonstrations. Groups and meetings can be difficult as people tend to talk over each other, so lip-reading and sign language interpretation become an issue. Consequently, RA is always an individually tailored solution.

¹⁸ Sources: [Action on Hearing Loss \(formerly RNID\)](#); [Deaf-in-ite Interpreters](#)

¹⁹ Approximately 42% of people over 50 will have some kind of hearing loss (71% of people aged over 70).

²⁰ Source: Adapted from Middleton (2009) and Action on Hearing Loss (2011)



Sign language²¹ is the primary language for expressing thoughts and phrases for most persons who are deaf. It is not universal, and each spoken language in the European Union has a counterpart sign language. International Sign (IS) is, however, widely used among deaf people and interpreters at international events.

Finger spelling is a form of communication in which the hand and fingers spell out letters of the alphabet to form words. Like sign language, the sign language alphabet varies from country to country.

Even if only a minority of persons with hearing impairment can **lip-read**, being able to see the speaker's mouth provides helpful visual cues.

To communicate through **writing**, a simple way is pad and pencil. When writing things down, use simple language and short sentences. Write legibly and use visual aids such as drawings or photos. You can also use other appropriate technology such as email/video mail, short message service (SMS), instant messaging or internet relay chat (IRC).

2. Adjustments for persons with hearing impairments

2.1 Working conditions could be adjusted by e.g.:

- restructuring the job by reallocating duties that a person with a hearing impairment may find difficult, such as phone-answering;
- allowing occasional or standard teleworking to take account of the person's condition;

²¹ See also [Europe's multilingual diversity](#)

- noting that medical appointments during working hours may exceed 36 hours per year;
- providing an email address only, as a way of contacting the person if communication by telephone is not possible or is too difficult;
- adjusting working schedules with the line manager.

2.2 *Working environments could be adjusted by e.g.:*

- making sure there is good lighting as deaf people rely on visual cues for effective communication;
- providing an amplifier fitted to the phone, as appropriate;
- allowing persons with hearing impairment sharing offices to choose a seat where they can see their colleagues to make them feel more included in the team and so that they know when their colleagues are talking to them (do not give them a desk that faces a wall or with their back to a door so they cannot see people approaching them);
- reducing noise in open space offices by providing partitions, room dividers or otherwise enhancing soundproofing between workspaces.

2.3 *Equipment and software could be adjusted by e.g. providing:*

- telephones with a **telephone amplifier**, **headset amplifier** or **videophone** for staff with a hearing impairment who need to use a telephone, making sure the telephone ring and conversation sound level are amplified or pitch adjusted, or ambient noise filtered;
- **wireless microphones** to boost hearing performance when participating in meetings by selecting the person who is talking and switching automatically between the meeting participants;
- an **optical alarm** in the office in case of an emergency.

2.4 *Methods of communication and access to information*

Booking a **sign language** interpreter for simultaneous interpreting into sign language. Sign language interpreters work in meetings with deaf participants and interpret from spoken language into signed language and from signed language into spoken. The interpreter sits or stands, clearly visible, in front of the deaf delegates.

When booking a sign language interpreter, the deaf sign language user must be consulted on their language and interpreter preferences, especially for high-level meetings. Event organisers are responsible for ensuring participation in public events by providing interpreting services. Offering this kind of service encourages deaf people to attend and be involved, ensuring access and opportunities that are equal to those available to a hearing audience.

3. Building an inclusive working environment for a person with a hearing impairment²²

3.1 *In general*

Poor communication habits of hearing colleagues can isolate deaf colleagues. If a colleague with a hearing impairment is joining a team, it may be useful to organise a general disability information session for the whole team. To overcome potential communication problems, specific information or training can also be provided about how to interact with colleagues who are deaf. What counts is having the willingness and desire to communicate. Some knowledge of sign language and finger spelling may be useful to establish very basic communication such as greetings. Do not be intimidated by or ignore deaf colleagues simply because communication feels awkward or takes longer. If you have trouble understanding the speech of a person who is deaf, do not hesitate to ask for repetition.

On the first day, it may be necessary to arrange for the PMR support team in the floor messenger service to meet and guide the new staff member. The trained floor messengers may also be involved as and when necessary at the request of the person with a hearing impairment.

Newcomers can be assigned a 'buddy' to help ensure that they are fully included and supported as a team member. The buddy could also introduce the new staff member to other staff or make sure they are included at lunchtime and coffee breaks.

3.2 *Tips when interacting with a person having a hearing impairment*

- Get the person's attention before speaking by tapping them on the shoulder or upper arm, waving your hand or switching the lights on and off.
- Learn the sign language alphabet and some basic, work-related signs.
- Any cue is useful – use facial expressions, mime, gesture and body language.
- Use visual aids such as photos, drawings and images; use pen and paper if necessary.
- Look at and speak directly to the person with a hearing impairment.
- Do not cover your mouth and lips when speaking.
- Speak slowly and clearly, be expressive, but do not exaggerate.
- Use complete sentences.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Stand or sit at the same level as the person, 1–2 m away.
- Stand away from the light of windows.

²² For more information, see e.g. [How to Communicate With a Deaf Person](#)

- Do not shout: hearing aids make sounds louder, but they do not clarify the person's reception or understanding of the sound.
- Ensure that the person knows what you are about to discuss, e.g. 'We are going to talk about your CV first, then I will discuss the post'.
- Have patience and check that you have been understood; if necessary, rephrase or try another word, or demonstrate.
- When a deaf person asks what has been said in a conversation, do not say "I'll tell you later" but try to give a brief explanation straightaway.
- Indicate when you intend to change to a new topic because the type of vocabulary is likely to be different.
- If a sign language interpreter is present, talk directly to the person who is deaf, not to the interpreter.

With regard to meetings:

- Ensure that everyone is facing each other – a circular table or a semi-circle arrangement would be perfect – as the ability to see colleagues is important.
- If possible, arrange to have an interpreter or note-taker, as written information is crucial for people with hearing impairment both during a meeting and afterwards to reinforce key messages.
- Use visual aids whenever possible.
- When showing a presentation, do not turn out all of the lights so that lip-reading or seeing the interpreter becomes impossible.
- Ensure that the right communication support²³ is provided, as appropriate.
- Include a planned agenda with appropriately scheduled breaks; short breaks are needed every 30-40 minutes when lip-reading or sign language interpretation is in use as it requires concentration and can be very tiring; also consider the time of day.
- Remember that meetings may take a little longer than usual when interpreters, lip speakers, electronic and manual note takers, verbatim speech-to-text reporters (STTRs)²⁴ are involved.
- Make sure that people speak one at a time, otherwise it is impossible to interpret.

²³ Type of sign language: e.g. International Sign (IS), French (LSF), German (DGS), Dutch (NGT), French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB), Flemish Sign Language (VGT), English (BSL), American Sign Language (ASL), etc.

²⁴ For more information on Language Service Professionals (LSPs), see e.g. [FAQ on Sign Language Interaction](#)

- Use a private meeting room rather than holding meetings in crowded communal areas with background noise such as telephones ringing, or conversations taking place.

1. About autism



Autism is a neurological developmental condition. It occurs when atypical (unusual) brain connections lead to atypical development. These differences in the way the brain functions produce distinctive, atypical ways of thinking, moving, interacting with people, and sensory and cognitive processing. The way a person processes information and communicates with and relates to other people and makes sense of the world is affected.

Autism is also an example of *neurological diversity* or *neurodiversity*, in that people have a different neurological make-up or 'brain wiring'. Autistic people are *neurologically atypical* or *neuro-atypical*²⁶. One analogy that has often been made is that autistic people have a different neurological 'operating system' than non-autistic people. Recent research on the worldwide prevalence of autism has found that 1 in 100 people have the condition to some degree.

- **Social interaction:** People with autism may not understand the unwritten social rules that others usually pick up without thinking. For example, when to speak, when to stop speaking, when a conversation is over, how close to stand to someone or why not to start a conversation on an inappropriate subject. They may also prefer to spend time alone rather than actively participating in social conversations and events in the workplace. Thus, people with autism can experience difficulties interacting with managers and colleagues, which can hinder their inclusion in the workplace.
- **Social communication:** Many people with autism have a very literal understanding of language, and can struggle to understand metaphors, idioms, irony and sarcasm. For example an expression like "it's raining cats and dogs" can be taken literally. Thus they can have

²⁵ Sources: [Autism Europe](#), [National Autism Society UK](#), [Autistic UK](#).

²⁶ People without a neurological condition are referred to as *neurologically typical*, or *neuro-typical* - or even *NTers*.

difficulties in understanding and interpreting instructions and unspoken expectations. People with autism can often appear very blunt, and have difficulty reading facial expressions or tone of voice. Some people with autism may have very good language skills but might find it difficult to understand the back-and-forth nature of conversations, and may talk at length about their own subjects of interest and not appear to be interested in what others are saying.

- **Social imagination:** Even if some people with autism may have active imaginations, are very creative, and may be successful musicians, artists and writers, they generally lack social imagination. They may find it difficult to understand and interpret other people's feelings, thoughts and actions. They can also have difficulties in predicting what will happen next. This can also affect the way they prepare for change and plan for the future. They often have difficulties in coping with change and unfamiliar situations.
- **Cognitive functioning:** Many people with autism have impaired executive function²⁷ and may have difficulties in completing tasks at work due to problems with planning, organisation, attention shifting, working memory and problem-solving.
- Persons with autism may be **hyper/hypo-sensitive to tactile, auditory, olfactory and visual stimulations**, and may have unusual responses to hot and cold temperatures and pain.

Strengths of people with autism in relation to employment

Despite their difficulties in certain areas, people with autism also have a great deal to offer in the labour market and some of the characteristics linked to their disability can prove to be an asset. While offering support for their difficulties, it is also important to recognise and make full use of their individual strengths, which can include

- **High levels of concentration and ability to excel at repetitive tasks:** They often find focusing on detailed work rewarding, and can tend to work persistently and without being distracted, being precise and paying close attention to detail.
- **Reliability, low level of absenteeism and loyalty:** They can be very conscientious and committed to their work, often with good levels of punctuality, honesty and integrity. For example, their rate of absenteeism is often lower than that of other employees.
- **Detailed factual knowledge, specialist technical skills and interests, highly analytical and numerate:** The tendency of some to develop specialist interests can lead them to develop very detailed factual knowledge in that area. They can also develop highly specialised skills, especially in technical fields, as well as an above-average level of systematisation skills, including understanding of rule-based systems and patterns.
- **Excellent record-keeping and memory:** They tend to have strong memorisation skills and to be good at record-keeping.
- **Problem-solving skills:** They tend to have highly analytical skills and prefer logical and structured approaches to their work, and often think in a very visual way. They may enjoy problem-solving and can bring new ideas and take fresh approaches to their jobs.

²⁷ Set of abilities that enable people to translate motivation into action, to START doing something, to CHANGE what they are doing, to STOP doing something once started and to manage time.

- **Retention:** They can be particularly suited to jobs that most people are not suited to, such as positions that require work of a repetitive nature and positions that are socially isolated due to the nature or location of the work. Once settled in a job, they will often stay in that role considerably longer than others.
- **Resourcefulness:** They may also have had to find ways to overcome challenges and so can be very resourceful.

To define the level of RA required for the position, the assessment should be individually tailored and comprehensive. The specific demands of the job should be taken into consideration, notably the social interaction skills and cognitive and behavioural skills required, as well as the general work environment, including the sensory environment. The assessment should be followed by an ongoing process of monitoring that examines how a person with autism performs in response to various support measures and their evolution at work over time.

2. Adjustments for persons with autism

2.1 Working conditions could be adjusted by e.g.:

- adjusting the tasks and responsibilities according to their abilities and strengths and reassigning work among staff members if necessary;
- adjusting working schedules, arranging for them to work initially on a part-time basis and gradually increasing the hours of work as they may find full-time work too overwhelming at the beginning. This could be an effective way to help them to adjust to their new role and environment;
- providing important predictability in the form of a structured working day with fixed hours rather than variable shifts, clear rules, routines and work schedules which are adhered to. When these are broken, disrupted or changed, it is very important to try and announce and explain this beforehand if at all possible, otherwise they may become uncomfortable or distressed. Preference is given to a 'job and finish' role rather than one which involves prioritising, swapping and changing;
- providing consistency and flexibility of individual support over time, especially where planning is unavoidably disrupted and when changes are introduced. At times of organisational change (new staff, new managers, moving to a new work location, during periods of stress, high workload, deadlines, etc.), support needs are likely to be higher. Line managers must be prepared and flexible enough to quickly accommodate these changing needs;
- giving very clear and systematic information about the task, the standard to which it needs to be completed, the deadline (date and time) and priorities, as well as more general long-term and short-term goals, using email to pass on this information;
- providing organisational assistance through the use of instruction sheets, checklists, labels and notebooks to maintain their schedule and meet deadlines at work;
- making regular performance checks. Even if things are going well, review the person's progress regularly. This is critical if the staff member's behaviour changes. If so, find out - gently - why it is happening and consider what can be done to help;

- allowing occasional or standard teleworking to take account of the person's condition;
- noting that medical appointments during working hours may exceed 36 hours per year;
- providing only an email address as a way of contacting the person if communication by telephone is not possible or too difficult;
- managing stress and anxiety by allowing regular breaks or designating a place to go to²⁸, or an activity to do, in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed when experiencing stress or anxiety in the workplace;
- providing assistance with transport to and from work if the journey and means of transport cause too much stress and anxiety.

2.2 *Working environments could be adjusted by e.g.:*

- adjusting the work environment, e.g. the noise level, lighting, degree of crowding and ease of navigation in the workspace, as well as the number of interruptions during work time. Adaptations can include positioning the person's workstation in a quieter or less bright part of the office or reducing noise in open space offices by providing partitions, room dividers or by otherwise enhancing soundproofing between workspaces.

2.3 *Equipment and software could be adjusted by e.g. providing:*

- tools such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), email programs and other software programs such as visual time-tables, which can offer daily scheduling and task management functions that can assist a person with autism to manage their time and meet deadlines at work;
- alternative forms of communication such as email, instant messaging or face-to-face communication because a telephone conversation often requires a lot of concentration as it is difficult to interpret emotional or hidden meaning behind words, pitch of voice and language use;
- earplugs, noise cancelling headphones or white noise machines which can help to block out sounds that would otherwise be distracting.

2.4 *Methods of communication and access to information*

- As people with autism have difficulties in communication and social interaction, an important step for the employer in adapting a workplace is to identify, understand and document the workplace's normative behaviour and communication practices, and to explain these to them and adapt practices to accommodate them.
- All instructions and policies should be written and communicated clearly and accurately.

²⁸ Two rest rooms are available for use in times of stress or anxiety (Justus Lipsius building room 00 MN 17 for women and room 00 MN 13 for men, Lex building room 04 AC 60 (mezzanine)).

- Allowing enough time to respond to verbal communication will facilitate more effective communication. If verbal instructions do not seem to be working, try using visuals and written forms of communication.
- Provide colleagues with advice regarding the use of clear and direct language such as asking clear and direct questions, asking for concrete examples, avoiding idioms, abstract language, hypothetical or abstract questions (they may find it impossible to make future projections), open-ended questions (they may find it difficult to determine what, and how much, to say).

3. Building an inclusive working environment for a person with autism²⁹

3.1 *In general*

- Change and transition can be very challenging for a person with autism, so colleagues need to be patient and support them throughout the process of change. Earn the person's trust and be proactive, not reactive. If you know something might be upsetting—such as a change at work—talk before it becomes a problem. In other words, do not wait for a crisis; instead, take steps to avoid a crisis.
- Providing structure, fixed points and routines also helps. The manager must make sure to spend time connecting with the person. Regular and consistent feedback, and optional 1-to-1's each week to discuss anything that might be causing issues or anxieties help to build this structure.
- Organise autism awareness training for colleagues to inform them about the challenges experienced by the colleague with autism as well as to recognise autistic positives and skills and how to support them. It should of course be undertaken with the consent of the person with autism, as any medical information is confidential.
- Be aware that the person may not interact well or 'get' humour and may struggle with 'social cues'.
- On the first day, it may be necessary to arrange for the PMR support team in the floor messenger service to meet and guide the person with autism. The trained floor messengers may also be involved as and when necessary at their request.
- Newcomers can be assigned a 'buddy' to help ensure that they are fully included and supported as team members, helping them with any issues that arise and advocating on their behalf if necessary. The buddy could also introduce the new staff member to other staff or make sure that they are included at lunchtime and coffee breaks if they wish to participate. A line manager is probably not the best person because their management role may conflict with a supporting and caring role.

²⁹ For more information, see e.g. [How to Communicate with Autistic People](#)

3.2 *Tips when interacting with a person with autism*

- People with autism tend to think literally. During conversations, other people do not always speak literally. From an autistic person's standpoint, other people can therefore be hard to understand. This is particularly true when people:
 - say things that they don't mean ("I'm going to kill her!");
 - tell the person to do things that they do not want them to do ("Pull your socks up!");
 - ask questions but do not want an answer ("Why is he such a #*@#?!");
 - ask questions but do not want an honest answer ("How are you?");
 - answer a question with an answer to a different question ("Are you having your meal break now? I've got to finish this report.");
 - use figures of speech ("You've got ants in your pants.");
 - do not say things they mean ("I'm not interested in this subject.");
 - say things in an illogical order ("It's time for the shop to close – make an announcement.");
 - laugh when there is no obvious joke ("Terrible weather – ha ha!");
 - think the other person has said things that they have not ("You're saying I'm wrong?");
 - say the opposite of what they mean (sarcasm) ("Yeah, right!");
- Do not assume that the person is ignoring you if they are not looking at you or making eye contact or when they are looking at a phone, an iPad or elsewhere. Do not feel awkward or rude if you are looking at the person's eyes or face and they are not looking at yours.
- When you have finished talking, pause long enough to allow them to begin speaking because they may have cognitive processing delays and need extra time to process what you are saying and formulate a response.
- If you need to ask the person a question, try to make the question as specific as possible. Broad, generalised and vague questions are cognitively inaccessible to many of them.
- It is important not to yell, scream, or shout at the person. Loud voices can trigger panic attacks and extreme anxiety.

- If the person is 'stimming' - fidgeting with an object or hair, flapping their hands or arms, pacing, making noises, spinning, rocking, etc. - do not stare and do not feel awkward about it either. This is normal. Never tell them to have 'quiet hands'.
- The person may tell you that they need to leave an area to continue the conversation. This may be because the location is causing sensory overload, anxiety or other barriers to effective communication.

With regard to meetings

- Give advanced notice of meetings if possible, particularly when a person with autism is required to provide information at the meeting. Let him or her provide a written response rather than a verbal one if possible.
 - Use a private meeting room with minimum background noise, adjustable light levels and away from strong smells, rather than holding meetings in crowded communal areas with background noise such as telephones ringing or conversations taking place.
 - Meetings should have a clear agenda and run to time as far as possible.
 - Meeting procedures should be clear, so that participants know when and how to raise the issues that they want to raise.
 - Keep good order in the meeting.
 - Use visual aids whenever possible.
 - Make sure that people speak one at a time.
 - Do not allow meetings to become dominated by jargon or jokey comments.
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