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Yttrande över remissen: "Accessibility of non-digital information related to products and services", prEN 18339:2026 från SIS"

Eftersom remissen var på engelska svarar vi på engelska. Vi översätter gärna om det behövs!

1 Summary

While prEN 18339:2026 represents a significant step forward in mandating accessibility for non-digital information (visual, auditory, tactile), it contains a critical structural deficiency that violates the core principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) regarding independence and reasonable accommodation for persons with specific sensory or physiological barriers to technology.

The standard frequently relies on "hybrid" models where non-digital information serves only as a conduit to digital content (e.g., QR codes linking to audio/video instructions). For individuals with Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS) or severe cognitive/physical disabilities that preclude any interaction with screens, speakers, or scanning devices, this creates an insurmountable barrier. The draft currently fails to guarantee that all essential information can be obtained through purely analog means without a mandatory referral to a digital interface.

The current draft of prEN 18339:2026 inadvertently creates a "digital-first" trap under the guise of flexibility. While it improves physical accessibility (font size, contrast, Braille), it fails to protect the most vulnerable users who are physically incapable of engaging with the digital ecosystem.

For persons with Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity, a QR code is not an accessibility feature; it is a barrier. Unless the standard is amended to guarantee that essential information exists fully and independently on the physical medium, it will fail to meet the obligations of the CRPD regarding non-discrimination and equal access.

Action Required: Reject the current draft in its existing form regarding digital redundancy. Demand a revision that mandates full informational completeness in analog formats as a baseline requirement, not an optional enhancement.

2 Alignment with CRPD Principles

2.1 Violation of "Reasonable Accommodation" (Article 2 & Article 5)

The CRPD defines "reasonable accommodation" as necessary modifications to ensure enjoyment of rights on an equal basis. For a person with EHS, the inability to use Wi-Fi-enabled devices or be in proximity to radio frequency emitting technologies is not a preference but a medical necessity.

- Problem: prEN 18339 treats "digital access" as a valid alternative or primary fallback for non-digital deficits (Clause 4.2.2). If the only way to access safety warnings, operating instructions, or service terms via a tactile/visual label is to scan a code, the accommodation is unreasonable for EHS individuals because it forces exposure to the very environment causing their disability.

2.2 Failure of "Independence" (Article 19 & Article 3(a))

The CRPD emphasizes the right to live independently and make one's own choices.

- Problem: By structuring non-digital labels as "pointers" to digital resources (Annex F.5), the standard effectively strips users of the autonomy to obtain information immediately and privately. An EHS individual may require assistance from a third party to scan a code and read it aloud to them, violating their right to independent access.

2.3 Accessibility of Information (Article 21)

Article 21 mandates that public information be made available in accessible formats without additional cost and in a timely manner.

- Problem: Tying information to a digital link introduces latency (scanning, loading) and potential technical failure (connectivity issues, dead batteries) which excludes the user entirely. The standard does not explicitly mandate that the complete informational payload must exist in the non-digital medium if the digital link is inaccessible to the user.

3 Specific Deficiencies in prEN 18339:2026

3.1 The "QR Code Trap" (Clauses 4.2.2, 5.3.1, Annex F.5)

The standard explicitly states: "Information presented in a non-digital form can be made available via more than one sensory channel by also presenting the information in a digital form... The use of an accessible QR codes can provide a link..."

- Critique: This phrasing suggests that providing a QR code alongside a physical label satisfies the requirement for multiple sensory channels. However, for an EHS individual, scanning a QR code is impossible or harmful. The standard fails to mandate that the full text/instruction set must be present in the physical document, not just a pointer to it.

- Requirement: A QR code must never be the sole method of delivering complex instructions, safety warnings, or legal terms. It should be supplementary only.

3.2 Insufficient Definition of "Non-Digital" Completeness

The standard defines non-digital forms as "information communicated in one direction, which cannot be changed or adapted" (Clause 3.3).

- Critique: It does not explicitly define "completeness" for critical data. A physical label containing a QR code that says "Scan for Instructions" is technically a "non-digital form," but it is functionally empty for someone who cannot scan.
- Problem: The standard lacks a clause requiring that all essential functional information (safety, operation, maintenance) must be fully legible/touchable/hear-able on the physical object itself, regardless of digital availability.

3.3 Auditory Limitations (Clause 6)

While Clause 6 provides excellent details on acoustic notifications and speech transmission, it assumes the user can hear or listen to a device.

- Problem: For some disabilities, hearing aids are incompatible with certain frequencies or create feedback loops when near digital transmitters. (EHS individuals often use older analog aids without any radio frequency communication for health reasons.) More critically, EHS individuals often avoid public areas with loudspeaker systems (which emit low frequency fields and often also RF fields and cause symptoms). The standard does not address scenarios where the source of the auditory information is itself a trigger for the user's disability.
- Missing: There is no provision for a completely silent, non-electronic method of communicating urgent auditory signals (e.g., haptic vibrations that do not rely on RF transmission, or purely mechanical visual indicators).

3.4 Testing Protocols (Clause 4.3 and Annex A)

The testing checklist in Annex A focuses on whether information is available for "more than one sensory channel."

- Problem: It does not test for universal standalone accessibility. A tester could mark a product as compliant because it has a printed manual and a website URL, failing to verify if the printed manual contains the entirety of the necessary information.

4 Recommendations for Modification

To bring prEN 18339 into full compliance with the CRPD, specifically for EHS and other digital-exclusion cases, the following amendments are required:

Recommendation 1: Mandate "Standalone Completeness"

Insert a new requirement in Clause 4.1 (General):

"Where information is critical for safety, legal compliance, or correct usage, the non-digital form must contain the complete informational content. Referencing external digital sources (e.g., QR codes, URLs, NFC tags) shall not replace the provision of full information in the non-digital format. External links may only supplement, never substitute, core non-digital content."

Recommendation 2: Prohibit Digital-Only Pathways

Amend Clause 4.2.2:

"If a digital format is provided as an alternative, the corresponding non-digital format must remain fully functional and complete without reliance on the digital medium. Systems that require digital interaction to unlock or view essential non-digital information are non-compliant."

Recommendation 3: Expand "Reasonable Accommodation" Definition in Context

In Annex B (User Accessibility Needs), explicitly include Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS) and similar conditions as examples of users who require "zero-digital" alternatives.

"Assessments must account for users who cannot utilize wireless, electronic, or digital interfaces due to physiological sensitivities (e.g., EHS), physical dexterity limitations preventing device handling, or cognitive barriers. For such users, the non-digital form is not merely an 'alternative' but the primary and necessary mode of access."

Recommendation 4: Revise Testing Checklist (Annex A)

Modify the test checklist to include a specific pass/fail criterion:

"Verification: Can a user perform all necessary tasks and understand all safety/warning information without using a smartphone, tablet, computer, or scanning device?"

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