

Accessible meetings and conferences

A checklist



Introduction

VISITFLANDERS wants Flanders to grow into an **international top destination for meetings and conferences**. To this end, the quality and service of our meetings industry must be in line with international expectations and must therefore also respond to growing societal challenges in terms of accessibility. We base our advice on two main principles of accessibility: Universal Design and the chain of accessibility.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Organising a meeting or conference with the **Universal Design** principle in mind is about striving for a smart approach that supports and satisfies as large and diverse a group of participants as possible. After all, any efforts you make in terms of accessibility not only benefit customers with a disability, but everyone. Just think of your employees (both your own and externally hired ones), your speakers, pregnant women and participants with a temporary disability.

EACH LINK IN THE CHAIN MUST BE STRONG

The concept of accessibility is often still limited to spatial or physical accessibility. This is not right. Of course, aspects of infrastructure such as doors, halls, ramps, lifts and adapted toilets are important. But accessibility also includes **good communication, extra facilities, customer friendliness, service provision, logical signposting, etc.**

It is the coherence between all of these aspects that forms the starting point of the chain of **accessibility**. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. This also applies to how accessible your meeting or conference is. You can't just tackle one part of it – you have to take care of every aspect and make sure that the notion of coherence is correct.

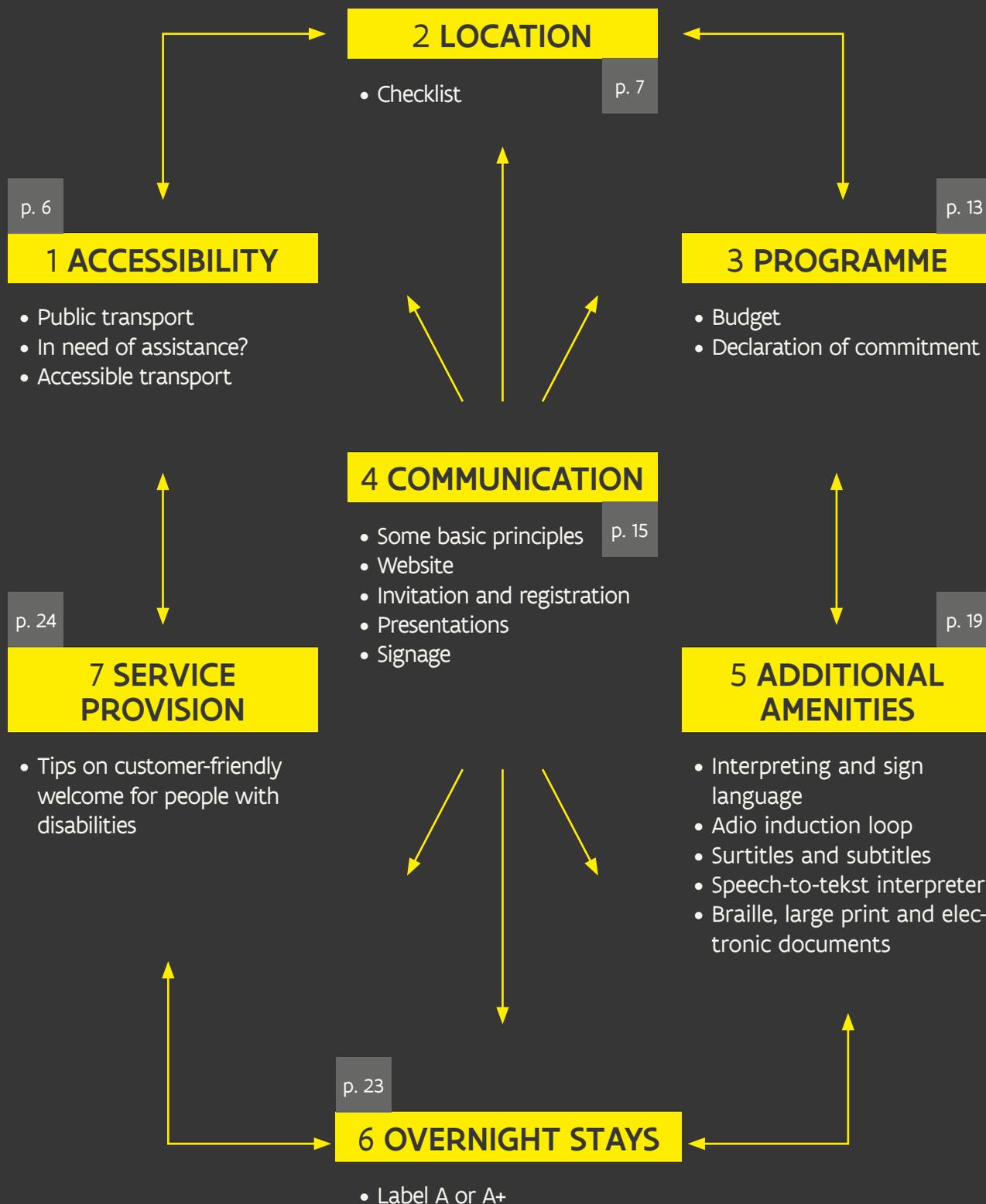
An accessible meeting or conference location does not necessarily mean that everyone can participate in your meeting or conference. After all, if this location is difficult to reach by public transport, many people with disabilities will be left out in the cold. Everyone must also be able to fully participate in the **content and social programme** of your meeting or conference and that sometimes requires extra facilities.

Does your meeting or conference involve an overnight stay? Keep the needs and wishes of your customers in mind at all times and communicate clearly about accessibility and possible facilities. This is the only way for people with disabilities to decide whether or not to participate.

Last but not least, encourage participants to share their questions and comments with you. Having a **customer-friendly attitude** often makes it easier to overcome hurdles.

VISITFLANDERS has developed this checklist together with Inter, the Flemish accessibility agency. It provides meeting locations and conference organisers with a basis for organising fully accessible conferences. Good preparation is half the battle. Good luck!

Your handy checklist





This plan of action offers you the tools you need to organise fully accessible meetings and conferences. We will start with the chain of accessibility and touch on a number of important points that need to be considered. Use it as a checklist during your preparations. This way you will avoid needing to provide extra adjustments or facilities at the very last moment.

This brochure was produced in collaboration with **Inter Vlaanderen**, an independent centre of expertise in accessibility and Universal Design. It aims to provide a broad range of services (from advice and practical support to training and research) and focuses on buildings and environment, policies, mobility and events, among other things. The ultimate goal is to improve interactions between people and the environment.

What services does Inter Vlaanderen offer?

- mentoring of organisers during the preparatory phase of their meeting or conference;
- guidance on locations for meetings during conversion work or new construction work;
- rental of equipment or assistance, or referral to appropriate suppliers via the website www.intro-tools.be.



1 Accessibility

Is the location of your conference or meeting easily accessible?

- **Is the location easily accessible from the airport?**
- **Is the location easily accessible by car and by public transport?**
- **Have you provided clear communications about accessibility?**
Provide the participants with an overview that includes:
 - (accessible) railway stations and bus stops nearby;
 - (accessible) parking facilities (and their location) nearby;
 - contact details of (accessible) taxi or transport companies (if necessary).
- **Will you have participants attending who have a physical disability?**
 - Check to see if they need customised transportation to and from the station or airport.
 - Ask if they need assistance between the arrival point and the entrance to the location.

Are all planned additional activities, restaurants and (chosen) accommodation easily accessible?

- **Are you going to provide a shuttle service for this?**
 - If so, choose an accessible shuttle bus.
 - Or book a suitable taxi for wheelchair users.



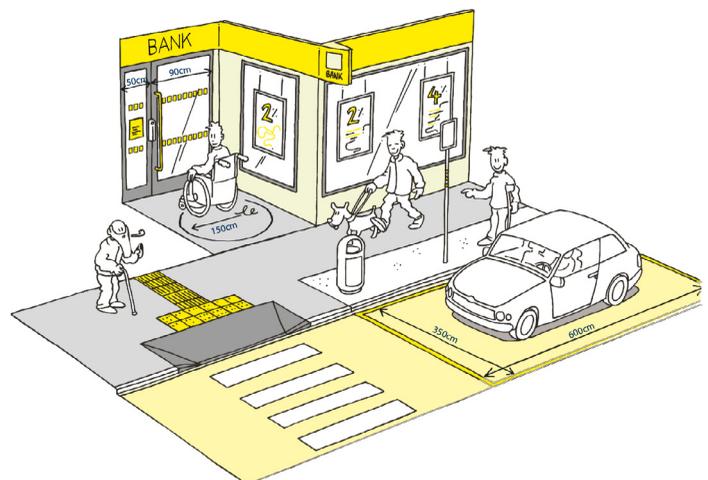
2 Location

Do you want to be certain you have chosen an accessible location? Soon, you will be able to choose a building or site that has been awarded the VISITFLANDERS accessibility accreditation for MICE infrastructure. This accreditation guarantees that the building in which you organise your conference or meeting is accessible to everyone.

The number of accredited MICE infrastructures is still growing, but in the meantime, you can use the checklist below to determine for yourself whether the basic accessibility of a location is good.

2.1 PARKING

- Ensure that there are clear signs to the car park.
- Keep a section free as a kiss-and-ride area.
- Reserve 6% of your total number of parking spaces for visitors with a disability. Always allow at least 1 reserved space. Make sure the space(s) are located as close as possible to the entrance.
- Put in place clear agreements with your staff about who may use the reserved spaces.

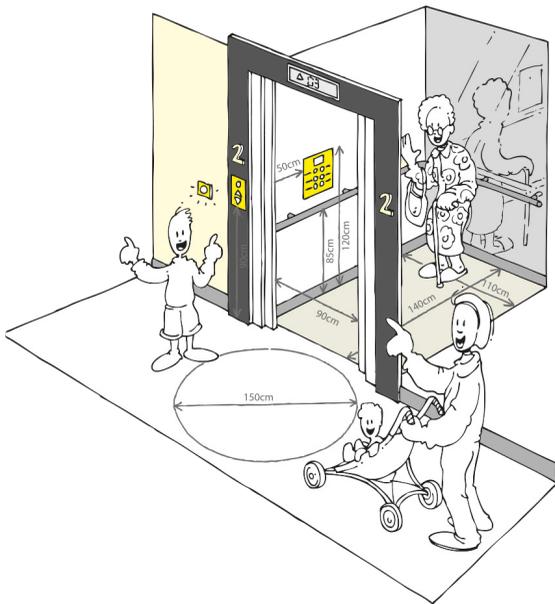


2.4 ROUTES

- All routes between the different areas must be easily accessible:
 - min. 150cm wide;
 - where the route narrows for up to 120cm in distance: min. 90cm wide;
 - if the route narrows for up to 10m in length: min. 120 cm wide. Allow for a free turning space of 150 cm in diameter before and after the narrowing.
- Glass doors on the route? Don't forget to mark them at three heights (see above).

2.5 DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS

Less than 1m difference in height? Rent a sloping surface (such as a metal ramp). An overview of suppliers can be found at www.intro-tools.be.



More than 1m difference in height?

Check to see if there is a lift available that meets the following criteria:

- The cabin of the lift is min. 110cm wide and 140cm deep.
- The automatic door has a transit width of min. 90cm.
- The operation buttons are a min. 50cm away from the corner.



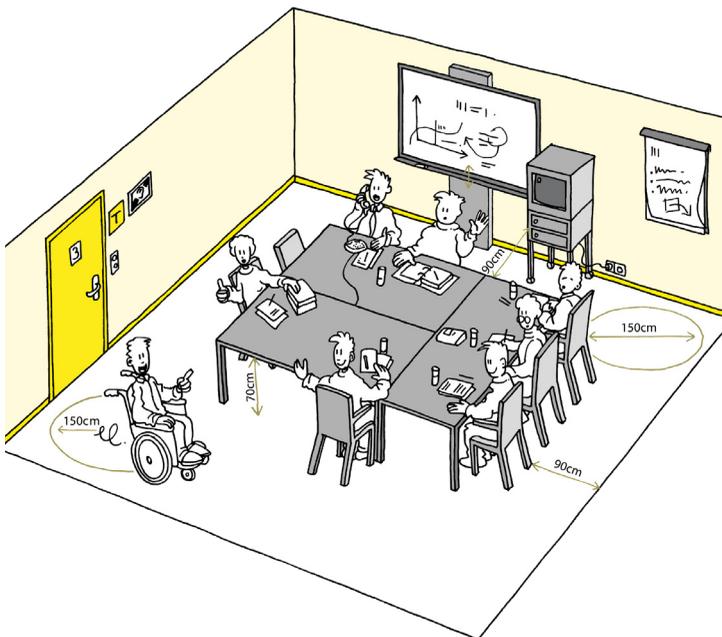
2.6 RECEPTION AND COUNTER

Does the building have an accessible counter? If not, install a mobile counter that meets the following conditions:

- Do you help people standing up? Do not make the counter higher than 110cm. And, in addition, provide a lowered section of max. 80cm in height.
- Do you ask people to fill out their details or consult something? Then underneath your counter or table, make sure there is a free space of 75cm height, 90cm width and 60cm depth.
- Make sure the counter is well lit, but avoid backlighting.
- If necessary, offer a (mobile/individual) audio induction loop at the counter for people with hearing impairments and people with hearing aids.

2.7 MEETING ROOM, ASSEMBLY HALL AND AUDITORIUM

- Ensure that there is at least one free area in the room that can be used by wheelchair users as a turning circle of 150 cm.
- Do not leave wires from electrical appliances such as laptops or projectors lying around. Tape them down if necessary.
- Provide bright, even lighting. This is useful for people with a visual impairment and for deaf people who lip-read. If necessary, provide a (mobile) induction loop.



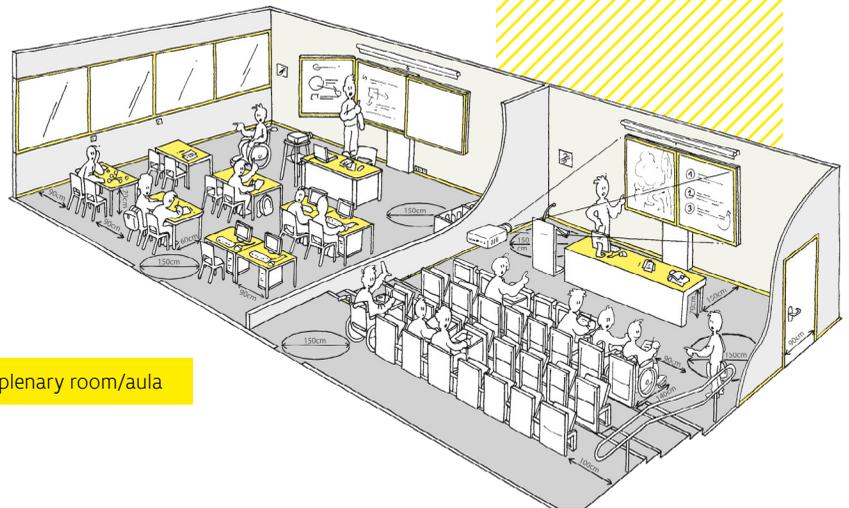
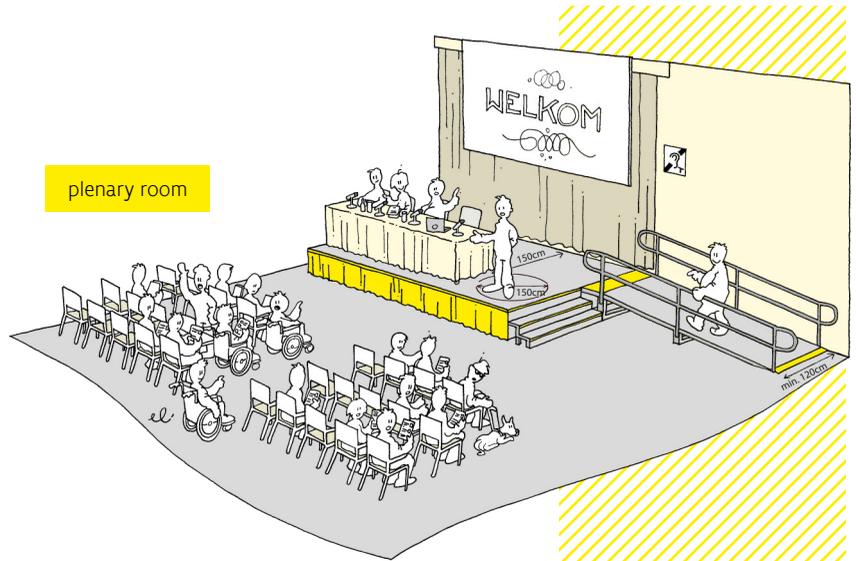
In meeting rooms

- Maintain a passage between the furniture of min. 90cm wide. Note: passages become narrower when people are sitting on chairs.
- Make sure that a wheelchair can roll under your tables: min. 75cm high, 60cm deep and 90cm wide.
- Use chairs that are easy to move. This way, you can quickly create a clear space for wheelchairs.
- Provide chairs with armrests for people who have difficulty getting up and sitting down.



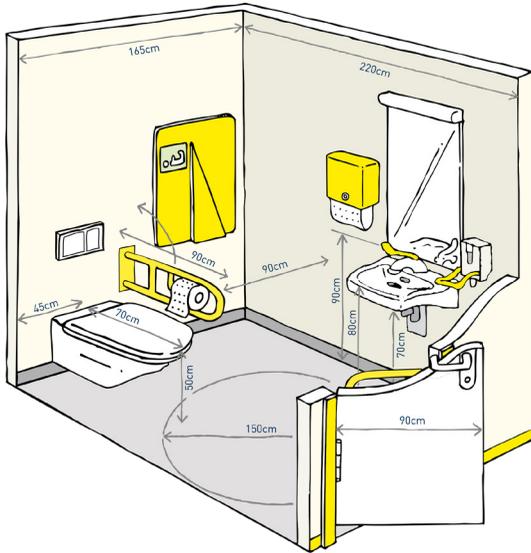
In a hall or plenary room

- In the first 50 places, reserve at least 2 seats for wheelchair users and then at least 1 additional adapted seat for every 50 additional participants.
- Can the chairs be moved around? Then keep free a space of 90cm in width and 140cm in depth.
- Do you have fixed furniture? Next to a row of benches, provide a space that is 90cm wide and 140 cm deep.
- In addition to the wheelchair space, reserve space for at least one non-wheelchair user (helper).
- Book a place at the front for visually impaired participants.





2.8 SANITARY PROVISIONS

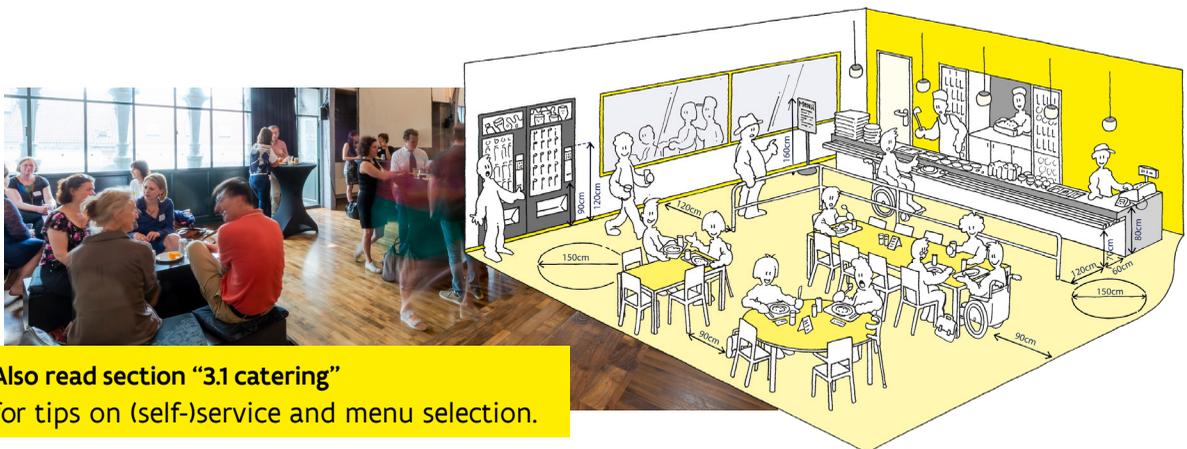


- Indicate the location of the adapted toilet using a pictogram.
- Allow the toilet door to open outwards.
- Ensure that wheelchair users in the toilet area have a turning circle of min. 150 cm.
- On one side next to the toilet, provide a minimum of 90cm free space and in front of the toilet, a minimum of 120cm of free space – so that people can move easily from their wheelchair to the toilet.
- Install a fixed support rail on the wall next to the toilet. And on the other side, install a fold-away support rail.
- It is preferable to place a washbasin in the toilet. Ensure that it does not hinder opening the door or use of the toilet.
- No adapted toilet? Then rent a mobile adapted toilet. An overview of suppliers can be found at www.intro-tools.be.

2.9 COFFEE AND CATERING AREA

Reception or standing buffet? Alternate standing tables with standard tables for sitting at.

- Leave enough space between the furniture at all times: at least 1m.
- Ensure that there are a few seats in a quiet corner. This way, you won't just be helping people with autism, but lots of other people who just want to escape from the crowd for a moment.
- Make sure the dishes and drinks on the buffet are well-lit.



Also read section “3.1 catering” for tips on (self-)service and menu selection.



3 Programme

- Immediately budget for the costs of accessibility services: interpreting and sign language, assistance at the reception or information counter, adapted transport, hire of equipment, etc.
- Are you outsourcing specific services to external parties, such as the catering? Then make sure that they comply with an accessible total package. Include accessibility criteria as a cooperation condition and confirm that they undertake to comply with it by means of a declaration of commitment. Download an example of a ready-to-use declaration of commitment here. A ready-to-use example of a declaration of commitment can be requested at accessible@visitflanders.com.
- Take into account participants with disabilities:
 - Take note that people with physical disabilities often need more time to move from one location to another.
 - Take regular breaks. This is relevant, for example, for people with a visual or auditory impairment, diabetics and sign language interpreters, and by extension for everyone.

3.1 CATERING

- Self-service for people with disabilities? This is not an easy task.
 - Preferably offer service or provide assistance.
 - Is service not possible? Then make sure you have a lowered area on your buffet table. This allows a wheelchair user to move their wheelchair underneath it.
 - Take into account certain food preferences and diets. Ask in advance for any specific dietary preferences of your guests.
 - Some may follow an adapted diet for health reasons or due to their beliefs: vegans, vegetarians, people who follow a gluten-free, kosher or halal diet, etc.



- By default, tweak your buffet selection to include the most common dietary preferences.
- Offer healthy snacks and drinks and provide sufficient sugar-free alternatives for diabetics.
- Inform yourself clearly and correctly about food products. In this way you can, for example, help people who suffer from allergies.
- Place information signs on the buffet showing the ingredients of foods (e.g. meat) and allergens (such as gluten, peanuts and lactose)³.

3.2 ACTIVITIES WHILE ON THE MOVE

- Check whether you need to take extra measures with regard to accessibility.
- Are there participants with a visual or auditory impairment who will be attending? You should then consider whether people providing assistance or an interpreter should provide sign language on the move.
- Is there a need for adapted transportation to external locations such as the restaurant or hotel? Read more about accessible and adapted transport in Flanders and Brussels at www.visitflanders.com/toegankelijkheid Transport > In Flanders.
- Inform participants about what the activities entail and about any possible walking distances to get to external locations.

Looking for a suitable place to eat or drink?

- VISITFLANDERS will help you in your search for a suitable location.

³ Since 13 December 2014, caterers have been obliged to provide information about allergenic substances that have been used and are present in their products. More info about this European Regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers can be found on the FPS Public Health website.



4 Communication

4.1 SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

Use the correct language

- Do not refer to people with disabilities or chronic illnesses as being ‘the disabled’, invalids or otherwise handicapped.
- Do not talk about people as being deaf and dumb, but about deaf people or people with hearing impairments.
- ‘Sign language’ is not the right designation. Flemish sign language, American sign language, international sign language are the correct expressions.

Make sure that everything is clearly legible

- Create sufficient contrast between the text and background. Black and white, for example, is easy to read, while the combination of green and blue is not.
- Doubts? Convert your text and background or image into greyscale. Is everything still readable? Then the contrast is good.
- Don’t put a busy photo or image behind your text. This makes it difficult to read.
- Use sans-serif fonts. These are easier for people with a reading disability to read. Accessible fonts include Arial and Calibri.
- Avoid underlining and italics.

- Use Arabic numerals instead of writing them out in full. That's easier to read.
- Choose a sufficiently large font.
- Do not type whole words in capital letters. They do not provide a clear picture of the word and are therefore more difficult to read.

4.2 WEBSITE

- Are you developing a website? In that case, prioritise ease of use. Take into account the basic conditions for making your site accessible⁴:
 - Build an accessible website.
- Provide information about the accessibility of your meeting or conference: location, accessibility, facilities, potential problems, etc.
 - Provide contact details should people have questions about accessibility and assistance.
 - Subtitle videos with sound or spoken text on your website. In this way, they are also accessible to deaf people and those with a hearing impairment.
 - Also consider using sign language on the videos on your website. It is the easiest way for deaf people and those that have a hearing impairment to receive information.

4.3 INVITATIONS AND REGISTRATION

- Invite your guests and let them register via your (accessible) website.
- Please ensure that the registration form is also accessible to disabled persons
 - try using Survey Monkey – it is easy to use: www.surveymonkey.com.

When registering, ask your participants if they have any specific requirements or requests.

- Formulate it like this, for example: “Do you have specific requirements or requests that you would like us to take into account? Please do tell us.” You should therefore provide a field for entering this data.
- In respect of lunch or dinner, ask about any possible dietary preferences or food allergies.
- In addition to a phone number, include an e-mail address. In this way, deaf people and those with a hearing impairment can also easily make contact.

⁴ An accessible website ensures that visually impaired people can read the texts using reading software. Someone with reduced hand functionality surfs the web using a keyboard. This requires you to make a number of adjustments to the website.



4.4 PRESENTATIONS

- Ensure the room is well-lit so that participants with hearing impairments can see their interpreter clearly.
- Remind people who have a question for someone who is deaf or has a hearing impairment that they should directly address the person themselves, and not the interpreter.

Provide speakers with the following advice:

- Speak in a normal tone and at an average speed, unless the interpreter asks for you to speak more slowly.
- Follow the recommendations on legibility when designing your slides. Make sure that the text is sufficiently large, with a minimum point size of 30.
- Create your presentation as if you were not going to show it: describe all visual information such as images and tables. Explain all of the information and text. Are you showing a video? Then either beforehand or afterwards, summarise everything that was shown. In this way, people with a visual impairment can also get an idea of it.
- Subtitle your videos.
- Give your audience a microphone when they want to ask a question. In that way, everyone can hear the contributions from the audience.

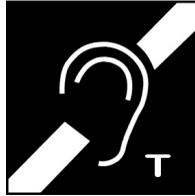


4.5 SIGNAGE

- Check that all accessibility facilities are clearly marked. For example, use signs, pictograms, door signs or information on digital displays.
- Pay extra attention to signage, also for deaf people and those with a hearing impairment:



Sign language



Induction loop



Wheelchair accessible

- Clearly indicate the route to be followed by your participants. Install clearly visible signage on the routes that you can see easily and from a distance:
 - Ideally, signs should have a ratio of 1/25. Do they have to be legible from 10 metres? Then they should be 40cm tall. From 20 metres? Then 80cm. And so on.
 - Is the reader close to a signpost or sign? For example in a lift or at a door? Then hang the signs at a height between 140 and 160cm.
 - Is the reader further away from the signpost? For example, in a car park or in a large-hall? Then make sure that the bottom of your sign is at least 210cm.
 - Avoid placing signposts on the route, so they don't get in anybody's way.
- Clearly indicate where certain presentations or workshops will take place:
 - Install the signs in logical locations, such as in the hall or at the entrance to the car park.
 - Hang up large signs (e.g. showing an overview of the services in a large hall) at more than 1m in height.
 - Hang small signs (e.g. showing the name of a room) at a height between 140 and 160cm.
 - Make sure that people do not have to cross a threshold to reach or read signs.



5 Additional Amenities

5.1 INTERPRETING AND SIGN LANGUAGE

- A deaf person will often bring their own interpreter, but not always.
- Have you been asked to provide an interpreter?
 - Ask the preferences of the participant in question.
 - Decide which interpreter(s) you need.
 - Each country has its own variant of sign language, sometimes even several. In Flanders, there is Flemish sign language. In addition, International Sign Language is the most common variant – most sign language users can understand it.
 - Are there sessions in different languages? Then you will need more than one interpreter. Participants using Flemish sign language in an English spoken presentation need an interpreter that is able to translate from English to Flemish sign language and vice versa.
 - Will the meeting last longer than 1.5 hours? Then you will need 2 interpreters. One interpreter will take over, while the other has a rest. In this way, the quality of the translations will remain at a high level.
- Is one or more of your (international) speakers deaf? Then always discuss with the speaker and his interpreter how the presentation will be done: by voice (and in which language), in International Sign Language or in their own sign language? In the latter case, you will need an interpreter who knows the sign language and is able to translate it into spoken language.

Ensure that the interpreters are well looked after:

- Book a suitable place for the sign language interpreter: next to the speaker.
- This allows the deaf person to see both the interpreter and the speaker at a glance.
- Provide adequate lighting for the speakers and interpreter.
- Give the interpreters advance information so that they can prepare themselves: the agenda, presentations, background information, etc.
- In addition, sort out logistical arrangements with the interpreters, for example regarding where they will take their seats.
- Is it a large conference with lots of deaf participants? Then film the interpreter and project the images onto a screen.
- As an organiser, you have to pay for the costs of an interpreter. This is normal practice.
- It is normal practice that the organiser pays for the costs of the interpreter.



5.2 INDUCTION LOOP

- Users with a hearing aid benefit from an induction loop. This ensures that people with hearing impairments can listen to a presentation without any disturbing ambient noise.
- Some locations have a fixed induction loop, this is usually indicated at the reception with the universal pictogram.
- What should you do if there is no induction loop and a participant asks for it? Rent a mobile or individual induction loop from www.intro-tools.be. It is customary that as an organiser, you will bear the costs.



5.3 SURTITLES AND SUBTITLES

- Are you showing audiovisual material at your conference? Be sure to subtitle it.
- Consider providing presentations with surtitles: you then convert the spoken text and other auditory information into written text. Accompanying explanations during the presentation can be projected onto a text bar in or above the backdrop.
- Pre-program the subtitles and surtitles, in whole or in part.
- Do not suspend the text bar too high.
- Be aware that sign language users often prefer sign language over surtitles and subtitles. Tailor your choice to the participants.

5.4 SPEECH-TO-TEXT

In contrast to a subtitler, a speech-to-text interpreter almost always works live. He or she types everything that is said and provides information about atmospheric sounds (such as laughter, voice nuances and ambient sounds). This information appears on a personal screen, a text bar, or is projected onto a larger screen.

- Consider having speech-to-text interpreters at conferences that are attended by a large number of deaf people or those with a hearing impairment. It is not only deaf people and people with hearing impairments who appreciate this. A speech-to-text interpreter also provides support for other participants.
- Provide the speech-to-text interpreter with as much information about the speakers in advance as possible, and if also possible, with the preparations for a presentation or panel discussion.

5.5 BRAILLE, LARGE PRINT AND ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS

Are blind people or visually impaired people attending your meeting or conference?

- Provide them with a **Braille or large print version** of your programme booklet and/or presentations.
- If possible, digitally adjust your presentations in **advance**. This helps visually impaired participants as well as sign language interpreters. Incidentally, it is not always possible to convert everything to Braille or large print. Moreover, not everyone knows Braille. Make sure you have an accessible document.

About Braille

Braille is internationally standardised as an alphabet and therefore universally accepted by all blind and world organisations. This means you can convert any language to Braille. Do you need to convert a Dutch text into Braille for a French-speaking visitor? Then you must first translate the text into French. Only then can you convert it (or have it converted) into Braille.

You can request a text conversion (in different source languages) into Braille at:

- Blindenzorg Licht en Liefde vzw:
omzet@blindenzorglichtenliefde.be
- Transkript: info@transkript.be,
+ 32 2 466 94 40

Expect to pay an average of 1.5 euros per converted page. Do you need more than one copy? Then work on the basis of 0.16 euros per copy. Be careful with large amounts of text. One line of text corresponds to three lines in Braille. Conversion can take up to 3 weeks.



6 Overnight stays

Is accessible accommodation required? You can find this by using the Flemish accreditation for accessible tourism: A (basic access) and A+ (comfortably accessible).

- Read more about the Flemish accreditation for accessible tourism
www.visitflanders.com>accessibility>designation labels
- Find accessible accommodation.
www.visitflanders.com>accessibility>find an accommodation



7 Service Provision

- Provide a point of contact to whom people with disabilities can direct questions.
- Make sure that the person in charge at the reception or information counter is fully aware of and up-to-date with accessibility facilities.

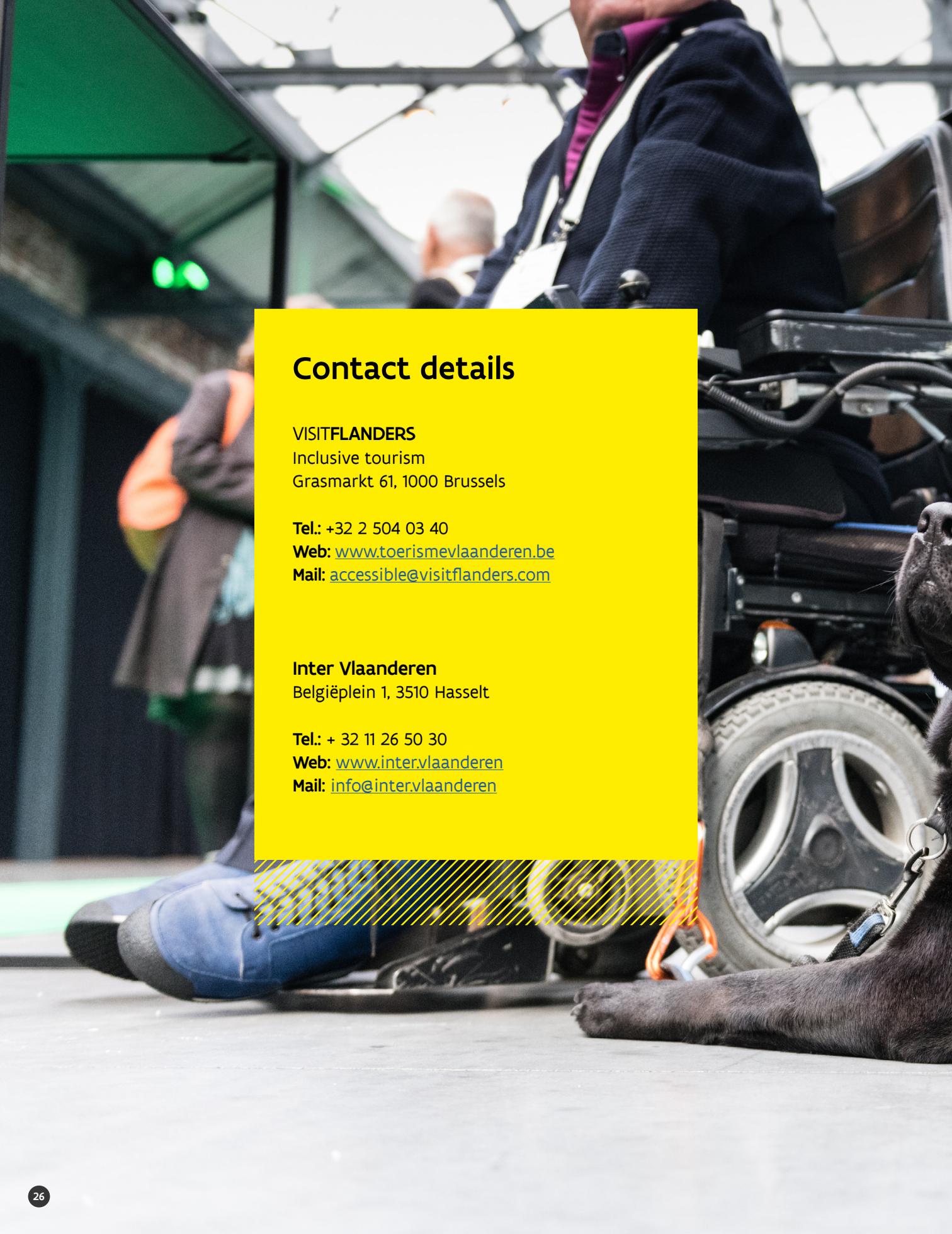
Does a participant need assistance?

- Hire an assistant by contacting events@intervlaanderen. Specify the language spoken by the participant.
- What can the assistant do?
 - welcome and inform disabled people about the facilities
 - provide assistance during the programme
 - monitor the correct use of certain facilities
- Meet them at the reception.
- Put everything in order for any **assistance dogs**⁵. You will be able to recognise them by their harness, support frame and jacket. Guide dogs are the best known type of assistance dog, but there are also hearing dogs for people with hearing impairments, assistance dogs for people with a motor disability and medical alert dogs for people with epilepsy, diabetes or Alzheimer's, etc.
 - Prepare an area for the dogs beforehand.
 - Offer the dogs a bowl of water: this is not mandatory, but a nice touch.

⁵ The Decree of 20 March 2009 on the accessibility of public places for persons with assistance dogs ('Assistance Dog Decree') grants people who use an assistance dog the right to access public places such as cafés, restaurants, shops, hotels, municipal services and facilities, public transport, etc.



- Organise a guided tour of the building for blind participants at the start of the meeting or conference (toilet, dog area, reception area, meeting rooms and auditorium).
- Provide refresher training to employees on the principles of a customer-friendly welcome.
- Do you work with a large group of employees and volunteers? Is it therefore impossible to train everyone? Then communicate frequently and specifically about dealing with people with disabilities, for example by means of a memo or via e-mail.

A photograph of a person in a wheelchair with a dog sitting on the floor in a public space. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a purple shirt. The dog is a black dog, possibly a Labrador, sitting on the floor. The background shows a modern building with a glass facade and a green light. The text is overlaid on a yellow rectangular background.

Contact details

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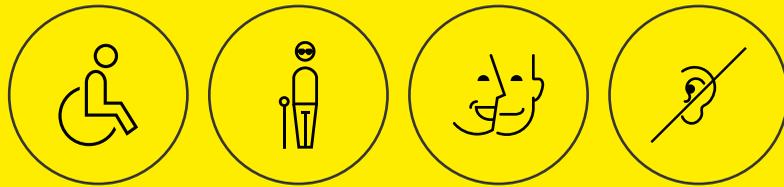
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