



EDF guide for accessible meetings for all

35 square de Meeûs
1000 Brussels - Belgium

tel +32 2 282 46 00
fax +32 2 282 46 09

info@edf-feph.org
www.edf-feph.org



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EDF Guide for Accessible Meetings for All

The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

Introduction

A successful conference with active participation, good debate, with audiences from different backgrounds and perspectives, will depend on how conference organisers accommodate the needs of **all** possible participants, including persons with disabilities.


In order to do so, there are a number of actions that you will have to take into account before and during the meeting. These guidelines are intended to support conference organisers in achieving those aims.

Meeting Venue

If possible, try to visit the venue of the meeting in advance (and ideally ask for an expert check in house or through a local disability organisation) to check the accessibility of premises and anticipate possible problems. Here are the things you should look for:


Basic Access

- Stairs and Ramps
 - The entrance should not have stairs, and if it does, there should be a lift or ramp as an alternative.
 - Make sure the ramp is not too steep (tolerated slope is 5%, min. acceptable ramp width 90cm).
 - All ramps and stairs/steps need to have handrails.
- Doors
 - Doors should be at least 85 cm wide.
 - Sliding doors should be at least 110 cm width
 - Make sure there are normal entrance doors in addition to any revolving doors, as these are not accessible.
- Toilets:

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- The minimum dimensions for a fully equipped toilet (toilet bowl and sink) are 200 cm x 225 cm
 - Dimensions of 150 x 150 cm could be accepted only in case of toilets without a sink.
 - In this case, the sink must be provided in a separate room free from obstacles.
 - Rotation space of 150 cm diameter.
 - A space of at least 110 cm is required in the direction of the door.
 - The door should have a minimum width of 100 cm and should open towards the outside. Sliding doors are also acceptable.
 - There should be a space of at least 90 cm width on the left or right of the toilet bowl, so that wheelchair users can approach it.
 - The upper surface of the toilet bowl should be installed at 48-50 cm high.
 - Two separate folding handles 75- 8090 cm in length should be placed (one on each side of the toilet) at 80 cm high at 35 cm distance from the toilet bowl.
 - Don't place the bin for sanitary towels in the open space designated for people with wheelchairs.
 - There should be a wall mounted sink without a column underneath
 - There should be a vertical mirror of a 100 cm height installed at the same height with the upper surface of the sink.
 - A tactile map of the toilet at the entrance can be helpful!
- Lifts:
 - Command systems should have audio and light signals so that everyone can use them regardless of disability.
 - These audio and light signals should also indicate each floor.
 - If there are multiple lifts, make sure an audio signal indicates which lift has arrived.
 - Lift button (both outside and inside the lift) should be installed between 80 and 120 cm high in order to be reached by a wheelchair user.
 - These buttons should also be indicated in Braille.
 - There should be a manoeuvring space of 150 cm diameter in front of the lift door.
 - Cabin
 - Dimensions: min. 140 cm deep and min. 110 cm wide.
 - Adequate lighting (100 lux).
 - Mirror and a support bar should be present.

Meeting Room

- Meeting room with no steps, ramps if necessary.
 - Ramps and stairs with handrails.
- If there is a podium, a ramp or a wheelchair lift needs to be installed if one of the speakers is a wheelchair user
 - Ramp: 5% slope, 90 cm min width
- If an induction loop for hard of hearing people is installed, make sure it is working.
- Avoid thick carpets if possible, since it makes it more difficult to circulate in wheelchairs.

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- Avoid tripping hazards such as loose cables or personal belongings in the aisles.
 - Make sure the thresholds of a door are not too high, since it is hard for wheelchair users to navigate.
 - A possible solution can be to place a mat or a temporary threshold ramp to smoothen the access.
 - Clear signs can help people navigating the space.
 - Clearly indicate where to find the toilets, refreshments, and exits in clear and simple language.
 - Black writing with font Arial is best for readability.
 - The signs should have pictograms too.
 - Seating:
 - Make sure there are spaces for wheelchair users. They must be flat and near the escape routes.
 - There must be space in between rows and in the aisles to circulate with a wheelchair.
 - Deaf or hard of hearing persons need an unobstructed view of the sign language interpreter.
 - Classroom style seating is the preferred option to allow use of assistive devices and computers/tablets to access electronic documents.

Choice of Accommodation

If your event or meeting involves guests staying at a hotel or other accommodation, you should also check the accessibility of the rooms. We recommend that you visit the hotel in advance; even if the hotel advertises accessible or adapted rooms the reality often varies.

- Entrance (see requirements for meeting venue);
- Lift (see requirements for meeting venue);
- Accessibility of corridors
- Accessible dining and breakfast room;
- Room:
 - There should be free moving space of 90 cm around all furniture.
 - Rotation space of 150 cm.
 - Cupboard with clothes hangers on 130 cm height maximum.
 - Preferably no thick carpets.
 - Information about hotel services and emergency procedures in accessible formats.
 - Key cards should have a tactile distinction so blind and partially sighted people can learn how to insert the card in the door without having to go through several attempts
 - It is preferable that room numbers are also in Braille and in big font size, with good contrast and lighting.
- Bathroom in the room:

- See requirements for meeting venue. In addition to them:
- Rotation area of 150 cm.
- Preferably a roll-in shower (without border) with little inclines on the ground, with folding chair installed at 50 cm high, with a seat of 40 x 50 cm minimum, and folding grips of 90 cm long, situated at 35 cm of the axe of the seat and installed at a height of 80 cm.
- Bath:
 - Height = 50 cm, approaching area of 80 cm next to the bath.
 - At one of the extremities of the bath there should be a transfer plan of 60 cm over the total width of the bath.
 - Next to the transfer plan there should be a grip of 80 cm long at a height of 70 cm.

Note: Check with the participants beforehand, they know best what they need. Some persons with disabilities might manage in a regular room but this should be confirmed.

Before the Meeting

General

- Make sure website or online registration form for the event is accessible.
- Registration form should ask for contact information and further information about accessibility needs, such as:
 - Special dietary requirements
 - Transport needs (for wheelchair users) from airport/station to the meeting venue & return, flight details (date + hour of arrival/departure + flight number)
 - Accessible room requirements
 - Personal assistant (e.g. for some meetings the assistant might need to register as well to get access to the venue)
 - Interpretation needs, including sign language, speech-to-text (captioning), or audio description
 - Accessible parking space needs
 - Provision of documents in accessible formats (such as large print, braille, easy-to-read versions, or accessible electronic format)
 - Open question to provide more details
 - “Please let us know if you have any specific accessibility needs that we should know to make the conference a success for you”
- Electricity outlets for computers and other electronic devices should be available everywhere in the room, ideally for every table.
 - Use extension cords if necessary but make sure they are safely taped to the floor.
- Reserved parking places for wheelchair users near the meeting venue.
 - Make sure there is an accessible route (without steps or with ramps/ lifts etc.) from special parking spaces to the accessible entrance.
- Try to make sure the venue has a silent room available.

- When using name tags with a lanyard, make sure to print the information on both sides so that no blank page is visible when the tag flips over.

Programme

- Organise the programme so that breaks are scheduled at appropriate times.
 - Breaks should last at least 20 minutes long, and should be taken approximately every 90 minutes.
- The organiser should ensure that times are adhered to.
 - Since many persons with disabilities need to plan, for example, transport to and from events, resting times, or take medication with food, sticking to the schedule is important and respectful.
- Distribute the programme in accessible formats, ideally ahead of time.
- Allow sufficient time for discussion and questions as well as for interpretation.
- Before starting the programme make an announcement with the applicable “housekeeping rules” including useful practical information, e.g. how to connect to the wifi.

Documents

- Send meeting documents and practical details in advance.
 - Venue of the meeting (mention the accessible entrance when this one differs from the principal entrance)
 - Address of the hotel
 - Telephone number of the organisers
 - Transport information (public transport schedules, adapted transport schedules/contact details)
 - Location of reserved parking places
 - Type of electricity outlets/plugs (in case adapters are needed)
- Prepare spare copies in braille, large print, and in accessible electronic format.
- If there is a change of programme on short notice, you can ask local blind persons’ organisation or library to print them if needed.

During the Meeting

Welcome

- One or two people should be available at arrival and departure to welcome and guide the participants to the conference room.
 - During longer events it can be useful to have a help desk.
- Brief the security guards and staff of the venue about the needs of the participants with disabilities so that also they are ready to assist if required.
 - Let them know at which times these participants are arriving.
- When the person is there, address her or him directly and thereafter the person accompanying (personal assistant or sign language interpreter).



- Be as natural and polite as possible as you would be with any other person.
- Propose help, but wait until the offer for help is accepted before doing anything, and listen carefully.


- People with reduced mobility:
 - Make sure beforehand that the corridors and the meeting room are free from obstructions and well lit.
 - Be at the main entrance on time and offer help to open the doors and to get over the steps.
 - Be informed about the location of accessible toilets and what the evacuation procedures are in the event of an emergency.
 - Only push a person in a wheelchair if you have the person's permission, and avoid too sudden or quick manoeuvres.

- People with visual impairments:
 - Always speak first. Introduce yourself and other persons clearly, explaining where they are in relation to the person.
 - Say the person's name when you start a conversation so that he or she knows that you are talking to him or her.
 - Before shaking hands, let the person know that you are about to do so.
 - Always advise the person that you are leaving, so that he or she is not left talking to an empty space.
 - If the person wants you to assist him or her in getting around, guide rather than lead. Ask the person how he or she would prefer to be guided (e.g. by the elbow, shoulder, etc.). Let him or her know when you are approaching steps or obstacles. Try to make sure in advance that the corridors and the meeting room are free from any obstacles.
 - Be ready to give a brief description of the 'geography' (shape, size and windows) and contents (furniture and people) of a room. Warn a blind person about possible dangers in a new environment, for example, very hot radiators. To help a person to sit down, just place his/her hand on the back of the chair.
 - Explain where the toilets can be found or show the way if necessary.

- People with hearing impairments:
 - Find out how the person prefers to communicate – signing, lip reading or captioning
 - In case of captioning with a screen, make sure that the screen is big enough and that people who need it can easily see it.
 - Sign language interpreters should be in front of the people they interpret for or well visible to them.
 - If the person prefers lip reading, face him or her (make sure he/she is looking at you) and speak in a normal, clear and steady way.
 - Do not shout or exaggerate your mouth movements, but use your facial expressions to emphasise your meanings.



- Make sure your face is in the light and do not put your hands in front of your mouth.
 - Be ready to repeat yourself or rephrase a sentence if necessary. Some words are more difficult to interpret and so it may be useful to try different words.
 - Keep distractions such as background noise to a minimum (avoid background music in the hall and in the conference room during breaks)
- People with intellectual disabilities:
 - Avoid lengthy written instructions or plans and diagrams on paper.
 - If possible, accompany the person to where he/she has to go.
 - Write down your name and telephone number for the person.
 - For completing forms, check if the person needs assistance. more than reading and writing, there might be an issue of understanding.
 - Provide forms in multiple languages, since many people with intellectual disabilities do not speak foreign languages.
 - Try to break down complex information into chunks and keep language simple and logical.
 - Keep distractions such as background noise to a minimum.
 - Give the person time to react and reply.
 - Speak to the person in a normal, natural way.
 - Don't take offence at unusual attitudes or reactions of the person.
 - Explain where the toilets can be found.
 - Persons with speech impairments:
 - Be patient, give them the time to speak, and let them finish their sentences before replying.
 - If you do not understand, do not pretend to, but tell them that you haven't and ask them to repeat.
 - Persons with psychosocial disabilities:
 - Psychosocial disabilities, or mental health issues, as it more commonly known, are invisible and can affect anyone.
 - These people may sometimes experience difficulties coping with daily life and the tasks and interactions it brings. Meetings can be a source of stress and can trigger panic, distress, or claustrophobia.
 - Some persons may feel more comfortable being accompanied by a friend, family member or assistant for emotional support.
 - If the person is distressed, respond to him/her in a calm and polite way – try to see the person and not just the problem.
 - If a person mentions that he/she has a psychosocial disability, take it seriously and treat the person with respect. It may be difficult for them to open up about it.
 - If the person mentions that he/she has a psychosocial disability or is experiencing mental ill-health, take it seriously and treat the person with respect. It might be difficult for them to open up about it, if they would like to do so. At the same time,



some people might prefer not to share their experiences and should not be forced to do so.

- Offer assistance if the person seems confused, overwhelmed or distressed.
- Calmly answer any questions the person might have; the information may be important to reassure him/her.

Note: Each person is different and cannot be categorised. The explanations above are for guidance only, please check with the participant directly what he/she needs or prefers.

Speakers

- Inform speakers about the accessibility needs of the participants.
- It is important that speaking times and schedules are adhered to.
- Have speakers talk directly into the microphone and speak as slowly and clearly as possible to facilitate the work of the interpreters
- Check if the speaking arrangement is accessible. Speakers may need a ramp to get onto the stage, or the removal of a chair for a panel discussion.

Presentations

- All presentations should be in accessible formats and given to participants and sign language interpreters in advance.
- The content of the presentations should be clear, concrete, and easy to understand.
- Ensure basic accessibility of Power Point Presentations:
 - Never use a picture as background for the text.
 - Make sure text and background have sufficient contrast.
 - Try to put one sentence on one line.
 - Use a maximum of two fonts.
 - Use a large font.
 - Avoid block capitals and italics.
 - Do not use animations.
 - Slides are a visual support of your talk. Make sure to refer to all items on the screen. This includes:
 - describe pictures, without addressing individuals directly. e.g. avoid sentences like "and for you John I will describe the picture." Instead just describe it.
 - When pointing at something on the screen, name it. Don't say "this blue line shows the evolution of our monthly sales". Instead, describe the trend shown by the graph.
 - Don't say "the full report is available on this website". Make sure to mention the full web address.
- If videos are being used ensure that they are subtitled and give an audio description if no words are spoken in the video.
- Here is some advice on how to ensure accessibility for everyone, including persons with intellectual disabilities:
 - Use simple, straightforward language.



- Avoid abstract concepts.
- Use short, everyday words.
- Avoid jargon.
- Address the reader in direct, personal and respectful ways.
- Use practical examples.
- Use short sentences that cover only one main idea each.
- Avoid negations.
- Use active verbs.
- Keep punctuation simple.
- Repeat words rather than finding complex synonyms.
- Do not assume your audience has previous knowledge about a topic.
- Try not to use metaphors or figures of speech.
- Avoid words from another language.
- Dialogues are more useful than traditional presentations.
- Leave time for questions.
- Allow for the use of Accessibility Cards:
 - Audiences may show color-coded cards to the speaker to indicate that they understand what is being said.
 - The cards should be in different shapes for blind participants.
 - Green cards = participants agree with what the speaker is saying.
 - Yellow cards = speaker should slow down.
 - Red card = participants do not understand what the speaker is saying, and speaker should explain it again with simpler words.
- Let audience members introduce themselves briefly before asking a question.
- If a microphone is passed around, check whether the needs help holding the microphone.
- When a deaf sign language user takes the floor, remember to give the microphone to the interpreter and not the person who signs.


Additional Requirements

- Breaks:
 - For coffee breaks and lunches, make sure that low tables for wheelchair users (not only standing tables) are provided, together with some seats/chairs to rest for people that cannot stand for long time.
- For live captioning, an additional screen is required apart from the regular screen that displays the presentations. Make sure you check the space is big enough for two (or more) screens so that all participants can see both the presentations.



Annex 1: Glossary of Terms

- **Accessibility:** extent to which products, systems, services, environments and facilities can be used by people from a population with the widest range of user needs, characteristics and capabilities to achieve identified goals in identified contexts of use.
- **Reasonable accommodation:** means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- **Easy to read:** information designed specifically for people with intellectual disabilities as a group with particular literacy needs. It may include plain language and pictures.
- **Communication access real-time translation (CART)/Captioning/Velotype:** A person who is either physically present in the room or connected remotely via the internet types down word for word (verbatim) what is being said during the meeting in real time, similar to live subtitles on TV.
- **Alternative text:** Short text used described images on websites and in electronic documents, usually 125 characters or less.
- **Screen reader:** A software program used to allow reading of content and navigation of the screen using speech or Braille output. Used primarily by people who have difficulty seeing. JAWS and NVDA are examples.
- **Transcript:** A text only version of what has been said during a meeting or in a video; they are not real time and they generally are limited to speech only; they are not a recommended substitute for captions but can help to revisit the content later.
- **Assistive devices:** Devices used to assist a person with a disability, e.g., wheelchair, loop systems, or computer-based equipment.
- **Braille:** System of embossed characters for blind and partially sighted persons, formed by using a Braille cell, a combination of six dots consisting of two vertical columns of three dots each. Each simple Braille character is formed by one or more of these dots and occupies a full cell or space. Some Braille may use eight dots.
- **Braille display:** Hardware connected to a computer that echoes screen text on a box that has cells consisting of pins that move up and down to create Braille characters.
- **Hearing loop/Audio induction loop:** A special type of sound system for use by people with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. The hearing loop provides a magnetic, wireless signal that is picked up by the hearing aid when it is set to 'T' (Telecoil) setting.



It is a physical feature that must be pre-installed in a room or public location (e.g. at the ticket counter in a railway station).

- **Portable loop:** “neck loop”, which is essentially a small loop worn round the neck. These loops generally use an output on normal audio equipment designed to use standard headphones.
- **Boarding aid:** Device used to help persons with disabilities access a transport vehicles. This can be for example a bridging plate between the platform and the train, a ramp, an integrated lift on board of the train, or a separate lift outside on the platform.
- **Obstacle-free route:** A link between two or more areas that can be navigated by all persons with disabilities and reduced mobility. This includes the absence of physical obstacles that are not indicated, e.g. low-hanging cross beams, pillars, etc.
- **Step-free route:** A step-free route is a division of an obstacle-free route that meets the needs of mobility impaired persons. Changes in level are avoided or, when they cannot be avoided, they are bridged via ramps or lifts.
- **Signage:** Signs that indicate directions or locations both inside and outside buildings.
- **Sign languages** are natural languages that have the same linguistic properties as spoken languages. [eg: Italian Sign Language (LIS) in Italy, Spanish Sign Language (LSE) in Spain, etc]. They have evolved over the years in different Deaf Communities and vary greatly between countries and regions. There is not one universal sign language in the world; in fact some countries have more than one sign language or dialect. [eg: in Spain have LSE and Catalan Sign Language (LSC) too, French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB) and Flemish Sign Language (VGT) in Belgium, etc]
- **International Sign (IS)** has developed for use at international gatherings, and is provided at EDF events. This is a communication solution when having to provide access to a diverse audience.
- **Sign Language Interpreter:** A sign language interpreter is a professional who is fluent in two or more (sign) languages and interprets between a source language and a target language and mediate across cultures. The interpreter's task is to facilitate communication in a neutral manner, ensuring equal access to information and participation. Sign language interpreters can be both Deaf and hearing but should always carry appropriate sign language interpreter qualification from the respective country. A sign language interpreter is bound to a Code of Ethics, ensuring impartiality, confidentiality, linguistic and professional competence, as well as professional growth and development.



- **Subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing** (SDH or closed captions) means synchronized visual text alternatives for both speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand the media content.
- **Audio description** means additional audible narrative, interleaved with the dialogue, which describes the significant aspects of the visual content of audio-visual media that cannot be understood from the main soundtrack alone.

Annex 2: List of Accessibility Resources for Meetings

Resources for accessibility for people with intellectual disability

- To translate your document to Easy to Read, you should use a provider who follows the ETR. You can learn more about ETR here: <http://easy-to-read.eu/european-standards/>
- A list of organisations that can support you in this is available at: <http://easy-to-read.eu/organisations/>

Sign Language Interpretation

- Booking interpretation should be done when the meeting date is booked as there is a shortage of sign language interpreters, and sometimes it is difficult to ensure this service. You should book 2 interpreters for any meeting over 1 hour.
- You can read more about sign language and sign language interpreters on the website of the European Union of the Deaf: <https://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/sign-language-interpreter-guidelines/>
- Both of these networks can be a source of IS interpreters
 - World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)/ World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) <https://wfdeaf.org/our-work/wfd-wasli-international-sign-interpreter-accreditation/wfd-wasli-accredited-is-interpreter/>
 - For National Sign language contact the National Association of the Deaf (<https://www.eud.eu/eud-members/>) or the National Association of Sign Language Interpreters (<http://efsl.org/membership/full-membership/>)

Captioning CART service providers

- Captioning is provided either on-site, or remotely. Both need to be planned well. On site captioning providers sometimes provide remote captioning also. Booking should be done when the meeting date is confirmed as there is a shortage of captioners. The list of service providers has been used successfully by EDF but the compatibility of your meeting requirements, technical resources, etc. need to be checked with the service provider in advance.
 - Global Real Time
Captioning: www.grtcaptioning.com | office@grtcaptioning.com
 - Velotype: www.velotype.com | info@velotype.com
- Note for remote captioning. It is extremely important to ensure that the remote captioning will work well at your event. It is obligatory to do an on-site test of the remote captioning service. Also keep in mind the time difference if you use remote captioning based in different time zones.

- Here is a [technical guideline from ITU for remote participation in meetings](#).

Accessible Public Transport in Brussels

- The public transport network in Brussels, operated by STIB-MIVB, is not fully accessible. It is therefore important to check and plan your journey beforehand if you rely on public transport. A network map that indicates stations with lifts can be downloaded here: http://www.stib-mivb.be/irj/go/km/docs/WEBSITE_RES/Attachments/Network/Plan/Net_Reseau/Plan_Metro_Train_1810.pdf

Some general advice:

- **To/from the airport:** Bus lines 12 and 21 are in theory accessible. You can also take the train to one of the Brussels train stations but accessibility for wheelchair users is limited. More information on the website of the train operator SNCB-NMBS: <https://www.belgiantrain.be/en/travel-info/prepare-for-your-journey/assistance-reduced-mobility/>
- **Metro:** Not all stations have lifts. Boarding can also be tricky because of the gap between the platform and the vehicle. You can order assistance at metro stations to assist with boarding: http://www.stib-mivb.be/article.html?_guid=d0f0d466-1483-3410-45af-9748427ab131&l=en
- **Tram:** The trams in Brussels are not accessible for wheelchair users. Accessibility varies between the lines: Lines 3,4,7,9,19, 82, and 93 operate with low-floor vehicles and have dynamic information screens and audio announcements but not all stops are adapted. Lines 51, 81, and 92 are not accessible at all.
- **Bus:** Lines 12, 21, 29, 43, 48, 49, 50, 58, 59, 63, 71, 79, 84, 87, and 95 are supposed to be accessible and have low-floor buses as well as dynamic information screens and audio announcements. However, diversions occur frequently and in practice there are often issues with ramps or with the functioning of information systems. Not all bus stops are accessible either.
- Mobile app: Can be useful for real-time information: http://www.stib-mivb.be/article.html?l=en&_guid=a0c9723c-04a2-3610-0fb9-df7702b3f1b2

Adapted Transport in Brussels

- Taxi Vert agency is more flexible and works everyday 24 hours. You can book it online or call them 4 or 2 hours in advance. Tel: 0032 3494949

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- Taxi Hendrix has a range of bigger vehicles. It is possible to book on the day, but better to reserve one day before. Tel: 0032 2 752.98.00 (06:00-19:00) Email: info.melsbroek@hendriks.be
 - See also other companies <http://bruxellespourtous.be/Taxi-1177.html?lang=fr>;

Wheelchair Rental in Brussels

- Red Cross Brussels: <http://www.croix-rouge.be/activites/sante/location-fauteuil-roulant-et-autre-materiel-paramedical/liste-complete-du-materiel-en-location/>

Additional Resources

- [Advice on how to make electronic documents accessible](#) (in French or Dutch)
- [W3C guidelines on how to make presentations accessible](#)
- [List of hotels with accessible rooms in Brussels](#)
- [Accessible restaurants and leisure activities in Brussels](#)

Contact the EDF Secretariat

Marie Denninghaus, Policy Coordinator

Tel: +32 (0) 2 282 46 07, E-mail: marie.denninghaus@edf-feph.org

Loredana Dicsi, EDF Membership Officer

Tel: +32 (0) 2 2865 180, E-mail: loredana.dicsi@edf-feph.org

Should you have any problems in accessing the documentation, please contact the EDF Secretariat. (Tel: +32 (0) 2 282 46 00, Email: info@edf-feph.org).



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